PERCEPTIONS OF LINE MANAGERS ABOUT QUALITY OF HR FUNCTION: CASE STUDY OF AN ORGANIZATION IN PAKISTAN

Auteurs : Muhammad Ali ASADULLAH, Doctorant (2ème Année), Université Paul Cézanne, Laboratiore CERGAM, IAE D'Aix-en-Provence, France. Jean-Marie PERETTI, Professeur, Département Management, ESSEC Business School, Paris ,France.

L'adresse Postale : Porte N° 1048, 15 Chemins des Plates, Vaulx-en-Velin, France, 69120.

L'adresses electronique : iae.hec@gmail.com, Cell : +0033637855823.

Résumé :
Transition of resource-based economies to the knowledge-based economies forced organizations to create value through Human Resource Management. This resulted in setting up Human Resource Departments inside the organizations. Same trend was followed by the organizations in developing economies. Pakistani organizations did not lag behind. Many organizations renamed their personnel or administration departments with human resource departments/divisions. But, the question of delivering quality HR services remains unexplored. Ulrich (1997) argued that 'to create value and deliver results, HR professionals must begin not by focusing on the activities or work of HR but by defining the deliverables of that work' because 'deliverables guarantee outcomes of HR work.' He explained that 'In terms of deliverable, HR must fulfil four key roles to make their business partnership a reality.' These roles include: Strategic Partner, Change Agent, Employee Champion and Administrative Expert. The available research literature is also insufficient to portray the real picture of the HR function in developing economies. The question is 'How are the organizations which renamed their administration or personnel divisions with Human Resource Divisions, delivering HR services in terms of these four roles of HR business partnership?' We asked this question from two distinct groups of line managers of a health sector organization of Pakistan with an objective to compare the matched or unmatched expectations of line managers. The two groups of line managers included i) the HR Service Providers or HR line managers and HR Service Receivers or Non-HR line Managers. We used survey questionnaire, confirmatory interviews and policy documents of the organization in order to conduct our case study. We found that the perceptions of HR managers differed from Non-HR line managers about the quality of three role of HR: Strategic Partner, Change Agent and Employee Champion. But, the perceptions of both groups fully matched about the quality of HR Function as an Administrative Expert.

Mots clés : Quality, HR Function, Business Partner, Line manager

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Introduction

'More and more organizations around the world are adopting similar HR practices because of intense global competition. But a mere imitation of HR practices in the hopes of improving organizational performance creates no value (Khilji & Wang, 2006).' 'National values remain rooted and work-related values reveal changes reflecting a modern market economy (Khilji, 2004).'

'The literature on current state of HRM in Pakistani is limited' and 'very little empirical research addresses the distinctive development of HRM in Pakistani context (Jhatial et al., 2009).' In Pakistan, HRM is 'passing through embryonic stage, as many organizations have restructured their personnel division as Human Resource Division (Khilji 2005).' 'HR practices are new (Zafar, 2005).' 'There are not too many organizations that employ HR appropriately. HR is misallocated and misdirected…HR is not properly directed, appraised, managed and supervised in Pakistan (Abbasi et al. 2008).' According to Zafar (2005), 'even multinational and international organizations are not fully focusing on HR practices as they focus on the functional areas of their organizations (like Production and Finance).'

On the other hand, Jhatial et al (2009) argue that 'discriminatory colonial legal-administrative frameworks that have a significant impact on HRM policies and practices are still present in modern-day Pakistan. Khilji (2003) also stated that apart from the indigenous traditions and religious injunctions, British colonial past and current Americain influences are central to the development of now HRM practices in the country (cited from Jhatial et al., 2009). Khilji (2003) also argues that Pakistan has been under cultural, academic and corporate influences of United States. The question that arises is that 'To what extent the practices of western world have penetrated inside Pakistani culture? as Budhwar & Debra (2001), stated that globalizing markets in Africain and Asian nations challenged the general application of Western HRM which rigorously demanded to comprehend the national culture.

Above all, Khilji (2002) also claimed that 'Pakistani employees are ready for a change and call for managers in Pakistan to reassess the needs of their employees and opt for novel approaches to human resource management.' A study by Khilji (2004), on the process and outcome of revamping HR systems in banking sector, represents that 'a younger cohort of employees has experienced a transition in their value system and expects a different set of HR practices.'

Lalani (2007) also claims that utilization of HR practices is better in private sector of Pakistan. In her comparative study of on four (2 private and 2 public) leading hospitals in Sindh, she justified that it is due to the existence of a distinct HR Function. But she also criticized that 'although to some extent HRM in private sector has been introduced but the required kind of HR manager and skills are not available adequately, yet (Lalani, 2007).' According to her study findings, only one out four hospitals had well established and functional HR department integrated into its set up. We selected this hospital as our case organization. The organization is a not-for-profit university hospital with its Head Office in Karachi. It has its operations in other countries like Nairobi and Kenya. In Pakistan, it employs more than 9500 employee.

In this case study, we tried to address three basic questions: 1) What are the perceptions of the line managers (HR & Non-HR) about the quality of HR Function? 2) What are the differences and similarities among the perceptions of HR & Non-HR line managers? & 3) What are the perceptions of these line managers about current HR programs and processes of the organization?

Theoretical Framework

'The world economy has become more competitive and globalized (Rennie, 2003).' Information and communication technology forced the resource-based economies to shift into the knowledge-based economies. 'Competitive advantage for organisations, also, shifted from financial capital and technology to the investment in human capital, knowledge and employee commitment and enthusiasm (Rennie, 2003).' Similarly, 'the focus in the business world has also shifted from physical assets to knowledge and information, i-e; intellectual capital.' According to the resource-based view of the firm, human resources can provide competitive advantage as long as they are unique, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Torrington et al, 2005). 'The demand for expertise of deployment and management of human capital and organisational capability is growing (Edward, 2004).' Gratton & Ghoshal (2003) stated that there are three kinds of resources that people possess which, collectively, constitute their individual human capital: 1) Intellectual capital that refers to fundamental individual attributes like cognitive complexity, capacity to learn etc., 2) Social Capital which is about who one knows and how well one nows. & 3) Emotional Capital underpinned by fundamental traits such as self-awareness, self-esteem and personal integrity. These three elements are the

productive resource that humans own. This ascertains the pivotal role of human capital in any organization.'

