HRMS: IS THE ROLE CHANGING FROM BEING ADMINISTRATIVE TO STRATEGIC?

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ABSTRACT: Human Resource Management System (HRMS) seems to matter for Human Resource Management (HRM) in the current digital economy. Many firms transform their HRM functions from the manual work processes to the computerized work processes. Information technology is expected to drive Human Resource (HR)'s transition from a focus on Human Resource Management (HRM) to Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM). This strategic role not only adds a valuable dimension to the HR function, but also changes the competencies that define HR professional and practitioner success. Interestingly, an HRMS is utilized for administrative purposes rather than analytical purposes. The study focused on the implementation of HRMS in the J&K Bank and attempts to investigate whether Human Resource Management Systems have reached the strategic potential in HR department or not.

Key Words: Human Resource, Administrative, Strategic, System.

INTRODUCTION

Many business functions have been transformed due to the emergence of the Internet throughout the world around 1995. After dealing with accounting, finance, and marketing, many companies are shifting their attentions to find a better way of monitoring their Human Resource Management (HRM). The companies are transforming their HRM functions from manual workflow to computerized workflow. Computers have made the tasks of analyzing the tremendous amount of human resource data into a simple task. Computer hardware, software, and databases help organizations maintain and retrieve human resource records better and simpler. Human Resource Management System (HRMS) will help organizations to keep an accurate, complete, updated database that can be retrieved when needed from reports (Gara 2001 and Walker 1982). HRMS is defined as a technology-based system used to acquire, store, manipulate, analyze, retrieve, and distribute pertinent information regarding an organization’s human resources (Tannenbaum, 1990). It is a systematic procedure for collecting, storing, maintaining, retrieving, and validating data needed by organization about its human resources, personnel activities and organization unit characteristics (Kovach et al., 1999). Furthermore, HRMS shapes integration between Human Resource Management (HRM) and Information Technology. It merges HRM as a discipline and in particular basic HR activities and processes with the information technology field (Gerardine DeSanctis, 1986).

As is the case with any complex organizational information system, an HRMS is not limited to the computer hardware and software applications that comprise the technical part of the system but it also includes the people, policies, procedures and data required to manage the HR function (Hendrickson, 2003).

Kovach et al., (1999) presented the three major functional components in any HRMS by giving the model below:

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Input  Data Maintenance  Output
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The Input function enters personnel information into the HRMS. The maintenance function updates and adds new data to the database after data have been entered into the information system. The output generated is the most visible function of HRMS.

As the economies are becoming more knowledge driven and thereby moving towards more qualified and educated workforce, it is being increasingly realized that better information makes employees more involved, connected, and productive. A major source of connect between the employees and their companies is through the information that they receive and the feedback that they provide. Information management in general and HRMS in particular, thus, has become a critical factor in managing employee performance. Companies are increasingly realizing the advantage of having systems that capture, analyze and report on the host of human resource aspects that are critical for running a business and share it with the employees so that they self-regulate their contribution. HRMS is a tool to achieve this objective. HRMS can be used as a tool to enhance efficiency of HR information management by increasing the speed of decisions, communication of decisions and also the reduction of overhead costs by task mechanisation and process automation so that the number of HR specialists required goes down (Zuboff 1988).

Further HRMS improves shareholder value (Brown, 2002) and provides many other benefits such faster information processing, greater information accuracy, improved planning and program development, and enhanced employee communications (overman, 1992). All of these benefits contribute towards administrative efficiency. It helps to reduce HR costs by automating information and reducing the need for large numbers of HR employees by helping employees to control their own personal information and by allowing managers to access relevant information and data, conduct analysis, make decisions and communicate with others without consulting an HR professional (Awazu & Desouza, 2003; Ball, 2001). Furthermore, lesser people would be needed to perform administrative tasks such as record keeping and more time would be made available for HR managers to manage at strategic level.
In examining the benefits of HRMS there are two extremes, the pure administrative use of HRMS and its strategic use. Ultimately the goal of both is to increase organizational value. Administrative HRMS is used in day-to-day operations and it is usually in the form of records that hold employee information. Administrative HR is much more efficient when it is used with IT because HR professionals are better able to handle large amounts of information efficiently. For instance, Watson Wyatt’s survey report (2002) concluded that it does not take a high progression of e-HR to reach high HRMS performance on the administrative side. The results showed that a properly integrated e-HR system is the key to the evolution of the system. The survey covered all organization sizes, and the measures used included productivity improvements within the HR organization, cost reductions, return on investment, and enhanced employee communications. Researchers concluded that by properly implementing an e-HR system an organization would be able to reduce the amount of work for which the HR department is responsible which would then leave HR professionals free to concentrate on performing more strategic roles for the organization. In contrast to administrative HRMS, strategic HRMS is much more difficult to explain and measure because there is no way to be sure that the benefits are a direct result of strategic deployment of an HRMS system. Strategic HRMS consists of tools that assist in decision making. For example strategic decisions may include those associated with recruitment and retaining employees. Much, if not all, of the administrative information held by HRMS can be used to analyze an organization and formulate strategies to increase the value of an HRMS. Some experts also believe that easy access to vital information will become an integrated part of many strategic decision-making processes (Kovach, Hughes, Fagan, Maggitti, 2002). But, the possibilities of strategic deployment still remain useless without a way of getting there.

