

HR Professionals Technology Proponent Competency: A Review

Uti Charles Amechi¹ & Choi Sang Long¹

¹ Faculty of Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

Correspondence: Choi Sang Long, Faculty of Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia. E-mail: cslong_1@yahoo.com

Received: August 30, 2014 Accepted: September 5, 2014 Online Published: December 2, 2014

doi:10.5539/ass.v11n1p33

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v11n1p33>

Abstract

Technological advancements of the 21st century have transformed the approach of how HR professionals reason and execute their responsibilities, which has made the HR technology proponent competency a critical factor for organizational performance. This paper therefore tries to examine and bring to the fore, the relevance and input of the technology proponent competency of HR professional, and how HR professionals utilize the knowledge of this competency in today's global market of severe competition. The methodology employed in this study is the principles of inductive categorization, which ensured a systematic content analysis of selected relevant literature from previous studies as retrieved from online databases. Findings from the review of extant literature in the area of review show that the acquisition of certain basic technological competencies have influenced and enhanced HR work output, which has made HR professionals more efficient in the delivery of HR administrative functions like payroll processing, benefits, healthcare costs, and other administrative services.

Keywords: technology, technology proponent, competencies, organizational performance, human resources

1. Introduction

The global nature of business today has narrowed the world into a global village, where new markets are presenting new challenges and prospects, particularly in the 'BRIC' nations of Brazil, Russia, India and China. Worldwide debates such as taxes, barriers to trade, rates of exchange, and allocation are critical components of management discussions (Ulrich et al., 2009) in recent times. Technological advancement has improved accessibility, visibility and linking, as such the linked world is now smaller, with rapid changes that are transparent, and has made it imperative for HR professionals to adapt to this global change if they must impact on their organizations (Ulrich et al., 2010).

Most leaders of organizations and strategy researchers would acknowledge that the knack to effectively manage information within an organization is becoming critically important as it is providing the basis for gaining a competitive advantage (Tippins & Sohi, 2003). According to Cheen, (2002) this is perceived by many as a source of creating value rather than of cost. Information has become an invisible asset that, when properly utilized, can be used to leverage other organizations resources. The process by which organizations acquire information concerning markets and customers aids in ensuring that organizations respond to changes in the environment that is capable of ensuring competitive advantage against their competitors (Barney et al., 2001). The rate at which most organizations are developing strategies centered on information technology with the aim of facilitating the effective gathering and application of information is on the increase (Bharadwaj, 2000; Daft, 2006; Church, 2002).

If HR professionals must to retort to this changing situation, they must first acquire requisite competencies, realizing that HR professionals who succeeded in the past would be inadequate in the business world of today due to the improved changes (Ulrich et al., 2009). However, understanding that HR capabilities entail the values, abilities, and knowledge HR professionals possess, it is therefore only the HR professionals with requisite competencies that have the capacity to excel in the changing global market (Ulrich et al., 2010).

2. HR Professional Competencies

The role of the HR professionals continues to evolve from a tedious administrative activity to that of a strategic partner that is expected to contribute to organizational performance (Scanlan, 2007; Long et al., 2013), yet these responsibilities require certain competencies that must be acquired if HR professionals must succeed. However, the issue of what comprises HR competencies is pervasive in HR literature. HR competencies are generally

defined as a list of related skills, knowledge, mindsets, traits, abilities, and the thought process HR professionals exemplify that directly affects their job. The identification of HR competency issues is very critical on the agenda of senior managers resulting from competitive pressures, social and political trends, as well as stakeholder awareness (Ulrich et al., 2010).

In addition, the Society for Human Resource Management, (2012) report shows that improvements have been dramatic, as management makes effort to position itself where it can become more competitive, but it also appears to be moving farther away from viable competitive positions. The report further revealed that management tools have taken the place of company strategy, as economic competitive advantage is traced to the level of the specific activities a company performs, as such; increased business demands have changed the expectations for HR professionals.

Consequently, Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, and Younger (2007) opines that a more comprehensive description of HR professionals competency factors may include (a) strategic (b) creating credibility (c) obtaining business knowledge and (d) leveraging technology with HR practices using e-HR and web-based channels.

