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Power and Influence in the Management of Human Resource Development

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CASE A. WORKING AGAINST THE ODDS: MANAGING HRD IN A LICENSED BETTING COMPANY

Abstract

This case presents a snapshot of a real organization from the perspective of the HRD department, as told by the HRD manager and a training officer. It explores current issues facing HRD in the organization, demonstrating their complexity, and asks students to identify root causes of the problems and develop strategies to address them.

The organization in this case is a large, relatively new call center in the licensed betting industry. The case examines the transition from a traditional training environment to a more innovative and learning-centered approach. The transition has not been without its problems and is still not fully realized. The current HRD manager provides insight into the difficulties she has faced and how power and influence issues affect the HRD function. Interestingly, relationships within HR are a key source of tension, but the positioning and reputation of the function and relationships with senior managers also play a role.

The call center industry is one of the most rapidly growing areas of work globally, replacing traditional manufacturing as the major employer in many towns and cities. A 2006 IBM report—*Contact Centers in Europe–The Rise of the Machines*—estimated that 400,000 people (or 1.5 percent of the workforce) are employed in 5,000 contact centers across the U.K. Call centers have been described as the factories of the 21st century and present a continuous challenge for HRD. Employers face ongoing competition for workers, resulting in high employee turnover. The work is often low-skilled and low–paid, and employee loyalty is difficult to achieve.

This industry has attracted media interest recently because of liberalization of advertising standards, allowing the industry to advertise on television and obtain celebrity endorsements for online gambling. There are also proposals for the introduction of super casinos. It is a topical setting for the case.

The organization is a bookmaker, traditionally running licensed betting shops across the U.K. It recently moved into the telephone betting and online gambling business. The company is FTSE 100 (this index comprises the 100 most highly capitalized blue chip companies, representing approximately 81 percent of the U.K. market) and employs approximately 16,000 people across the U.K. There are two contact centers in large cities employing approximately 500 customer interface staff (employees who deal directly with customers, either on the phone or electronically). The locations have a high density of contact center work and there is a great deal of competition for staff. The work is low-paid and staff turnover is 80 percent annually. Recruitment and training is a constant.

The customer interface staff members require customer service skills and strong mathematical skills. A large proportion of the customers are phoning to place bets on horse races. The nature of work is somewhat different to the majority of contact centers because there are high peaks of activity before the start of each race, but then periods of inactivity. Employees are also required to work weekends and holidays, which is often unattractive to applicants. The senior management team has largely been homegrown in the business, progressing through the ranks but lacking external experience. This is mirrored in the HR team.

A year ago, the training department was dismantled with the intent to move training to customer-facing teams. Rather than a central team providing training support across the organization, each division would have a dedicated training team. This would create a business partner relationship, where the operational managers work closely with the training team who can better respond to their needs. Partnering makes HR accountable to the business and expects HR to add real value. This is a shift away from traditional HR functions where purpose, priorities and successes were defined in HR.

The contact center now has an HR and an HRD manager. An external HRD manager was brought in to help redefine relationships with operational business partners and to change training delivery.

Before the reorganization, training was a traditional, classroom-based delivery. High employee turnover meant there was a continuous demand for new employee training. Trainers were often people who had worked on the phones and then been moved into the training role, without any formal training or development themselves. They copied the existing training style; this was largely instructive and lacking dynamism. The new HRD manager reviewed the new employee training and redesigned it as a more participative model. This reduced the duration of formal delivery and introduced a coaching approach. A designated trainer at each location would coach the coaches from the department to support the new employees. This developed coaching skills in the department and ensured that the line managers would take ownership of staff development, rather than seeing it as the trainer's job.

The trainers responded well to the change. In the past, they had no clear leadership and insufficient role clarity. They had, therefore, reacted to training requests without a clear idea of where they were making a difference or control over the type of training they offered. In the new structure, they are more closely managed and have a clearer understanding of what is required of them.

The contact center managers also responded well to the change. They worked closely with the training team to improve their employees' skills. This new consultancy approach allowed them to discuss their requirements and understand where HRD could contribute to their department's success. One example of this is the coaching program: The managers agreed to loan people to the training team; the training team provided development in coaching skills to these people, who then returned to work able to undertake the role of coach. This partnership approach increased the skills of the operational teams and reduced the resource requirements of the training team. It also ensured a shared responsibility for staff development between the operational team and the HRD.