According to Joseph Collette (2001) the traditional reactive staff role of HRMS and HR leaders needs to become more proactive and strategic in nature, if HRMS has to be made successful. Consequently, those leading the HRMS initiative must have some key competencies like, strategic vision, hands on technical skills, HR business acumen, and the ability to influence and negotiate team leadership ability and project management skills.

SCOPE
This study focused on the implementation of HRMS in the banking sector, and J&K Bank zonal office, Jammu has been chosen for this purpose. The main questions sought to address were e.g. Have human resource information systems reached the administrative potential of HRIS in HR departments at J&K Bank? Have they reached the strategic goals? The research has also attempted to assess the overall satisfaction of managers with the system.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Within the last decade, the explosion in information systems related literature confirms that information technology, its implementation, use and benefit is a very well researched area in organizational studies (Robinson, 1997). Early surveys suggested that HRMS were used predominantly to automate routine tasks and “to replace filing cabinets”. (Martinsons, 1994). Accordingly, theories which can be considered as ‘social constructivist’ can play an important role in the study of technology as they explicitly recognise that technologies, such as HRMS, cannot be evaluated and analysed without having an explicit understanding of the context of individuals and groups which consequently comprehend, interpret, use and engage with the technology. The social construction of technology (SCOT) approach challenges the idea that technologies and technological artefacts have a pre-given and fixed meaning and in its place argues that the process, design and selection of technologies are open and can be subjected to contestation (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). Thus a technology is seen to be characterised by ‘interpretative flexibility’ and various ‘relevant social groups’ who articulate and promote particular interpretations of it (Dery et al., 2006). In similar tradition to SCOT approaches, the technologies-in-practice approach endeavours to recognise the inability to separate the technology from surrounding social relations. Technologies-in-practice are the structure that is enacted by users of a technology as they use the technology in recurrent ways (Orlikowski, 2000). It is only when individuals use the HRMS that the associated social practices will frame and determine the value that they attribute to it. Hence the process of using a technology involves users interacting with ‘facilities’ (such as the properties of the technology artefact), ‘norms’ (such as the protocols of using the technology), and ‘interpretative schemes’ (such as the skills, knowledge and the assumptions about the technology as might be positioned by the user) (Dery et al., 2006). Both of these approaches are important and useful as they recognise that when considering relationships and experiences with technology, it is essential that social factors and previous experiences be considered. Therefore the opinions of respondents can only be understood in the context of individuals and groups comprehending, interpreting, using and engaging with the technologies (Dery et al., 2006).