The term 'HR Function' refers to 'organisational systems and processes within firms (for example, staffing, hiring, recruiting, communication and compensation) that govern how work is done (Ulrich, 1997).' HR Function has been facing many challenges in terms of its existence and contribution. 'Some leading HR managers believe that HR function is now at crossroads (like Edward, (2004)): either it has to show a worthwhile contribution to make or it will find itself merely a contract manager of activities done by others (Peter and Williams, 2003).' 'Large-scale transformational change is not only desirable but necessary' because, 'traditional transactional work of HR is becoming a commodity' as, 'top management is putting pressure on HR Function to reduce costs as never before (Edward, 2004).

HR Function as a Business Partner: Caldwell (2008) explained that the rise of 'HR business partnering' over the last decade has led to an enormous growth in HR competency models. Competencies are believed to provide a mechanism for reinventing traditional HR roles and improving the effectiveness of HR professionals as business partners.' But he also questions whether these roles and competencies are effective? The findings of his study highlight the intrinsic limitations of competency models, as well as the powerful influence of contextual factors. He explained that 'there are also significant contextual variations in effectiveness based on the degree of change experienced by the HR function, how consistently business partnering is implemented, overall levels of reduction in transactional HR, and the patterns of centralisation–decentralisation of the HR function.' Therefore, we argue that it is important to test the Business Partnership model of Ulrich (1997) in Pakistan's evolving environment and context.

According to the 'Business Partner' role of HR Function, an idea by Ulrich (1997), HR professionals must focus on deliverables rather than HR activities. Ulrich (1997) argued that 'deliverables guarantee outcomes of HR work. With deliverables defined, the roles and activities of business partners may be stipulated.' He explains that HR professionals must perform complex, paradoxical and multiple roles (both strategic and operational, police and partner) at a time, to add value to their businesses and to achieve both the qualitative and quantitative as well as short term and long term goals. Ulrich (1997) insisted that, as a 'Business Partner', HR must perform four basic roles (Figure 1):

(Insert Figure 1 Here)

According to Ulrich (1997), as a 'Strategic Partner', HR helps organization by participating in defining business goals. It not only aligns HR strategy and practices with business strategy but works, as well, to ensure this alignment. Ulrich (1997) also guided that HR can accomplish this goals by developing HR programs and processes which can further establish the credibility of HR in satisfying its strategic role. It is proposed that HR executives be given the opportunity to sit at the executive-committee table as strategic partners by adopting new innovative solutions from the marriage of science, technology and intellectual resources (Singh & Latib, 2005). Lawler and Mohrman (2003), stated that most effective HR deparment add value by playing business partner role but the greatest benefits occur when HR is strategic business partner that fully participates in both the development and implementation of strategy. As a Change Agent, HR helps the organization in adapting the change and shaping the culture for organizational renewal and transformation (Ulrich, 1997). HR can lead this change by developing HR processes and programs to ensure this organizational renewal and transformation. Administrative role of HR requires HR professionals to design and deliver efficient HR processes for staffing, training, appraising, rewarding promoting and otherwise managing the flow of employees through the organization. It requires continual reengineering of the work processes. Employee Champion role of HR, requires HR professionals' involvement in say-to-day problems concerns and needs of employees. Thus they can link employee contribution to the organizations' success by increasing their commitment and competence.

Quality and Customers of HR Function: According to Edward (2004), 'the success of organizations lies in focusing the activities that help achieve strategic objectives through core competencies and organizational capabilities.' He argues that 'to meet the customer demand and focus HR practices on customers, HR professionals must look beyond HR administration and become customer sensitive. They need to know who the target customers are and how existing HR practices can be tweaked to serve customers better (Edward, 2004).' 'Survival in today's world demands that organisations develop the capabilities to compete on many fronts: speed, cost, quality, service, technology, innovation, knowledge management and new products (Edward et al. 2003).'

Thus 'quality of service' is one of the determinants of organizational survival and competitive advantage. The term 'Quality' refers to "the conformance to the requirements not the

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'goodness' in (Crosby, 1979).' But 'the meaning of quality differs depending upon circumstances and perception. Quality is a different concept when tangible products are the focus versus the perception of a quality service. The meaning of quality is also time-based or situational (Westcott (2005).'

Thus, quality of HR function denotes the conformance to the requirements, expectations, and delights of the customers to the HR services. Ulrich (2005) stated that the universal value premise is that value is defined by the receiver more than the giver. This requiresprofessionals to focus on what they do and more on what they deliver. Edward (2004) argues that 'HR professionals need to know who the target customers are and how existing HR practices can be tweaked to serve customers better in order to meet the customer share demand and focus HR practices on customers.' Who are the customers of HR services? Answer is all the management and employees of the organization. Every manager, regardless of his or her functional specialization, is on the front line of people management (Kulik, 2004). But, Armstrong() justifies that "it is important for members of HR Function to remember that line managers are their customers and deserve high levels of personal service that meet their needs.' As the department heads, line managers are the core of HR service customers, who interact with HR Function consistently and directly in terms of their HR requirements in order to accomplish their departmental objectives. At a minimum, line managers conduct performance reviews, make promotion decisions and communicate terminations (McGovern, et al., 1997). Christensen (2005) emphasised that HR should serve line managers in such a way that they do not attempt to resolve any people or organisational matters without advice from and consultation with the HR function.

