The Constraints of Information and Communication Technology on Human Resources Development in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT

The use of electronic technology for communication has since become a very vital and effective tool of human resources development and management in tertiary institutions across the world. In Nigeria, it is fast becoming a significant aspect of human resources development. Thriving organisations attach great values to good human resources management and effective internal and external communications. The paper attempted to achieve two objectives: (1) to discuss the concepts of information and communication technology; and (2) to analyze the constraints to the use of contemporary communication and how it is impacting on human resources development and management in Nigerian Universities. The paper concluded by presenting some recommendations on how the academic institutions in Nigeria can increase the effectiveness of information and communication technologies for the sustenance of effective human resources management.

Keywords: Development media, Human Resources Management, Universities, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The world is growing at very fast rate with regards to information technology and human resources management processes and methods. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) provide enormous adequate potentials for enhancing productivity of human resources in small and large organisations, although; the gains of information and communication technologies in the industrialised countries have been noted to be far reaching than in the developing countries. Argenti (1996 and 1998) argues that, since contemporary organizations "become more focused on retaining a happy workforce with changing values and different demographics, they have necessarily had to think more seriously about how they communicate with employees".

Every organisation including educational institutions needs to give the internal audience equal attention to those external to the organization (Wright, 1994). Dolphin (2005) noted that "communications professionals have to recognize the importance of integrating the internal message with those messages communicated externally".

"As societies develop, therefore, technologies of handling information become more sophisticated because a combination of older and new technologies can be used simultaneously. For example, in a first phase of human development (nomadic hunting and gathering communities) the technology of processing information was organic" (Kamuzora, 2006).

Social network among students and staff of the universities enhance by information technology tools aids human resources development. Communication involves the transmission of information. It is "a process in which participants create and share information with one another, in order to reach a mutual understanding" (Rodgers, 1995). Information could be expressed in codes and symbols or in a combination of symbols capable of conveying meaning. Development is practically impossible without communication. Okunna (2002) observed that communication and development are so closely inter-connected that there can be no development without communication. On the other hand, human resources management has the capability of bringing about changes in communication (Dortok, 2006). According to Cowell (2010):

"Electronic channels are the new roads and bridges" and "Just as the Industrial Age shifted societies from an agrarian and pastoral way of life to factories, mass production and city expansion, technology has decreased the size of the world. Technology has not only changed society, it has changed organizational structure and the way workers do their jobs. The occupational structure of this knowledge-based economy has shifted to whitecollar services in office jobs. Technology, specifically internet capability, is not just about all the commerce we can do, but about how we can change community to enable people to better meet their needs and thrive".

Canton (1999) remarked that "technology is more important to a town than new roads or bridges". Modern communication tools have greatly influenced human resources management in Nigeria. Similarly, the improvement in the development of human resources makes communication faster and easier. Assembling, processing, storing and transmitting information are now not only easy but also faster, for example, Freire (1970) and Tracy (1998) noted that the advancement in telecommunication networks which relays massive volume of voices, video and print products along digital circuits at very high speeds could not be possible without the efficacy of human resources management.

Human resources management (HRM) is increasing the utility rates of various technologies thus, the "applications for administration are at a worldwide adoption rate of 89% — that includes all industries. In addition, utilizing technology for employee productivity outperforms technologies to increase management productivity"(Cowell, 2010).

Contemporary communication also provides employment and empowering poor communities across the world (Belbin and Belbin, 1972); For example, mobile phones and GSM operators have created vast job opportunities in Nigeria. According to Freire (1970), the range of services that can be provided by the availability of communication services have expanded rapidly and will continue to expand from fax, mobile phone, email etc. It is common knowledge that contemporary digital technology facilitates access to wide range

of information which is highly valuable in real-time decision making on diverse issues including human and materials management. For instance, Dennis (1995) observed that mobile telephones enable people to communicate on real-time basis, thereby saving time and money.

Nowadays, no discussion on human resources management would be complete without some mention of the web's significance in expanding and extending the extent to which the dissemination of information occurs globally (Drucker, 1998 and Charvatova and Vander, 2006). Odiorne (1984) explained that development media theory accepts economic development and nation building as overriding objectives. Unfortunately, the Nigerian government has to overcome quite a number of challenges in ensuring that its citizens fully embrace human resources management. Egboh (2009) argue that the cognitive properties of human resources and its link to adequate communication are invaluable. Thus, the qualities of employers are regarded as the organizational single most important asset and its success depends on the quality of the available human resources.