Despite the support from the contact center managers, this approach has not been mirrored at a senior level or in the HR team. The HRD manager faces regular battles to implement new ways of working. When the coaching program was implemented and trainers were freed with the intent to use those resources to offer a broader range of training services, HR reduced HRD's budget and allocated it to other HR areas. The HRD manager called the barriers she faced "friendly fire". She described a very cautious environment, where people were reluctant to support new ideas for fear of failure.

An additional frustration for the HRD manager is the lack of training facilities and the negative working environment. HRD staff members were expected to work quietly at a desk in an open-plan HR office. This created tensions with the rest of the HR team because the working requirements were different. The HR team needed a quiet and confidential area to work; the HRD team needs space to be creative and discuss or practice ideas in a more animated way. In addition, there are no training support materials for courses because no budget was allocated to this it. "We have a budget for sending people flowers if they are feeling poorly, but we do not have a budget to actually produce training materials!" laments the HRD manager.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The HRD manager reports to the HR manager. How does this reporting structure affect the HRD manager's power and influence? How does it affect the power and influence of HRD in the organization as a whole?

2. How does the change in the line managers' responsibilities for training affect the HRD team's power and influence?

3. The HRD manager describes the problems she has encountered with the HR team as "friendly fire". What does she mean by this? In her position, how would you overcome these barriers?

4. "Position power can be enhanced when managers are able to demonstrate to others that their work units are highly relevant to organizational goals and are able to respond to urgent organizational needs." (Schermerhorn et al., 2005.) How is the HRD manager trying to enhance her position power? What other ways can this be done?

EXTENSION TASK

Lufthans, Pfeffer, and Schermerhorn (see recommended pre-reading) identify different types of power. What types of power can you identify in the case? How can the HRD team use these to their advantage? Consider expert power, referent power and reward power.

CASE B. VOLUNTARY HRD: RAISING THE PROFILE OF HRD IN A VOLUNTARY SECTOR ORGANIZATION

Abstract

This case is based in a small charity in northern England as presented in interviews with the personnel officer and the new senior director. The organization has a distinctive culture with a strong counseling ethos. The case describes the attempts by the personnel officer to address HR's low status and lack of influence in the organization, and explores the barriers facing HRD and the external drivers stimulating change. Students are asked to consider how the power and influence of the HR function could be enhanced.

This case focuses on a small mental health charity affiliated with a national charity. It is managed independently but is bound by the principles of the national charity. The organization is based in a large U.K. city and serves the surrounding community, providing support for vulnerable adults with mental health issues. Assistance is offered in a number of areas, including housing, finance and education. The charity is well-known in the U.K. and is publicized in hospitals and clinics. There are approximately 60 paid employees and a similar number of volunteers. Care from the charity is based on self-referral.

A feature of the U.K. voluntary sector is the complexity of stakeholders for each organization. This is demonstrated in this case. Their stakeholders include clients, staff, the executive committee, local health care professionals, funders (both private and government bodies) and other partnership organizations (other charities and health care providers).

There has been no official HR presence in the charity. Twelve years ago, a new member of the administration team took an interest in personnel issues; she took a course at a local college, and her job gradually developed into that of a personnel officer. The job is heavily influenced by the role-holder and is very process and procedurally driven. As a result, HR is reactive, with a lot of fire-fighting. For example, there are competency issues with employees that go unaddressed by the management team and therefore escalate. HR does not get involved until employees call in sick (when they are not) or file a complaint. The issues are not addressed early enough because managers do not follow (or are not aware of) appropriate HR procedures.

HRD has been handled in a similar reactive manner. In principle, a new employee's manager should identify training requirements; but in practice, this varies from project to project. Beyond new employee training, employees have applied for training in whatever took their fancy. Consequently, a small number of employees who have shown an interest have participated in a lot of training, whether relevant or not—and other employees have not done any. The only training evaluation has been comment sheets completed at the end of the event.