According to Westcott (2005), "quality is how the recipient of the product or service views it.' We collected the perceptions of line managers of our case organization in Pakistan, about the service quality of its HR Function, based on four roles of HR function as a business partner given by Ulrich (1997). Because, line managers may belong to HR or any other functional areas of the organization, therefore, we divided them among two distinct groups: HR line managers and Non-HR line managers. HR managers deliver HR services, therefore, they were considered as service providers. Because Non-HR managers, belonging to functional areas other than HRM, receive HR services, therefore they were considered as service receivers. Ulrich (1997) also advised that a perception gap among HR and Non-HR line managers, about the quality of HR service based on four roles of HR Function, can be fulfilled by setting the priorities.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected through questionnaires and confirmatory interviews (face to face). We used original questionnaire given in his Book 'HR Champions' by Dave Ulrich (1997) with a minor change of three point likert scale instead of five point likert scale. Based on the authorization from HR Head (Vice President) via mail, a list of 50 line managers with contact details and an authority letter were provided. The respondents included 10 HR and 40 Non-HR line Managers, of grades 12-14. During the selection process of these respondents, it was emphasized that at least one respondent from each department of the organization, should be included in the study. Data was collected in July and August 2009. The lack of time and the lack of the knowledge of respondents about the services of HRD, the responses from 37 managers (9 HR and 28 Non-HR) were collected. About 6 respondents replied that they are unaware of the services of HRD. Others gave the appointment time after deadline. All such respondents were discarded from the list. The response ratio was 74% (i-e; 37 out of 50).

Secondary sources of data collection consisted of EBSCO database, website of the organization, online research journals, Books and other literature materials.

Data Analysis

'Conjoint Analysis is a statistical technique which is extensively used in marketing research (product development) to estimate the impact of selected product/service characteristics on customer preferences for products/services (Cattin & Wittink, 1992).' Our study also aimed at determining the perceptions of line managers about the services of HR Function. Therefore, we also used Conjoint Analysis, in order to determine the perceptions of line managers about each role of HR Function as a business partner.

Before applying Conjoint Analysis, we determined the descriptive statistics of the data to check the data normalization. Then we applied independent sample t-test to test if the difference between two groups of HR and Non-HR line managers was significant.

For Conjoint Analysis, we divided the perceptions of respondents into three categories (High, Medium and Low) against each role of Business Partner.

Then we ranked these categories based on the maximum number of respondents, for each group of line managers, falling in each category as depicted in Column 1: (Priority Level 1, 2

& 3). When applying Conjoint Analysis in marketing research and product development, the perceptions of customers/end consumers are mapped against the product attributes based on their perceptions. Hence, a product with different attributes can be developed with respect to different levels of consumer demands. In our study, we used the attributes of quality perceptions as 'High', 'Medium' and 'Low.' When the responses were gathered, we determined the frequency and percentage of the responses with respect to each quality attributes. Then we applied conjoint analysis technique to determine the scores for each category of attributes. Then, we arranged them in three Levels 1, 2 & 3 based on their conjoint analysis scores. For example, the ratings of maximum number of HR respondents (5 out of 9 or 56% of HR respondents) were 'High' and the conjoint analysis scores were 8.1, so they represented Level 1. Then the ratings of HR respondents who rated quality as 'medium' was ranked as Level 2 (i-e 3 out of 9 or 33% rated quality as 'medium') and the conjoint scores were 5.3. At the end, only one respondent out of 9 (11%) rated quality of HR 'low' as a strategic partner which represented Level 3 with conjoint scores 4.6. But here in data analysis we did not represented the conjoint scores but the attributes of perception only in order to facilitate the understanding of reader. Same technique was applied to the rest of HR roles and the perceptions of both groups i-e; HR and Non-HR respondents were matched to observe the difference.

For first three roles Strategic Partner, Change Agent and Employee Champion, a significant difference was observed. For these three roles, majority of HR managers perceived that the quality of HR Function was 'High.' On the otherhand, majority of Non-HR line managers perceived that the quality of HR Function was 'Medium' (As depicted in Table 1. Second group of majority of HR respondents perceived quality of HR as 'Medium' while Non-HR respondents perceived quality as 'High.'

Interestingly, the perceptions of both HR and Non-HR respondents about the fourth role 'Administrative Expert' of HR Function were same. Number 1 majority group of both respondents groups rated quality of HR Function as 'High', Second group of majority ranked quality as ' Medium'. While, there were minimum number of respondents who rated quality of HR as low.

<center>(Insert Table 1 Here)</center>

Interview Findings

1. HR as a 'Strategic Partner': The perceptions of our respondents represented that the strategic role of HR inside the organization has just begun. The respondents were asked 'how do they think that HR is helping the organization achieve its business goals/objectives?' An HR manager explained: 'The objective of our organization is to be the best hospital and university in the world. Our HR is helping the organization to achieve its organizational objective, proactively, by bringing right people for the right job, by training and developing HR from within and outside, through specializing and replacement.' Another HR manager shared almost same views: 'the objective of AKU is to become number one hospital university in the world is the objective of AKU which can be achieved by 'meeting the needs of customers' by providing quality of care. HRD helps in achieving this objective by recruiting, training and developing high quality faculty and staff.' HR policy of recruitment department of the organization also states that:

> 'The recruitment department aims to assist supervisors/ department heads in recruiting and selecting suitably qualified high calibre faculty and staff for vacant positions in a timely manner.

The department achieves this by:

> Helping the institution assess its immediate and long term resource requirement and ensuring that it has an appropriate number of qualified employees to fulfil these requirements.

> Providing opportunities to existing employees to apply for vacant positions in the institution to motivate them and help them learn new skills for their further career development.

> Selecting the best candidate for the job, purely on merit without any discrimination'

An HR respondent explained that 'We are trying to achieve our strategic objectives by partnering with our line managers for quality improvement, capacity development and succession planning.' He also stated that 'we keep our managers informed about how our (HRD's) customers feel' by tracking changes via proactive internal and external marketing surveys.'