HR had missed the strategic opportunity provided by HRMS (Ball 2001). More recent research shows greater use of HRMS in support of strategic decision making by HR (Hussain et al., 2007). However, the extent to which HRMS is used in a strategic fashion differs across organisations with the vast majority of organisations continuing to use HRMS simply to replace manual processing and to reduce costs (Bea & Bea, 2002; Brown, 2002). Recent debates about technology and organisation have highlighted the importance of social context and sought to develop frameworks which acknowledge both the material and social character of technologies including HRMS (Dery, Hall, & Walies, 2006). The top four metrics used in formal business cases supporting HRMS were improved productivity within HR organization, cost reductions, return on investment, and enhanced employee communications (Watson Wyatt 2002). In fact, the payback period, or the time it takes to recoup the investment, may be as short as one to three years (Lego, 2001). HRMS contribute to cost reductions, quality/customer satisfaction, and innovation (Broderick and Bouderoue, 1992). HRMS also provide HR professionals with opportunities to enhance their contribution to the strategic direction of the firm. First, by automating and devolving many routine HR tasks to line management, and secondly by providing HR professionals with the time needed to direct their attention towards more business critical and strategic level tasks, such as leadership development and talent management (Lawler et al., 2003). HRIS provides an opportunity for HR to play a more strategic role, through their ability to generate metrics which can be used to support strategic decision making. The existing literature on HRIS suggests that they have different impacts on HR across organisations but provides little explanation for
this variation (Hendrickson, 2003; Lawler et al., 2004; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2003). Computerized HRMS function enable, faster decision making, development, planning and administration of HR because data is much easier to store, update, classify, and analyze (Sadri and Chatterjee 2003). Moreover, while it may be possible to identify many of the relevant costs (e.g., software and hardware), it is more difficult to quantify the intangible benefits to be derived from an HRMS system. Beyond cost reductions and productivity improvements, HRMS potentially and fundamentally affect revenue channels. However, establishing direct and objective benefits measures is more difficult to achieve. Ngai and Wat (2004) in their article, ‘Human resource information systems: a review and empirical analysis’ Ngai et al., (2004) presented a comprehensive literature review of human resource information systems and reported the results of the survey on the implementation of HRMS in Hong Kong. They also aimed at examining the use and applications of HRMS. Moreover, the purpose was also to identify the perceived benefits of, barriers to, and implementation of HRMS.

Hussain et al., (2006) studied ‘the use and impact of human resource information systems on human resource management professionals’. The aim was to assess and compare the specific areas of use and to introduce a taxonomy that provides a framework for academicians. They also sought to determine whether HRMS usage was strategic, a perceived value-added for the organization and its impact on professional standing for HR professionals. The researchers used two techniques to investigate the IS impact on HRM. Both a questionnaire survey and in-depth semi-structured interviews were used. While the former was used to obtain responses from HR professionals in the UK organizations, the latter targeted a small number of senior executives, such as directors, in order to gain deeper insights into emerging issues. In the research ‘The use and impact of Human Resource Information Systems on Human Resource Management professionals’, it has been showed that few differences existed between Small/Medium (SME) and large company HRMS’ usage, and that specific use of HRIS for strategic collaboration enhanced professional standing (Hussain et al., 2006).

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the administrative potential of HRMS in HR department in J&K Bank.
2. To study the strategic goals of HRMS.
3. To study the perceptions related to strategic impact of HRMS in J&K Bank.
4. To assess the overall satisfaction level of managers viz a viz the HRMS system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey was developed and sent to the Human Resource personnel in the J & K Bank. Approximately 40 questionnaires were sent and 30 usable questionnaires were received. Likert-type items on a five point scale and open-ended questions were employed on the survey to measure the perceptions of the HR personnel in regard to the impact of the HRMS on HR processes, the time spent on various HR activities, the expense of HR activities, levels and use of information within the organization, the role of the HR department, and strategic decision making. While previous research has assessed satisfaction with and the amount of usage of HRMS systems (Haines and Petit, 1997) and the types of applications for which HRMS is used (Elliott and Tevavichulada, 1999; Ball, 2001), few if any empirical studies have addressed the issues of concern in the current study. The items on the survey were generated based upon suggestions developed from review of the previous literature in general, and Watson Wyatt (2002) and Feigenbaum (1983) in particular with regard to costs.

RESULTS

This research was exploratory and primarily descriptive in nature. Mean scores has been used to measure favourable responses to a series of questions assessing perceptions of Respondents towards HRMS. The results of the survey have been depicted in Tables 1 to Table 7. The items have been divided into various categories concerning satisfaction with the HRMS (Table 1); the impact of the HRMS on HR processes (Table 2); time savings due to the HRMS (Table 3); the effect of the HRMS on expenses (Table 4), information (Table 5), and decision-making (Table 6); and the strategic impact of the HRMS and the impact of the HRMS on the role of the HR function in the organization (Table7).

| Item                                                                 | Mean score |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Overall I am satisfied with the HRMS.                               | 3.85       |
| The employees of human resource (HR) department seemed to be satisfied with our HRMS. | 4.14       |
| Our HRIS has met our expectations.                                  | 3.42       |
| Our HRIS could be better utilized.                                  | 2.09       |

As can be seen in Table 1, the HR personnel seemed to be, in general, overwhelmingly pleased with the HRMS. On an average they were satisfied with the system (m=3.85), and believed that their HR employees were satisfied also (m=4.14). An often overlooked implementational issue is getting staff to accept a new system (Kovach, Hughes, Fagan, and Maggitti, 2002), so this obstacle appears to have been overcome in this instance. However, while they and their
employees were satisfied with the system, the majority of the employees believed that it could be better utilized (m=2.09) and few responded that it had met their expectations (m=3.42).