There is little standardization across projects, so managers who engage well with the personnel officer see the value of training and supported the introduction of an appraisal process. Other managers have not responded well. Appraisals for their team have not been completed, but there are no sanctions for lack of compliance. The personnel officer has tried to raise the profile and importance of these issues, but without support at a senior level, it has been a struggle. "I am ineffective without senior management support. I mean, I can send emails, training flyers, whatever, until I am blue in the face … I am ignored most of the time."

Closely linked to the issue of support is the cultural fit of HRD. As is often the case in small businesses, the culture is dominated by the chief executive. In this organization, his orientation is clearly shown in the business development plan; the focus is on client service delivery, and out of nearly 40 action points in the plan only two are associated with staff. There is also a strong counseling culture in line with the services provided. This manifests itself in a strong people orientation, with emphasis on treating everyone as individuals. As a result, there is reluctance to adopt generic HR policies and procedures. This has hampered any strategic approach to HRD.

There have been three recent drivers for change that have opened the receptiveness of the need to develop an HRD strategy:

- A staff satisfaction survey showed that people thought they were not getting enough of the right sort of training.

- A new senior director was hired who previously worked in a larger social care charity with a strong training ethos.

- The government introduced a competitive tendering process for allocating funds to charity organizations. To obtain government funding, the charity must now provide evidence of staff skills, qualifications and experience as part of the selection criteria.

The personnel officer, with the support from the new senior director, is now trying to move the HRD agenda forward by:

- Identifying training needs based on performance appraisals.

- Developing a core training program for all staff with a focus on individual development.

- Requiring justification for the need and relevance of training requests.

- Introducing a training evaluation process to assess its value and how it is transferred back to the workplace.

Acknowledging the challenges she faces, the personnel officer's aim is to progress her agenda one step at a time. When performance appraisals and the identification of training needs are accepted practice, she believes this will pave the way for line managers to take a greater responsibility for HRD.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The organization uses the term "personnel officer". What does this say about HR's status in the organization? Is formal status a requirement for power and influence?

2. What significance does the new senior director have for HRD? How could the personnel officer use this new hire to enhance her power and influence?

3. Consider the following quote from the new senior director:

   The culture is very person-centered—everyone is an individual … I think that does make it very messy—and it is about the compromise between recognizing that yes, we are going to treat all our managers individually, but have some core standards that we expect them to reach.

   a. Summarize the challenges and opportunities this culture presents for HRD.

   b. How appropriate are the steps for promoting the HRD agenda (outlined in the case) in this culture?

   c. Suggest strategies to establish power and influence for HRD.

EXTENSION TASKS

Consider the power bases that are most evident in volunteer organizations. How does this differ from private sector institutions and how do those differences affect the character and influence of HRD in these types of organizations? Are the tactics HRD professionals use different? If so, why?

Despite the potential barriers and constraints for HRD in the voluntary sector, there is considerable evidence of good practice. From the suggested reading or by searching the Internet, identify three examples.

CASE C. ACCOUNTANTS AT THE WHEEL: RAISING THE PROFILE OF HRD IN AN AUTOMOBILE DEALERSHIP

Abstract

This case explores a large, family-controlled automobile dealership in northern England. The case is based on interviews with two senior members of the organization: the finance director and the HR manager. The HR function is relatively new to the organization and its development has been somewhat uneven. The case focuses on the issues facing the HR manager and discusses how she is trying to establish a stronger presence for HRD in the organization and position HRD so it can play a valuable role in managing what has become a complex business. Difficulties and tensions are evident. Thus, the case provides interesting examples of issues surrounding the power and influence of HR and HRD in a family-controlled business. It is made all the more complex because the HR manager is the only woman in a male-dominated management team.

This company is a large automobile dealership that sells and provides service support for the main models of cars on the road. Established in the 1960s by the chairman, it has enjoyed considerable, though sporadic, growth over the years in terms of its size and presence in the marketplace. It remains family controlled; the chief executive is the founder's eldest son. Profit is now £60m (U.S. $104m) and the company employs more than 1,100 employees in 40 dealerships and its headquarters. Its growth has been achieved by a combination of:

- Selective acquisition.

- New business development (like car rentals and leasing).