Among Non-HR respondents, only few optimistic responses, regarding the strategic role of HR Function, were observed. Some gave simple opinions like 'HR is helping very much in achieving its strategic objectives.' Or 'HR is playing a strategic role and has its influence in strategic decision making.' But a detailed justification came from a manager of university

services as she stated: 'The objective of university is to enhance research of international and universal acceptance and HR is helping our organization in achieving its strategic objectives. A great example is in form of hiring and promotion criteria. We are producing quality graduates. HR is contributing in form of hiring quality people to work and teach. HR assisted us to hire quality faculty members. Technical questions come from our side while behavioural questions come from HR. Recruitment and promotion, are the examples. In Pakistan, qualification criteria are set by PMDC (Pakistan Medical and Dental Council). HR would not go for any candidate if he does not fulfil these criteria. Similar is the promotion as we need better experienced and highly qualified HR faculty. Similarly a person is not promoted until and unless he does not fulfil criteria of PMDC and our organization itself.' This group of Non-HR respondents shared following opinions: 'HR participates in strategic decision making.' Or 'Probably HR is playing a strategic role and has its influence in strategic decision making.' Or 'HR is playing a strategic role with medium quality but HR cannot pay attention to individuals' needs and personnel strategic objectives.' Or 'There is 'Yes and No' situation.' These respondents seemed expecting more from HR which is apparent from their opinions: 'HR does not go beyond expectations.' Or 'HR participates in top level decision making. But available contribution is still to be seen. They must analyse how to achieve the objectives and then align their policies with those objectives.'

Influence: Just participation in defining business strategy is not sufficient. The strategic intent of HR also requires that HR has ability to influence in strategic decision making. Non-HR respondents of the organization did not agree in this perspective. A respondent stated that 'Influence is a 'way ahead' and more interaction with managers and employees in needed on strategic part.' Other responses gathered from Non-HR respondents included: 'HR is only by name. HR does what it is said to do. It has influence by name only.' Or 'HR just follows what it is told to do.' Or 'HR has no influence in long-term planning. It is the clinical side that dictates and sets the requirements. (HR is playing a passive role regarding Lahore Project.)' Or 'HR has no weightage or influence in strategic decision making. Real job is being done by someone else.'

Developing Programs and Processes: Strategic aspect of HR requires HR Function to be proactive by developing programs and processes which contain strategic influence like long-term HR plans, policy making and policy revision etc. An HR manager described the scenario as: 'We are moving towards proactive role by reviewing our 15 years policies, to achieve the vision of BoD.' A further detailed explanation was: 'To perform our strategic obligations, we

send our 3 years, 5 years and 15 years strategic projections to the committee by circulating them to presidential level. As per presidents' vision, two main positions 1) Head of HR & 2) Head of Finance play major role in Strategic Decision Making of the organization. The creation of a special post of Vice President HR, almost a year ago, is the greatest example of the strengthening of HRD inside organization. Previously HR director was heading HR department. But, now Vice President HR is heading the organization after the President. This is the change that came from within HRD.' Managers also reported the restructuring of HR teams from 'Specialist' HR role to the 'Generalist' HR role.

In contrast, majority of Non-HR respondents did not agree with the views of HR respondents. For example a Non-HR manager stated that 'I don't see any proactive role of HR. They get all the directions by top management and follow them. They need to be proactive, themselves. Feedback process of HR in top decision making is not strong. Promotion process is pretty subjective and evaluation form does not help in the assessment of the amount of performance. Career planning is a great issue; People particularly junior staff do not see career path ahead. HR must identify potential people and promote them.'

Among the strategic processes and programs, **'Succession Planning'** was observed as a main issue, among the departments which provide support services to the organization like Sports, transport, Tourism, University Administration etc. The Non-HR respondents of these areas shared the perceptions: 'Our career growth is stagnant.' Or 'Proactive role of HR is missing. We don't have career path. We reported HR, VP and CEO. Our staff is suffering from the issue of succession planning.' Some respondents reported that it has been many years that they were working on their current positions. For example, a respondent stated 'There is a need to develop career ladder. If I leave, there would be no second man. There is discrimination among the departments. I am working on this position since 9 years doing routine work. There should be some change. Career ladder should be improved.' Another comment was 'In certain areas, there is no career ladder.'

Other issues requiring strategic attention included workload, employee retention, employee branding, training, its evaluation and linkage with performance, etc. For example a manager stated that 'HR is linked with staff recruitment policy while it is restricted to T& D. HR has no concern with its proactive role. No one pushes if no one attends the training course. There is also a need to link training with performance.' At the time of our study, **annual employee turnover** inside the organization was 14%. More than 9600 employees were working inside the organization. This signifies that on average 1344 employees leave the organization

annually. Organization is a medical university and hospital, also owning its nursing school from where it can hire human resources annually. Still, replacing 1400 employees annually is a great cost. A NHR manager commented about high turnover in following sentences: 'HR must devise a strategy to retain staff. Quality means that customers should be delighted. In our department we have 'patient-physician' relationship. We have to deliver results in form of accurate and in-time diagnosis. We have to retain good HR through training and compensation. We need technicians who are skilled, experienced, trained and have technological knowledge. Here workload is high. When a technician leaves, it affects the quality of our services. Each new employee needs time to be trained, which is another cost.'

Communication Gap: Dissemination of HR policies is also a responsibility of HR function. The responses of Non-HR respondents give an indication of communication gap among HR and other functional areas of the organization. The comments that Non-HR respondents shared were: 'We are ignorant of how training is planned and how its impact is determined.', or 'Information dissemination is not up to the mark.' Or 'communication is restricted to the top management only.' A manager recorded his complaints in following sentences: 'Quality is almost 'non-existent' and strategic role of HR is, as a whole, missing. I don't think that HR is performing a strategic role. Do they determine HR needs for next 15 years? Where are they? I don't find any.'

2. HR as a Change Agent: We observed three main changes inside the HR function of the organization which were also reported by our respondents (both HR and Non-HR). These changes involved: 'Creation of the post HR Head as VP of the organization', 'restructuring of HRD teams', & 'Automation of systems and processes by installation of human resource information system 'People Soft.' These changes can be perceived as strategic in nature, as well.