Human resources management is at a cross road, as newly developed communication technologies continue to create opportunities for more strategic leadership in the management of human capital, corporate culture and communication. Communication is the key engine of human resources management in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is because personnel management deals with the development of human resources and performs the roles of multiplier through communication technologies. Hence, the main purpose of human resource management in the schools lies in the ability to prepare hire, retain and train staff taking adequate care to develop the human resource potentials (Belbin and Belbin, 1972).

SCOPE AND METHODS

Human resources are the most important driver of national prosperity, growth and development. It is the determinant and nucleus of the work force to which the economy revolves. Human resources development involves the improvement of aptitudes, skills, abilities, knowledge, understanding and attitude of the employees of an enterprise. No country can prosper without the capacity of the people to manage, govern and control the material resources. At the centre of human resources development is the effectiveness of the educational policies and practices which enhances the knowledge and skills of the nation and moulds the future of the nation.

The current international trend in human resources management and development depends largely on communication. The tools and methods of communication have evolved over the centuries. Presently, the information technologies (IT) presents new challenges to Nigeria for many reasons. The role of the educational institutions to the building of adequate workforce capable of coping with the national challenges has placed the tertiary universities in prime focus.

This paper presents a narrative discourse of the subject-matter. Materials used are deduced from selected previous literature. The caveat of the paper does not require empirical analysis.

DISCUSSIONS

According to Charvatova and van der Veer (2006) communication is not a purely inborn skill and ability, it is necessary to develop it. The theory of human resources management therefore uses a growth management model. However, many organisations still fail to define an appropriate and realistic strategy or goal understandable to all the segments of the organisation.

> "In a number of companies, management teams do not communicate the goals and employees, not being acquainted with them, cannot implement the strategy efficiently and in full. The performance of goals is determined by corporate culture, human resource management and functional support systems. The outcomes are also influenced by the communication system, controlling and suitable organisational structure. The fulfilment of goals is based on the ability to respect and adapt to current conditions and the environment, provided there is a clear and shared company strategy. Other important factors include the quality of human labour relations, permitting to build on well-functioning company structure, company systems and processes helping the company to carry out its activities".

Despite the significance of modern information and communication technology on human resources management in Nigeria, quite a number of challenges still confront the Nigerian government in ensuring that HRM is fully utilized. These challenges arise as a result of social, economic and political state of the nation.

Kasper and Mayerhofer (2005) asserted that constant electric power outages in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) pose serious threat to the survival of HRM. These power outages last for many hours or days and have become a common occurrence in almost all organizations of LDCs. The Nigerian government especially has not been able to tackle the problem of energy despite the huge income being accumulated from oil production.

The Nigerian government has not been able to define the purpose, principles and values that should animate their communication system. This is why Stein and Sambe (2005) advised that making these social choices would allow these decisions to be incorporated into technology and industry as they develop rather than forcing costly and inefficient changes later.

Sambe (2005) and Wells, et. Al, (2000) observed that a major limitation to the use of communication technology to develop human resources for management and administration is the extremely high cost of producing and running HRM programmes. In Nigeria, the high exchange rate is also affecting the cost of HRM because majority of needed equipment are imported from Europe and Asia.

CONCLUSION

The paper has shown a rising need for the use information and communication technology for the development of human resources in Nigerian universities. This is consistent with the opinion of scholars who suggest that effective use of communication and information technology fosters adequate development of human resources.

Nigerian universities lack effective vertical communication. Nevertheless, the paper has shown that downward vertical communication predominates in these academic institutions, in particular in the areas of the use of information and communication technology in the development of human resources; it has also demonstrated that efficient communication as vital tool for human resources development is suffering from severe national constraints mainly attributable to the failure of the State to provide and maintain the basic support infrastructure including electricity consistency.

In order to sustain reliability of human resources development and progress in the universities, the federal government urgently needs to place more emphasis on human resources development in the universities. Budget should be earmarked to tackle the basic barriers to the use of information technology.

The personality of the university administrators can be influenced by adequate human resources development. The weakness of the development is affecting the employees of the universities and affecting their performances thereby affecting the teaching and learning process. For any reversal of the current trend to occur, there must be appropriate conditions by which a systematic development and suitable human resources management tools which encourage motivation is paramount.

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