- Competitive bidding for new manufacturer-sponsored dealerships (e.g., Mercedes, VW).

Growth has been driven by the dominant family owner, the chairman, rather than by a demand to meet a wider shareholder or stock market expectation. Strategic business decisions are still in the hands of the chairman as opposed to a wider constituency.

While this growth has brought financial prosperity to the family, it is an increasingly complex business to manage. Complexity has been added because of:

- Increasing management layers. The business now has a tier of brand directors who look after four or five dealerships (those principally selling BMW cars) in addition to the various managers at each dealership (general manager, sales manager, etc.) and in the contract hire division.

- A geographic distribution that has spread considerably beyond its initial base. Dealerships are located throughout northern England.

- The need for fit-for-purpose systems across a diverse set of functions and the need to respond, for example, to much stricter financial controls introduced by government (e.g., with respect to cars bought using loans).

- Rising manufacturer standards that translate into tougher demands on car dealerships. The finance director notes:

    The game has been moving on all the time … what was acceptable in the 70s for a typical dealership has changed … the bar has been raised progressively in lots of ways, like standards. All the Porsche dealerships in the world are exactly the same … and it extends to manufacturers wanting to approve certain key positions, like your general manager and the sales manager … We have to send our chosen candidate down for vetting.

This change makes the finance director's role in HR important. Recruited in 1988, he was the first senior appointment made outside of the family. He quickly recognized the need for HR systems and processes to ensure that recruitment, selection and required training, for example, were not undertaken haphazardly and inconsistently. In effect, some HR became part of his job as finance director. It was not until 10 years later that the first HR manager was hired. At that point in time, with more than 20 dealerships and a much larger workforce, it was decided that the time was right for change. Any earlier, it was thought, the chairman would have simply said that it wasn't needed. The finance director made the case for the HR position based on the need for compliance. An HR manager would help the company comply with employment laws and the growth in manufacturer expectations and standards.

The new HR manager was short-lived. The incumbent struggled to be effective in what is a tough business. He was considered too soft, and reports of him being "eaten alive" by general managers provided graphic testimony of this. His replacement, described as more of a "battleaxe," did succeed in introducing some important innovations (e.g., an appraisal system); her demise after two years was attributed to poor handling of important technical issues regarding employee transfers from one of the newly acquired businesses.

The incumbent is the third HR manager and has been with the company for a little more than three years. During the job search, the finance director argued that it was important to have HR leading initiatives and sitting with top management rather than operating under instructions. Karen, with a track record of more than 15 years of HR experience in retail and hospitality, was hired. Although not a director, Karen attends meetings of the operations board. She reports to the chief executive and has created a small department of two HR advisors and herself. Despite all this, Karen questions the rhetoric surrounding her appointment. In her view, her appointment was "a necessary evil … They didn't have a clue about HR or about how it might help expand the business … They just wanted an HR woman … to do the disciplinaries."

From the outset, HRD was a particular concern for Karen. She sought and got approval to hire a training officer. Her concern was that salespeople were considered "number one" and received all the support from manufacturers and the company. Karen's concern was everybody else. For example, there were managers who had been recruited from the sale force; they were good salespeople but not necessarily good managers. Karen said it was frustrating to see them fail after a year because of a lack of basic supervisory skills.

The training officer, however, did not work out, lasting only eight months. In retrospect, Karen feels the initiative was a case of "trying to run before we could crawl," and that the organizational culture at the time was a recipe for disaster:

> She lasted about eight months … it was just a battle, it was awful. She was so different … you've got to remember a training manager is a lively extrovert, with Post-It notes everywhere and piles of paper all around. She came here and it was like working in a bank. If you're not an introvert, if you're not an accountant, you don't fit.

The problem of fitting in is one in a set of problems Karen describes, including:

- Resistance from the top for Karen's idea to get managers to do more of their own HR work. Karen notes that on more than one occasion the chief executive has said that their managers "can't cope with this sort of thing".

- Reluctance to recruit outside of the automobile industry and bring in talent with retail experience from other sectors, despite a staff turnover rate of more 30 percent.

- A culture dominated by the family.

- A predominantly male workforce. Karen notes that she and her team have been called the "cackling witches" and the "welfare department". She notes, "We are women and you know all the directors are men—it is just so difficult."