Though Non-HR line managers acknowledged such changes but they were expecting more from HR. They shared the opinions like: 'The role of 'change agent' is yet to see. More work is needed to be done for CA role of HR.' Or 'The role of change agent is invisible.' Or 'HR doesn't push for practical change. There is the need of change policy affecting through independent departments. Every department has its own Qibla. HR needs to be customer friendly.'

Appointment of VP HR: A few months before we started this study, a new post of Vice President (VP) HR was created. VP was hired from Canada who is, currently, leading the

organization after President of the organization. Both HR and Non-HR managers were having a high regard for this change. Before this, a Director was heading HRD like all other departments. But after this change VP was the second highest post inside the organization after President of the organization. A Non-HR respondent described that 'We are impressed by the change in form of the post of VP.' Non-HR respondents had some expectations, as well as, some reservations, about this change as stated by a Non-HR manager: 'Restructuring and the creation of new post of VP have brought the expectations of changes in the role of HRD. Entire Hospital and University is changing. We also expect enhanced flexibility.' A Non-HR respondent commented: 'Change as VP HR seems important. But the question is that how much power and authority, the board is giving her?' Another non-HR respondent described that: 'Change of management style is necessary. We expect attitudinal changes from VP. We expect that she would be a 'good listener' and would accept divisional issues.' Another respondent explained 'VP is a big change despite that the people feel uncertain because of sudden change in the higher level. Yet, restructuring is essential.'

Restructuring HR Teams: Currently, the restructuring of HR teams was under process. According to HR respondents, previously HR has been playing the role of specialist, but, now the role had been shifted towards 'generalists.' HR personnel were divided into three different 'Unit-based' teams: 1) Medical College; 2) IETD, 3) School of Nursing. Non-HR respondents were also acknowledging this change as stated by a respondent: 'The change that we have observed inside HR is 'the split of HRD in to unit-based teams.' But this respondent also stated that: 'It is good somehow but there remain the chances of leniency if the same person is doing the job. Change is good for individual but when you inform and change, then, people may not be satisfied. There is also a need to replace the old information with the new ones. HR is decentralizing but more is needed to be done yet. Electronic attendance sheet is a good example of the decentralizing of organizational processes.'

Automation of systems and processes: The respondents (both HR and Non-HR) also acknowledged the implementation of Human Resource Information System 'People Soft' inside the organization.

Perceptions about 'Training and Development Division': As a change agent, HR respondents appreciated the innovative research and education programs' of 'Training and Development Division' like 'Early Child Development', and other electronic and web-based training. Some Non-HR line managers also appreciated the efforts of 'T & D' their opinions were: 'Training programs are good.' Or 'T&D courses like failure causes analysis, root cause

analysis, tools, continuous education are good.' Or 'I like 'Lunch and Learn' training program.' & 'Orientation is a good program.'

But majority of Non-HR respondents had some objections, as well. A manager stated that 'The role of change agent is also non-existent. There is no proper training delivered. Same speakers come to address in the seminars and there is need to invite foreign speakers as well. T&D must determine the return of training through its proper evaluation.' Similar comments were recorded from another Non-HR respondent: 'T&D department has fixed training programs that they provide to all employees. HR has fixed systems that they follow. Thus change agent role of HR is almost silent. Review of policies is the basic issue.' Others stated that 'Many training programs do not relate.' Or 'There are no specific training programs but all are tailor-made.' A NHR respondent explained that 'Change should come at the 'very end' i-e HR, not at the departments, that is only possible if HR head is strong. People are moving. Certain standards are supposed to being met. HR can guide for good quality programs but it's not happening. HR should intervene in budgets and financing.'

Future Changes Anticipated: It is important to describe here that a Non-HR responded reported 'It is for the first time that HR arranged meetings with us, which have not been done previously.' We also asked respondents about the future changes, that they anticipate inside the organization. An HR manager stated 'there is need to change the bureaucratic style of management that results in slow processes and high response times.' Another HR manager stated that 'the required change is the cultural change by management and employees in order to change mindset developed or created.' He stated that 'practices like job rotation, and leadership development need to be enhanced in order to ensure the changes.'

Non-HR line managers expressed the changes related to the review of policies, flexibility of work hours, need for more customized training programs etc. A respondent talked about the need to review salary structure: 'There is a need to review policies for example 'salary structures' are same of 1985.' Another respondent asked for turnover reduction: 'There is need to retain staff because of high turnover. There is also a need for proper updating of job descriptions inside the organization. Pay increase is needed to influence quality.' About working hours, a respondent explained that 'There is a need of 'shift differentials' for nurses. They need flexibility in work hours and schedules. Many outstanding nurses are sitting home because they don't find flexible shifts.' About training programs, a respondent commented that 'General programs are more prevalent. There is the requirement of customized programs.' About the organizational politics, a respondent stated that 'blaming, finger

pointing and negative behaviours bother employee relations and employees feels personally very insecure. We realize that it needs severe attention.' A Non-HR respondent informed us that 'Health and Safety is separate from HRD. I don't know why. In fact, Health and Safety comes under HRD.'