3. Technology Proponent Competency

Currently, human resource (HR) professionals are been requested to support businesses compete, in doing that, HR professionals are not to merely observe, but are equally expected to recognize and adjust to these trend of business (Ulrich et al., 2010). Therefore, as the world continues to advance in technological development, the way HR professionals execute their administrative and strategic functions has changed. Today, HR professionals require the services of technology to ensure adequate HR administration in the areas of payroll processing, cost of healthcare, benefits and other services required in their efficient administration. HR professionals also require technology in ensuring that people stay connected with each other where ever they go. The ever-increasing significant role of technology as a process of connecting employees to their customers, executing administrative functions efficiently, and enhancing communication cannot be over emphasized. Technology as a tool for enhancing and sustaining relationship through social media is an emerging trend that is influencing the social media because it allows the business to situate itself strategically for future development. An in-depth understanding of current technologies by HR professionals is expected to create an enhanced identity for the organization externally as well as advance social relationships within the organization. The need for HR professionals to gather information, analyze, encourage and affiliate technology for the purpose of communication, competence and interactions in their organizations by way of technology proponents is imperative (Ulrich et al., 2012).

Agreeably, the growing significance of information in the global market today (Daft, 2006), in attaining competence in respect of the instruments and practices utilized in the management of information has become critical. According to Tippins and Sohi (2003) competencies are inimitable because of the eccentricity in the improvement of resources with limited value outside the context of a specific organization. As such, this inimitability has the capacity ensure competitive advantage.

Maclean and Blackie (2004) argued that organizations that attain advanced stages of information technology competency are alleged to be in an excellent position to manage the “invisible assets” that engenders market control. Consequently, observations from reviewed literature in marketing (Hamedan, 2004), in strategy (Kalpic & Bernus, 2006), and from information sciences and technology (Weill et al., 2002; Tippins, 2002; Waclawski & Church, 2002), we hypothesize information technology competency to be the extent to which an organization is informed about and adequately applies information technology to the management of knowledge within an organization.

Furthermore, in our assumptions, we hypothesize that organizations also acquire information technology items such as software, information technology personnel, and hardware. These three dimensions of technology proponent competency represent joint-specialized resources that provide a clue about the organization’s ability to appreciate and acquire information technology tools and processes required for managing market and customer information.

Mukherjee (2001) in his study argued that HR professionals require the ability to influence technology for HR practices as well as utilizing e-HR or web based networks in the delivery of value to customers. He further emphasized that the speed of technological revolution will continually fast track; stressing that HR could utilize these transformations to their advantage by systematizing HR practices, which is capable of enhancing effective in communicating with its in-house and peripheral customers. Significantly, by embracing modern technology, HR has the capacity to project a context through which it can earn the required respect from cynical colleagues (Mukherjee, 2001).

In a current investigation conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, technology was identified as the most important workplace trend (Mondy & Noe, 2005). The identified workplace trends comprise: outsourcing of HR functions to individuals and organizations globally, web-connected workplace, utilizing analytical tools in measuring the success of HR practices and the prediction of potential results, virtual workplace and contingency planning like planning against disaster. Increasing the use of e-HR is a vivacious obligation among modern organizations (Mondy & Noe, 2005).

According to Mukherjee (2001), the HR technologies that provide remarkable improvement in learning and knowledge management, business process support and employment self-service opportunities are the network portals. The emergence of the net has revolutionized HR service delivery to employees. The accessibility to the internet and intranet enables HR service to expedite the capture and retrieval of data, as well as limiting the volume of personnel administrative details HR executives work on daily, but enables them to focus on HR strategy and employee welfare. Consequently, with e-HR, organizations are gradually transiting to paperless workstations that will be free of personal files, leave and appraisal forms (Mukherjee, 2001; Long & Ismail, 2011).

4. Relationship between Technology Proponent and Organizational Performance

Today's global market has become data-focused, as such, the technology through which data is collected, processed, interfaced, and made usable for people, is incorporated in the system and daily organizational experiences (Tippins & Sohi, 2003). However, most people take the impact of information technology for granted; yet it remains the only channel through which people, organizations, and the entire social systems are connected (Kalpic & Bernus, 2006).

Rosacker and Olson (2008) suggest that technology propels:

- Organizational communications (via websites, virtual conferences, electronic mail,);
- Typical HR practices (enrollments, online aids, on-boarding and orientation packages, HRIS tracking systems, processes of performance management); and
- Organizational improvement strategies (targeted enhancement feedbacks designed to drive control and superior quality, self focused learning and occupation administration tools that will sustain cultural transformation, ensure prompt online investigation technology and continuation capability, as well as collaborative training and improvement ascendancies).