Although the training officer position did not work out, Karen has had successes. Paradoxically, it is with managers that she feels she is making slow progress. Her belief that HR and HRD should be a critical part of any manager's role has not wavered despite opposition and resistance. She describes it as a "hard struggle" and "hard to sell", but changes are evident. She has introduced a combination of short, half-day workshops for managers followed by support at the dealership. Through this, Karen feels there is now acknowledgement that improvements to the business can be made through good recruitment, effective performance management, coaching and mentoring.

Tensions remain. Working with managers at their locations is resource-demanding, and the three-person HR team is spread too thinly. For some, HR is still seen as a headquarters help desk. Two HR advisors spend much of their time on the telephone operating a call center service rather than out in the field. This said, the hiring of a third HR advisor has been approved (see job description below). There is still talk of adding a training or learning and development manager position, and there is also mention of a graduate recruitment initiative to grow their own managers. Karen remains somewhat skeptical, though, as to whether the required resources will have political support of the board. The future of HR and HRD in one form or another is assured, but Karen is about to lose her one ally on the board: The finance director is due to retire. She is not enamoured by the prospect of working with directors who fundamentally see things differently.

Job Title	Job Description
HR ADVISOR	We are looking to recruit an HR advisor to support and assist managers across the group in all aspects of people management.

You will provide generalist advice to managers on recruitment, the disciplinary process, handling grievances, performance management, TUPE[1] and the redundancy process. This will be done over the telephone from headquarters for the first 6-12 months, after which you will be field-based with responsibility for a cluster of dealerships. You will take on coaching, mentoring and training duties in addition to the above.

You will be proactive as you confidently and effectively provide practical advice in line with best practices, company procedures and law. You will follow up with the advice that you provide to ensure that your advice has been correctly initiated and have the confidence to challenge managers where appropriate in a professional manner.

It is essential that you have a minimum of three years generalist HR experience and strong working knowledge of Microsoft Office applications. You will be highly organized with effective communication skills and the confidence to deal professionally with all levels of employees, managers and directors across the company. |

[1] TUPE is a U.K. law governing the transfer of an undertaking, or part of one, to another. The regulations are designed to protect the rights of employees in a transfer situation, enabling them to enjoy the same terms and conditions, with continuity of employment, as before the transfer.

1. Karen, the HR manager, describes her three years with the company as "difficult". She uses words like *struggle*, *battle* and *ally*. Summarize the factors that have created this perception in terms of her power and influence in the organization.

2. How can Karen develop a more strategic presence for HR and HRD, particularly now that her ally on the board is about to retire?

3. Karen has had some success with the managers. What sort of style and approach should Karen use with the managers? Reflect on the differences between positional power and influence and personal power and influence.

4. Karen is the only woman in a male dominated senior management team. How does this affect her power and influence?

5. Review the job advertisement for a new HR advisor. Is it appropriate to orient the new employee into the characteristics of power and influence in relation to the HR function in the business? How could this be achieved? Is it appropriate to have the new employee spend most of their first six months working in the HR call center?

EXTENSION TASKS

1. Family-controlled businesses are often smaller in size than the company discussed in this case. Often, they have no dedicated HR function, much like this company before 1998. Consider the implications of managing HRD in a small business. What are the difficulties? What are the advantages?

2. In the U.K., women hold the majority of junior- and middle-management positions in HR and HRD. Paradoxically, though, HR directors are invariably male. Is a similar situation evident in the sector in which you work? What about women in management in general?

CASE D. BREAKING THE LOW-SKILL CYCLE: A ROLE FOR HRD?

Abstract

This scenario describes a study by Hull University on behalf of Hull City Council to investigate the training requirements of lunch supervisors in the city's primary schools. It identifies a number of training needs but also considerable barriers to addressing them. The case is based on an interview with the study's project manager. It examines a group of unskilled workers who have limited access to HRD. Students are encouraged to consider issues related to low-skilled workers and the effect the lack of training has on their power and influence in the workplace.

The Hull City Council, as part of a project to introduce healthy school meals, saw that there was a lack of training for lunch supervisors. Existing training was patchy, inconsistent and had no long-term effect on work performance.