3. HR as an Administrative Expert

Administrative Efficiency, Management Style and Automation: Some non-HR respondents liked 'recruitment and selection' job as they shared the opinions like 'Recruitment' is good job.' or 'I am extremely satisfied with HR and its administration. When I was hired, I felt as I was some VIP.' Bureaucratic management style and lack of technological implementations influence the response time of processes. HR respondents admitted that 'there is need to change the bureaucratic style of management that results in slow processes and high response times.' Another HR respondent explained that 'we are stuck in procedural and administrative work (paperwork and record keeping) rather than paying full attention in training the staff. These issues hinder our strategic activities because we have limited training staff and limited technological support. Thus we need more apt use of technology to reduce redundant activities.' Some Non-HR respondents criticised that: 'Hiring process takes time. It does not matter whether department is suffering.' Our experience with a NHR manager from Clinical/Hospital area is an ideal example of bureaucratic style of management. The respondent presented us a document, for hiring of two doctors that contained signatures of almost 8 authorities. The application was under process since more than six months, as reported by the respondent. The respondent expressed his views that: 'HR response time is very lengthy. There are almost 8 to 9 steps for hiring. Look at this application that we have processed for the recruitment of two doctors for our department. The application moves from manager to Chief, then to director of the department. After that it is forwarded to CEO, then COO and then to PVB.' Another NHR person shared his experience with respect to the previous organization where he worked. He stated that 'The quality of HR is not better than the previous organization where I have been working. HR quality is the quality of relationship between organization and employee. According to my personal experience the operating efficiency is not very good. HR was not prepared for the position created for which I am working. I haven't found office yet. It's not my office where I am sitting. There is no computer, no printer & no telephone yet. I reported HR, they replied that it's the duty of IT Department and the case is still pending.'

A Non-HR respondent justified that 'Efficiency is a two-way process. I think HR is efficient because I am efficient. I think that HR is doing good job.' Contrary to this opinion, other Non-HR respondents had different views. According to a NHR respondent, who was heading the department, 'Operating efficiency is not good for my department. Look after of the needs of employees' is not ok. When we need personnel and we ask them, they send all CV's to my office instead of screening all the stuff, themselves.' It is also depicted in HR policy documents that 'HR will forward all applications for the position to the department head/chair or Chair of the search committee as applicable, for screening and initial short listing based on the job specifications.' This person was quite right in his complaint. HR policy of the organization also describes that when requisition from department is received, HR sends all short listed CVs to the head of department for screening.

HR respondents accepted that the response time is high. But, they had expectations with the undergoing automation of HR processes. They perceived that the implementation of HRIS 'People Soft' would reduce their workload (paper work and record keeping etc.), response-time and transaction costs. Thus, administrative efficiency of HR Function would increase. An HR respondent talked about the complaint of response time: 'We are trying to cut down unnecessary quotient processes. We have recently implemented 'People Soft' HRIS inside our organization in order to reduce costs, eliminate unnecessary data and to increase time efficiency. The examples of process improvement include quality circle, medical process, employee checklist, (no) clearance in case of leaving. These processes would be implemented in a couple of months.' Another HR respondent also explained that 'We are living in bureaucratic type of management styles which influences response times of the processes. A number of persons need to be called upon for almost every type of work. This requires changes in form of quick response requirements and structural changes. Through the implementation of 'People Soft', we would reduce the response times.' An HR respondent also described that 'we are consistently revising HRIS 'People Soft' to make it user friendly so that customer demands must be met within in time lines. It would also strengthen the 'facilitation role' of HRD.'

Training and Development and Appraisal: We have already stated that Non-HR respondents admired the job of 'Training and Development' division. They liked the programs like 'Orientation and induction', 'Lunch and learn program' etc. But a NHR respondent criticised the implementation of ergonomics inside the organization. Ergonomics training is a part of initial orientation program. This person had covered the light that with a

paper, that was shedding light directly into his eyes. The person criticised that 'Where has gone this ergonomics. I don't see any application of ergonomics. You can see this light. I have tried to cover with a paper. It's gonna make me blind. This office is in the basement of this block (building). When it rains, the water enters in this office and all the carpet becomes wet.'

NHR respondents criticised that 'There is no proper training evaluation process.' NHR respondents also criticised performance and appraisal system. According to a NHR respondent, 'Their feedback process is not very strong and 'major improvement required' is normal.' Another stated that 'Appraisal form is complicated. Notice the grade increase of staff.'

Both HR and Non-HR respondents liked the work-environment and research culture of the organization. They seemed more satisfied with the administrative role of HRD relative to SP, CA and EC roles of HRD. But Non-HR respondents viewed HR as a dictator and policeman. Some also shared the opinions like 'HRD is policeman', 'HR is working as a dictator', and 'HR behaves in negative manner.' Non-HR respondents wanted more autonomy in recruitment and selection, as a respondent stated that 'When we make individual selection in our departments, HR jumps into.'

A No-HR respondent also criticised that 'Unequal compensation is prevailed.' About reporting system, A Non-HR respondent stated that 'It is not clear that which department reports to whom and whether HR comes under CEO.' Another complaint also came about the promotion system, as a manager stated that 'There are flaws in promotion systems. Every employee wishes promotion, therefore career ladder should be followed and employees should be informed properly.'

4. 'Employee Champion' role of HR Function

Demand for Market-Based Salary: HR respondents claim that we ensure 'market-based compensation' of employees. An HR respondent illustrated that 'We conduct 'yearly compensation survey' in order to ensure that our compensation strategy is market-based.' But, Non-HR respondents did not agree. A respondent stated that 'HR must also ensure that compensation is according to the market rate.' This opinion was shared among the respondents from departments like pharmacy, sports, safety etc. A respondent from 'Safety and Security' expressed: 'We are compromising on quality. Contractual employees are not loyal to the organization. Our employees are not getting salary according to the standard

market rate and they have no accommodation. The conditions would go worse if it would remain same. We have trained soldiers but they are not getting compatible salary.' Another respondent stated that 'We need 'Market-Led' salary.' During our discussion with an HR respondent, he accepted that: 'In certain areas compensation is below market, but we feel that it must be compensated.'

Non-HR respondents perceived that increase in compensation and benefits can reduce turnover and increase loyalty. A respondents stated that 'the way people work, is not rewarding. There is the need to retain employees through monetary benefits. HR has fixed budgets and they are always looking to cut from the compensation of employees on behalf of different excuses. Satisfaction of employees needs attention and appraisal in form of money. HR follows strict guidelines by following merit policy but the limit of merit is fixed. It needs to be flexible by increasing the funds to support monetary audition.' Another Non-HR respondent talked about employee loyalty: 'HR must support to increase the benefits of staff and faculty because the people who would come from outside would be less loyal to the organization. While the employees inside have very long and strong linkages with AKU.'