Targowski and Deshpande (2001) and others have suggested that part of the utility of an HRMS is its positive impact on traditional HR processes such as recruitment, selection and training and development. However, Table 2 indicates that, even though the HR employees were mostly satisfied with the system, they did not perceive that it had much impact on recruitment, training, or forecasting of staffing needs, with only a few respondents indicating a positive effect in these areas. There was, however, a somewhat more positive view of the effect on data input and data maintenance, with (m=3.85 and 3.90) of respondents, respectively, agreeing that these processes had seen improvement due to the HRMS.

| Item                                                      | Mean score |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Our HRMS has improved the recruitment process (RP).       | 3.66       |
| Our HRMS has improved the training process (TP).          | 3.76       |
| Our HRMS has improved the data input process (DIP).       | 3.85       |
| Our HRMS has improved the data maintenance process (MP).  | 3.90       |
| Our HRMS has helped with forecasting staffing needs (FSN).| 3.57       |
| Our HRMS has decreased paperwork (DP).                    | 3.42       |

One of the general purported benefits of HRMS applications is to reduce time spent on administrative processes (Kovach and Cathcart, 1999; Targowski and Deshpande, 2001) and yet the results show that the effects of the HRMS on time savings are mixed (see Table 3). Again, the traditional HR tasks of recruiting, training, and staffing were not positively affected, as there was little or no perceived decrease in the amount of time spent on these activities or on the time spent communicating information within the institution. At least half of the respondents, however, believed that their institution had realized some savings in the time spent on correcting errors. There was, however, a somewhat more positive view of the time spent on processing paperwork with (m=3.80).

| Item                                                      | Mean score |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on recruiting (TR). | 3.33       |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on training (TT).   | 3.23       |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on making staff decisions (TSD). | 3.33 |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on inputting data (TID). | 3.57 |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on communicating information within our institution (TCI). | 3.52 |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on processing paperwork (TPP). | 3.80 |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on correcting errors (TCE). | 3.42 |

One of the proposed advantages of human resource information systems is that processing costs should be reduced (Kovach and Cathcart, 1999). Regarding cost reductions for J&K Bank, as can be seen in Table 4, the perceived effects of the HRMS were negligible. Few, if any, of the HR employees perceived any decreases in training, recruiting, data input or hiring expenses or in the amount spent on HR salaries.

| Item                                                      | Mean score |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on recruiting (TR). | 3.33       |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on training (TT).   | 3.23       |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on making staff decisions (TSD). | 3.33 |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on inputting data (TID). | 3.57 |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on communicating information within our institution (TCI). | 3.52 |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on processing paperwork (TPP). | 3.80 |
| Our HRMS has decreased the time spent on correcting errors (TCE). | 3.42 |
Kovach, Hughes, Fagan, and Maggitti (2002) suggest that the HRMS will become the mechanism for sharing information across the functional area of an organization. But the information effects of HRMS were negligible. As Table 5 reveals, few HR personnel’s believe that the HRMS has improved their ability to disseminate information (m=3.57) and a mean score of 3.52 showed that it has also increased the amount of useful information, while some of them share information generated by the HRMS with top administrators (m=3.28). However, few of them believe that the information generated by the HRMS in not fully utilized by the top administrators (m=3.04) and think that the HRMS has enhanced coordination between the HR department and the administrators (m=3.33). Finally, some believe that the information generated by the HRMS results in value added to the organization (m=3.38).

Table 5
(Information effect)

| Item                                                                 | Mean score |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Our HRMS has decreased cost per hire (CH).                            | 3.19       |
| Our HRMS has decreased training expenses (TE).                        | 3.23       |
| Our HRMS has decreased recruiting expenses (RE).                      | 3.38       |
| Our HRMS has decreased data input expense (DIE).                      | 3.42       |
| Our HRMS has decreased the overall HR staff’s salary expense (SE).    | 3.33       |

The functions provided by HRMS that allow for the type and amount of the information provided to top management and the effectiveness of the HR department to make better decisions are important in research of the system (Lengnick-Hall and Moritz, 2003). A general purpose of an HRMS is to provide decision support applications that help HR and non-HR managers, as well as employees, make better decisions and the key is to make better decisions rather than simply produce data faster (Kovach and Cathcart, 1999). Based on the results contained in Table 6, however, the HRMS appears to have little effect on decision making. Fewer than half of the HR employees perceived that HR decision making had become more effective (m=3.28), and there has been positive impact of HRMS on decisions concerning promotion and timing of hiring with m=3.47 and 3.23 respectively. Few respondents perceived that the system did aid in making decisions concerns when training and skill development are necessary (m=3.52).