As you would expect in a school environment, there was a strong emphasis on learning and staff development. Teachers must complete a four-year degree program to qualify and subsequently receive a minimum of five training days a year, in addition to any role-specific training, as part of their continuing professional development. Teaching assistants also require a formal qualification and are included in a number of school training days. However, for up to 1.5 hours of the 6-hour day children spend at school, they are in the care of lunch supervisors. There are no requirements for training or qualifications for this role. Training is often ad hoc and people learn by communities of practice, often perpetuating inappropriate behavior like blowing whistles and shouting at children.

As a result, the Hull City Council commissioned the University of Hull to research the training needs of lunch supervisors in 71 primary schools in the city. All 71 schools were sent a survey to hand out to their lunch supervisors, asking questions about their job, their likes and dislikes, what they found challenging and the support they received. Six schools were selected to take part in a more in-depth study; these schools were chosen to reflect a variety in size, location and economic prosperity. The project was managed by a university representative, who interviewed the head teachers and lunch supervisors over a period of several months. She spent a week working as a lunch supervisor, and spoke to people in groups and one-on-one to understand the job requirements.

The needs identified were:

- Head teachers wanted lunch supervisors trained to play with children and to encourage playground activities.

- The lunch supervisors saw behavior management and conflict resolution as key skill requirements for the job.

- The project manager highlighted developing confidence, understanding the role and understanding children's needs as additional requirements.

The study also highlighted a number of potential barriers to training:

- It was difficult to recruit people with the right skills because the work was low-paid and confined to the lunch period.

- The job was undervalued by head teachers, teachers, children and even the lunch supervisors themselves.

- Jobholders often left school without graduating or had been out of the workplace for a long time and were sometimes apprehensive about training.

- A large number of these employees had poor numeracy and literacy skills, often making some forms of training inaccessible.

- Some employees had been in the role for 20-30 years and thought that their experience was sufficient and that training was unnecessary.

- Many of these employees had other part-time jobs, and availability for training was limited.

Although the project identified some clear training needs, the project manager highlighted broader issues that needed to be addressed and which she felt would potentially have an important effect on the efficacy of any training developed. These were the lack of integration with the wider school team; the job's profile; and the need to change perceptions.

A program to address the training needs of lunch supervisors would be expensive and require a lot of investment by the government or the local council. Schools are managed as businesses and have to control tight budgets. Other priorities, such as school resources and teaching staff, are likely to attract investment at the expense of the lunch supervisors. This may be justifiable in terms of the outcomes for children, although the implications of disruption to afternoon teaching when issues are not resolved appropriately at lunch were noted in the study. What about the lunch supervisors themselves? The job is almost exclusively held by women who are trapped in a low-skill cycle. Due to poor education, they can obtain only low-skilled work. In these low-skilled roles, they do not receive training or development to enhance their skills and have little potential to move out of these low-skilled, low-paid jobs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the possible outcomes of a carefully designed training program to meet the needs of the lunch supervisors in terms of the distribution of power and influence in the school? Are there any hidden dangers (unanticipated consequences)?

2. There is some ambiguity as to where and with whom responsibility lies for the training and development of these employees.

   a. How important is this in terms of access to HRD opportunities?

   b. Identify the political factors in this case that need to be effectively managed to improve the situation.

3. Where should responsibility for HRD lie with regard to these employees?

4. The case examines an initiative to address the training needs of a particular employee group. A stimulus for the initiative is the growing interest in the dietary health of our children. In the absence of such an external stimulus, how could this group and similar groups of low-skilled workers ensure a stronger voice in their organization and sustain it beyond the short term?

EXTENSION TASKS

Identify other employee groups trapped in low-skill cycles. Consider different economic sectors. Is it more likely to be a problem in some sectors than others?

1. The discussion raised in the case introduces wider social and political issues:

   a. A key factor in low-wage employment is the educational attainment level of the employee.

   b. Women are overrepresented in this type of low-paid role.

      i. Should an organization be responsible for offering HRD opportunities to all its employees?

      ii. Should HRD professionals engage in this debate, or should they focus on the effect of HRD on business goals?

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