Budget Limitations and Unequal Remuneration: Some Non-HR respondents also complained against budget limitations and unequal remuneration. For example a respondent stated that: 'Salary must be increased. HR must cut budget from other areas to increase salaries. They can cut cost from the tours of top management.' Another stated that: 'There are budget constraints. If I'll fight for the employees of my department, they say that they have no budgets. HR flips the way face is. There is discrimination among the departments. They raise many hurdles in work processes. Who are the customers of HR'. None of my customers is happy.' Another talked about unequal remuneration: 'There is need for totally equitable remunerations.' A few of Non-HR respondents demanded increase in gross salary. But it is important to state that HR managers were realizing their budget limitations and felt that compensation must be increased as an HR respondent expressed that 'The benefits are fixed. There is need to invest more on HR equally at every level.'

Medical, Insurance and Other Benefits: HR managers explained that employees are benefiting from health, education and medical benefits (coverage for employee and his parents' coverage), leave facility, provident fund scheme, loans (personal & car) scheme, insurance services facilities (85% insurance coverage for employees), free of charge health and psychological treatment through MR card etc.

Non-HR respondents had some complaints regarding such benefits. According to a respondent 'Increase in Medical care provided is 10% while annual inflation increase is 15% percent, every year benefits remain 10% low.' A respondent complained that 'Medical reimbursement has not been reviewed since last 5 years despite that inflation is souring day by day.' An HR respondent agreed that 'Inflation has boosted prices. This fosters the need of consistent salary increments for satisfying the employees.'

Non-HR respondents also complained that 'HR policies were changed, particularly, medical facilities. Previously, medical facilities were provided to all the family but now they have changed and restricted to wife and kids only. But, in our society parents are also our responsibility.' Another stated that 'Increase in medical compensation and provision of health insurance for parents at discounted rate is needed.' Another respondent presented same view: 'Medical benefits for parents are needed. Previously, these benefits for parents were being provided but later on they were eliminated. In our culture, my parents are my responsibility.' A manager talked about outpatient benefits: 'Outpatient benefits are not enough. The limit of outpatient benefits is 14,000 for whole year but consultation fee is 1100. The cost of MRI is 24000 and there is 15% payment discount. The money paid for test is besides this.'

Employee Turnover: Annual employee turnover of the organization was 14%. Total employees exceed 9600. 14% employee turnover means that each year 1400 employees leave the organization. This represents cost. A Non-HR respondent stated that 'retention of employees is essential. We are losing our staff. HR must rebuild its image as employee's friend and feel employees' needs proactively.' An expressed that 'our aim is to get quality employees and retain them.' Non-HR respondents also complained about high work load. But they shared the opinion that turnover and workload can be compensated by increasing compensation and benefits. A respondent from 'Radiology Department' explained: 'We are losing our experienced staff, that affects our quality of service. It takes time (almost a year) and time to train a new entrant.

Flexible Work Timings: In our case study organizations, HR respondents recognized the need of flexible working hours for their HR, particularly female staff. For example HR managers' described that 'Employee is looking for flexible time, cafeteria benefits, medical and insurance groups.' A female HR respondent also expressed her views that 'Presently, I am satisfied because my need is being fulfilled. I needed flexible work timing that I have got.' But Non-HR respondents, particularly female workers, still demanded more flexible working hours. A respondent from nursing department expressed that 'There is a need of 'shift

differentials' for nurses. They need flexibility in work hours and schedules. Many outstanding nurses are sitting home because they don't find flexible shifts.' This respondent also demanded transportation facility for such workers. The respondent from transportation department also expressed such needs of flexible work hours and shift differentials.

Leaves and Loans: Regarding sick leaves a Non-HR respondent complained that 'Management employees are given 15 sick leaves but the encashment is provided for half of them.' Another complained that 'If employee needs the extension of leaves, it is not paid.' Organizational employees benefit from car, house and other types of loan facilities. But Non-HR respondents were asking for more flexibility in such benefits. According to a respondent, 'Loan without mark-up must be provided. Here we have to pay 7-8% mark-up on car loans. The limit of car loan is, also, very low. Which car can be bought in 3 or 4 lacs as you see the prices are increasing day by day because of inflation rate?'

Workers Abuse: Workers abuse i-e getting extra, personal and unrelated work from employees is like a norm in Pakistan. A Non-HR respondent highlighted this issue inside the organization. He stated that 'There is gross violation of HR policies in university areas. University staff is being abused. There is fear prevalent in university area environment. People take personal works from the staff like asking someone to go to pay the fee of children, etc.

Cashless Policy and Cafeteria Benefits: A Non-HR respondent from Pharmacy department highlighted an issue related to the cashless policy of medicine quota for each employee. According to him 'people misuse the cashless policy.' According to this policy, each employee can get the medicine equal to 12,000 rupees per year. The manager explained that at the end of each year, the employees come to the pharmacy and bring the medicines in bulk, of amount equal to the cashless amount remaining, whether it is 12,000 or less. They sell these products back into the market. It influences our storage and costs us. HR must devise a policy according to which it must reimburse the employees their remaining cashless amounts, either on monthly basis or in lump sum at the end of the year.'

Employees also receive cafeteria benefits. Recently, a further discount in 'Cafeteria Benefits' was provided. A Non-HR respondent provided his views: 'You can see, as the prices food decreased, the quality decreased as well.'

Need for Training and Development: According to an HR professional 'Career growth of employees is ensured through well-designed training and development programs e.g; spoken English courses. On the job coaching is also provided to the employees.' But, Non-HR

respondents argued that 'Individual employee development opportunities regarding professional development and higher education are inexistent.' They suggested that 'There should be some T&D programs for managers, business education opportunities for administrative staff and clinical supervisors as well as greater training opportunities within and outside the country.'

