

DECIPHERING A DISTINCT DUALITY



By Dr. Ajantha Dharmasiri

Life has a soft side and a hard side. During the recent festive season, we would have focussed more on feelings than facts. In the new year with new aspirations, it may be the other way around. So is the case with regard to managing people. Let's look at the soft and hard aspects of Human Resource Management (HRM).

The overall purpose of HRM is to ensure that the organization is able to achieve success through its people. It essentially deals with getting the best out of people for organisational results, whilst developing them. According to Armstrong (2006), the areas where HRM can contribute can be summarized as shown below:

Organizational Effectiveness

Distinctive human resource practices shape the capability of the organization. Research has shown that such practices can make a significant impact on the organization performance. In other words, how best an organization uses the capabilities of its people will ensure the achievement of its results.

Human Capital Management

The human capital of an organization consists of the people who work there, and on whom the success of the business depends. Like in the case of financial capital, you need to get a return on investment (ROI), with human capital. Human capital represents the human factor in the organization; the combined intelligence, skills and experience that give the organization its distinctive character. The human elements of the organization are

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those that are capable of learning, changing, and providing new ideas for innovation. This creative thrust, if properly motivated can ensure continued sustainability and success of the organization.

In other words, HRM aims to ensure that the organization obtains and retains the skilled, committed, and well-motivated employees it needs. This means taking steps to assess and satisfy future people-needs, and to enhance and develop the capabilities of people.

Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is any process or practice of creating, acquiring, capturing, sharing, and using knowledge, wherever it resides, to enhance learning

and performance in organizations. HRM aims to support the development of organization-related knowledge and skills that are the result of the organizational learning process.

Knowledge is available in documents, manuals, in the form of regulations, systems, procedures, specifications, instructions, circulars and other forms in an organization. These are called "explicit" forms of knowledge. On the other hand, individual employees possess a vast amount of knowledge gathered through their experience and exposure, which is called the "tacit" form of knowledge. Both explicit and tacit forms are essential for an organization to function, and the challenging task is to capture the tacit form of knowledge from individual employees, to use it meaningfully.

Reward Management

HRM aims to enhance motivation of people, resulting in higher effort being put willingly towards the fulfilment of their tasks. This is achieved, by introducing policies and processes that ensure that people are valued and rewarded for what they do, and achieve, and the levels of capability they reach.

Employee Relations

The aim is to create an environment in which productive and harmonious relationships can be maintained through partnerships between management and employees and their trade unions. Industrial peace is essential for uninterrupted functioning of any unionized organization.

Meeting Diverse Needs

HRM aims to develop and implement policies that balance and adapt to the needs of its stakeholders. In the case of the private sector organizations, these stakeholders may include employees, owners, shareholders, customers etc. In public service, the concept is very valid with a broader range of stakeholders including the general public. HRM has also to cater for a diverse workforce, taking into account individual and group differences in employment, personal needs, work-style and aspirations.

In order to fulfil the aims discussed above, there has to be key functions of HRM properly in place.

Key Functions of HRM

Let us look at the interaction an employee is having with an organization. According to Gupta (1995), the sequence involved can be listed as follows:

- Acquisition: Recruiting and selecting the employees
- Development: Training and developing the employees
- Motivation: Ensuring that employees are doing their best
- Maintenance: Rewarding employees
- Separation: Administering the retirement, resignation or removal procedures on disciplinary grounds

All above are interrelated and therefore should be viewed in a holistic manner.



The beauty of HRM is the meaningful co-existence of such a complex yet coherent whole. It is not only HR professionals but all other managers should be aware of such a harmony in order to maintain proper balance between achieving results and maintaining relationships.

Soft and Hard Aspects of HRM

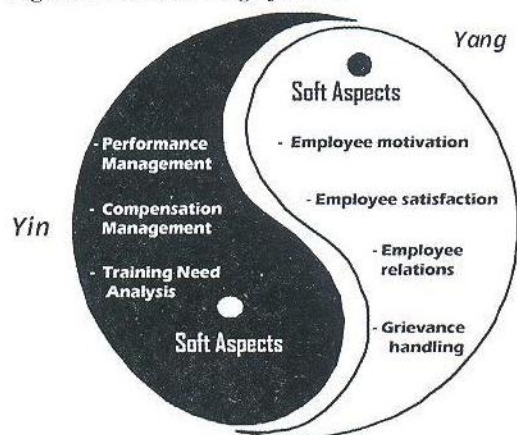
HRM is increasingly emerging both as science as well as an art. This paradoxical nature of HRM can be depicted by using the traditional Chinese symbol yin yang. This is what we see in the national flag of South Korea.

In Chinese philosophy, the concept of yin yang is used to describe how polar or seemingly contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world. It also depicts how they give rise to each other in turn. Opposites thus only exist in relation to each other.

Insights into Yin Yang

As Porkert (1974) tells us, the relationship between yin and yang is often described in terms of sunlight playing over a mountain and in the valley. Yin (literally the 'shady place' or 'north slope') is the dark area occluded by the mountain's bulk, while yang (literally the 'sunny place' or 'south slope') is the brightly lit portion. As the sun moves across the sky, yin and yang gradually trade places with each other, revealing what was obscured and obscuring what was revealed.

Figure 1. Yin and Yang of HRM



In simple terms, yin is characterized as slow, soft, yielding, diffuse, cold, wet, and passive; and is associated with water, earth, the moon, femininity and night-time. Yang, by contrast, is fast, hard, solid, focused, hot, dry, and aggressive; and is associated with fire, sky, the sun, masculinity and daytime.

To put even more precisely, yin yang are complementary opposites that interact within a greater whole, as part of a dynamic system. Everything has both yin and yang aspects, but either of these aspects may manifest more strongly in particular objects, and may ebb or flow over time.

Yin Yang and HRM

As figure 1 shows, there is yin (represented by black) in yang. Also, there is yang (represented by white) in yin. In other words, two different and opposing elements appear to be in a constant state of flux. This is the nature of HRM in reality, where managing employee concerns as well as employer concerns need to take place in synergy and harmony.

Dimensions of Duality

According to figure 1, the hard and soft aspects of HRM are separated, indicating a distinct duality. Such a duality highlights the art and science of managing people. The soft aspects are more into relationship building, which requires an artistic approach. In contrast, the hard aspects represent more the structural, analytical and rational elements highlighting the need for a scientific approach.

The beauty of HRM is the meaningful co-existence of such a complex yet coherent whole. It is not only HR professionals but all other managers should be aware of such a harmony in order to maintain proper balance between achieving results and maintaining relationships.

Way Forward

Yin and yang of HRM is relevant to individuals, interactive teams and institutions. Clarity on the approach will no doubt pave the way for committed actions that deliver concrete results. Such a yield symbolizes unity, harmony and rich relationship between soft and hard aspects of HRM.



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