Table 6
(Decision making)

| Item                                                                 | Mean score |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Our HRMS has improved our ability to disseminate information (DI).   | 3.57       |
| Our HRMS has provided increased levels of useful information (II).   | 3.52       |
| The information generated from our HRMS is shared with top administrators (STA). | 3.28       |
| The information generated from our HRMS is underutilized by top administrators (UTA). | 3.04       |
| The information generated from our HRMS has increased coordination between HR department and top administrators (CHRTA). | 3.33       |
| The information generated from our HRMS has added value to the institution (AVI). | 3.38       |
HRMS has been envisioned as having a substantial impact on the importance of human resource departments, leading to a more strategic/managerial role and contributing to the organization’s competitiveness, as well as creating new paths for HR to add value to the organization (Lengnick-Hall and Moritz, 2003). However, HR personnel did not perceive that the HRMS had a positive impact on the role of the human resources department in the organization, with mean scores of 3.33 and 3.33 respectively, agreeing that the HR department had become more important and had become more of a strategic partner in the institution. As early as the mid 1990’s the focus of HRMS had begun to shift because of its usefulness in strategic decision making (Kovach, Hughes, Fagan, and Maggitti, 2002). Regarding the strategic impact, few responded that the administrators thought the HRMS helped them to meet strategic goals (m=3.52) and some of them believed that it had improved the strategic decision making of top administrators (m=3.38). Finally, a mean score of 3.38 showed that it had aided in the promotion of the institution’s competitive advantage.

Table 7
(Strategic impact and HR’s Role)

| Item                                                                 | Mean score |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Our HRMS has made the HR department more important to the institution (II). | 3.33       |
| Overall our administration thinks that HRMS is effective in meeting strategic goals (ESG). | 3.52       |
| The information generated from our HRMS has improved the strategic decision making of top administrators (ISDM). | 3.38       |
| The information generated from our HRMS has made HR a more strategic partner in the institution (MSP). | 3.33       |
| Our HRMS has promoted our institution’s competitive advantage (PCA). | 3.38       |

CONCLUSION

Based on a sample of HR personnel, the results concerning the role of HRMS in a J&K Bank are encouraging, but mixed. One of the general purported benefits of HRMS applications is to reduce time spent on administrative processes (Kovach and Cathcart, 1999; Targowski and Deshpande, 2001) and yet the results show that the effects of the HRMS on time savings are mixed. Again, the traditional HR tasks of recruiting, training, and staffing were not positively affected, as there was little or no perceived decrease in the amount of time spent on these activities or on the time spent communicating information within the institution. Regarding cost reductions for J&K Bank, the perceived effects of the HRMS were negligible. However, while the managers and the employees of J&K were satisfied with the system, the majority of the respondents believe that it can be better utilized and only so some of them responded that it has met their expectations. The processes have seen improvement due to the HRMS. But the information effects of HRMS have been negligible the HRMS appears to have had little effect on decision making. Fewer than half of the HR respondents perceived that HR decision making has become more effective, and perceived that the system does aid in making decisions concerns when
training and skill development are necessary. As the main focus of the study is to see whether role of HRMS has been changed from administrative to strategic or not in J&K Bank, it has been clearly indicated from the results that the role of HRMS has not changed and it has not been shifted more towards strategic parameters. So there is a need for Strategic implementation of Human Resources Management System so that it provides support for actively accomplishment of organisational goals and helps to measure how well the activities contribute in achieving organization’s strategic goals. To improve firm performance and create firm competitive advantage, firm HR must focus on a new set of priorities. These new priorities are more business, and strategic oriented and less geared towards traditional HR functions such as staffing, training, appraisal and compensation. Strategic priorities include team-based job designs, flexible workforces, quality improvement practices, employee empowerment and incentive compensation. Moreover, the personnel believed that additional and better training would lead to better results. Several of the responses also reinforced the notion that the system was being underutilized and that they were not taking full advantage of the capabilities. They believed that other applications were needed and that the system could be more effectively utilized with the addition of some other features that were not currently part of the system. So, the potential contributions of HRMS are recognized, but further advances in terms of its strategic implications are needed before the potential can be realized.

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