Career Promotion: Non-HR respondents form sport service areas seemed discontented that 'Promotion criteria and salary increment are not as they should be.' According to a respondent, 'Ladder promotion has vanished. There is the problem of career path.' Another shared his experience that 'I have been working as assistant manager pharmacy since 8-9 years. Now I am appointed as a manager. My responsibilities changed but there is no change in my compensation and benefits. It is, only, my title that changed. My department is the second revenue generating department that generates almost 80-85 karore annually and 100 of staff works under me. There is no bonus for the staff of my department staff.' Succession planning was observed as an issue prevailed in the departments which provided support services, like Sports, Pharmacy and university administration etc.

Other needs: Both HR and Non-HR respondents stated many other needs which they think that have not been addressed yet. These needs included: i) Smooth exit process; ii) Replacements of low qualified staff with more qualified and technical staff in some of departments like pharmacy etc.; iii) integration of promotion with appraisal; iv) respect from colleagues for female workers, especially nurses.

Conclusion and Discussion:

It is well-accepted that 'organizations around the world are adopting similar HR practices (Khilji and Wang, 2006).' In their study, Jhatial et al. (2009) concluded that HRM, personnel or administration department in government organizations seems weak whereas private local enterprises have started realizing its importance and have been passing through an evolutionary phase. We also accept that 'HRM in Pakistan is passing through embryonic stages (Khilji, 2004).' Pakistan imported Western-HR practices (Jhatial et al., 2009) and the resulting western HR practices in MNC's with minimum national cultural influence are the success story in Pakistan (Khilji 2003, 2004). Jhatial et al. (2009) also claims that MNC's seem far better than governmentand and private organizations in terms of HRM functioning. As an MNC organization, our case organization was ahead in adapting modern HR practices.

We found that HR professionals emphasized on Administrative role of HR Function while Strategic Partner, Change Agent and Employee Champion roles are still in their infancy. It is apparent from the on-going changes inside our case organization like Appointment of HR Head as 'Vice President' to strengthen the strategic role of HR, restructuring of HR teams and implementation of 'People Soft.' We observed few oddities like succession and higher turnover in some functional departments (like Pharmacy, Sports, Transport, and university administration etc.) of the organization which provide support services to other departments. It represents that appropriate employment of HR is lacking inside the organization as stated by Abbasi et al. (2008). The problems like bureaucratic style, abuse of lower level workers, Cashless policy etc. need the cultural as well as attitudinal change at both strategic as well as operational level. Bureaucratic style of management, as reported by both HR and Non-HR respondents, signifies that national values are rooted inside the organization as described by Khilji (2004). Changing management style and winning influence in strategic decision making is a real challenge for HR Head in fostering the Strategic Partner and Change Agent roles of HR Function inside the organization.

The questionnaire findings of our study were akin to the study findings of Wright et al.(1998). HR professionals consistently rated the functions effectiveness higher than did Non-HR line professionals. But we observed greater difference at Change Agent role, then at Strategic Partner and Change Agent role but the perceptions of both groups were very similar for the fourth role of HR Function as an 'Administrative Expert.'

As reported by respondents, the quality of Administrative role of HR inside the organization is better than the rest of three roles SP, CA & EC. It is represented by the questionnaire findings and was also reported by managers during interviews. The implementation of HR information system 'people soft' is also expected to further improve the administrative efficiency by reducing cost and the burden of paper work. It may also reduce the communication gap among HR and other functional areas through dissemination of information and facilitating instant access to HRD.

The needs reported by both HR and Non-HR respondents also seem to be justifying that 'work-related values reveal changes reflecting a modern market economy (Khilji, 2004).' For example, the reported requirements of flexible work-hours and shift timings by respondents are the work-related changes reflecting modern economies. But, it is well-admitted that severing economic and political situation of Pakistan is increasing challenges for HR in
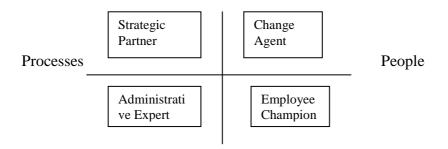
Pakistan. The respondents rated quality as 'medium' for the overall Business Partner of HR Function inside our case organization.

Though organizations in Pakistan are adapting modern HR practices in order to cope with the phenomenal changes inside modern economies. But, the quality of such HR practices still needs to be improved. There are some gaps, still, remaining to be fulfilled in order to compete with the organizations of developed economies. HR professionals can fulfil this gap by strengthening all the roles of HR Business Partnership, particularly, the strategic and change agent roles (which are still in their infancy). An important thing is that HR professionals must ask Non-HR professionals, who are the customers of HR services, fin order to fulfil this perceptional gap and improve quality of HR Function.

Limitation and Future Recommendations:

First limitation of our study is that it is a case study of a single organization. There is a need to conduct large scale, cross-sectional studies at national level. This would help researchers and HR professionals to get a better picture of changing nature of HR Function. Secondly, our study was aimed at gathering perceptions of line managers only. Besides middle management, the responses can be gathered from top and lower levels of management, as well. Our study was cross sectional i-e we gathered responses at a point in single time. It is also the limitation that we conducted this study while a number of changes were undergoing inside the organization like appointment of HR Head as Vice President, Restructuring of HR teams and Automation. There is a need to conduct such studies at different times in order to get an in-depth observation of changing HR roles. HR managers of the organization can benefits from this study by setting the priorities to determine that which role of HR needs more attention in respect of HR policy and decision-making. HR professionals can gather responses of line managers of their organizations in order to determine the quality of HR Function, at a point in time, so that HR policies may be reviewed with respect to the quality of each role of HR function.

Strategic Focus

Processes ← | Strategic Partner | Change Agent | → People
| Administrative Expert | Employee Champion |

Operational Focus

Figure1: Source: HR Champions by Dave Ulrich (1997)

Table 1: Conjoint Analysis and Questionnaire Findings

HR Roles	SP		CA		EC		AE	
Perception Priority Levels	HR	NHR	HR	NHR	HR	NHR	HR	NHR
1	High	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	High	High
2	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
3	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low

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