Although the discussion regarding the degree to which information technology competencies can be transferred effectively across organization precincts continues (Bharadwaj, 2000), a resilient paradigm suffices that information technology competencies by themselves are futile at delivering the basis for justifiable competitive edge since the competencies are effortlessly replicated. Alemayehu (2004) further argued that the "benefits resulting from a novel application of information technology can be more readily defended if the system utilizes distinctive resources of the inventing organization so that competitors will not gain undue advantage. Hence, it is predictable that the effect of information technology on an organization's performance cannot be measured directly, but is quantifiable through the examination of the incidental result on some prevailing organizational competence.

Therefore, it supports our assertion that the relationship existing between information technology competency and organization performance is directly related (Long et al., 2013), with reference to the large scale profits realized by different organizations with regard to information technology ventures. Consequently, ingenuous information technology ownership by organizations is not a guarantee that information technology will positively influence critical organizational performance (Kalpic & Bernus, 2006). According to Hamedan, (2004), it was deduced that some organizations have benefited positively, while some other organizations fell prey to the productivity paradox and experienced deleterious returns on investment (ROI) in information technology, which implies that information technology by itself is not the answer to improved organizational performance, rather must be integrated into an organization as well as merged with other organizational competencies that will ensure positive outcomes (Maclean & Blackie, 2004). Integration of processes such as production process, human resources metrics, supply chain value and customer satisfaction will transform the organization to another dimension which creates competitive edge that is vital for organizations' survival. This could be achieved by defining the strategic fit that exists between HR competencies and information technology, since the strategy is not what indicates competitive advantage but the adequate implementation with regards to the environmental veracities that are exclusive to individual organizations as well as the varying units and responsibilities of the organizations (Thite & Kavanagh, 2009). According to Thite (2004), information

technology is simply a device meant to complement, not to replace the human capital that utilizes it. Repeatedly, most organizations erroneously treat IT as the core, and end up wasting valuable resources, time and effort that would have been used for an enduring investment in human capital rather than improving and installing information technologies.

5. The Influence of Technology Proponent on Organizational Performance

Recurring pecuniary crunches and progressively growing competition, necessitated by the globalization of markets, are compelling an unparalleled restructuring of resources (Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, & Younger, 2007). However, the need to enhance productivity has become trepidation for organizations. Coincidentally, technology is developing at a dazzling speed and is gradually becoming the fundamental mechanism for actualizing this concern (Scanlan, 2007). Consequently, this elucidates why most organizations are making huge investment in the realizing information technology systems. Conversely, the benefits obtainable from technological investment, particularly in relations to boosting productivity, are dependent on the incorporation of the technologies into the organization (Kalpic & Bernus, 2006).

Research has shown that most organizations have come to the realization that their information technology units lack requisite resources to meet their challenges, as they need ample time to execute projects, even as the project accumulates (Cheen, 2002). Besides, these organizations know that technological, organizational and human resource development processes are not progressing at the same speed within their organizations, this makes them diffident concerning developing their information technology systems (Alemayehu, 2004).

5. Conclusion

HR competency research clearly indicates the significant tenets for HR professionals. The relevance of these competencies is not arguable irrespective of organization size, industry, hierarchical levels, job title or financial responsibilities (Brockbank & Ulrich, 2003). HR professionals that appreciate technology definitely will produce superior identity externally for their organization as well as advance communal interactions within the organization. With regards to their responsibilities by way of technology proponents, HR professionals are expected to gather information, encourage, analyze, and affiliate technology for the purpose of communication, competence, and interactions (Ulrich et al., 2012). It is imperative that HR professionals understand the strategic nature of their job as well as link the HR system lucidly to the organizational strategy. HR professionals must therefore learn to deal with their task from a business standpoint, and not exclusively from HR viewpoint, if this must effectively happen, they must learn to improve utility of HR operations, connect people through technology and leverage the social media tools (Stumberger, 2002; Ulrich et al., 2012).

Acknowledgements

Authors wish to acknowledge the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia under the Research Grant (Vot. 4F349) for supporting and sponsoring this publication.

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