Problems Encountered in Managing the Human Resources in University Libraries in Sri Lanka

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This paper is based on a research carried out on the Human Resource Management (HRM) in University Libraries in Sri Lanka (ULSL). It explores the problems encountered by the Librarians in managing their human resources in ULSL. The objectives of the study are to identify the major problems of HRM, to gain a best picture about these problems, to rank these problems on the order of higher influence to lower influence for libraries, to study what are the additional HRM problems as revealed by the Librarians and to explore the possible alternative solutions for these problems.

The method used for this study was the descriptive research. Survey technique was used in order to collect data. The population of the study was the Librarians in ULSL. Primary data was collected circulating a structured questionnaire among the Librarians and they were asked to rank the ten major HRM problems defined by the researcher. Ranking was done on the five point-Likert scale. The individual HRM problems and their mean scores are given here with ranking. They are Improper HRM policy (3.9); Lack of training and development programmes (3.7); *Lack of professional manpower* (3.6); *Lack of ICT literate personnel* (2.8); *Lack of library resources and facilities (e.g. infrastructure)* (2.8); *Lack of financial support* (2.8); *Lack of support given by the UGC* (2.5); *Inadequacy of ICT facilities* (2.5); *Lack of support given by university administration* (2.3); *Influence of rules and regulations* (2.3). The other HRM problems indicated by the university Librarians are *policy of the Government; lack of personal interest of library professionals; lack of professional mutual cooperation* and *unnecessary competition; lack of opportunities to motivate and reward dedicated officers* and *lack of opportunities to share experiences with other colleagues (especially in overseas libraries).* To resolve these HRM problems, a suggestion is made to introduce sound *HRM policy* for the ULSL. Other suggestions are the introduction of *staff training and development policy* along with different types of **best fit** (qualitative) and **higher number** (quantitative)

of *training and development programmes, proper motivational procedures and programmes,* and the *development of competencies* among library professionals. Within this context, the concerned stakeholders will have to design and implement the library policies and programmes in the future.

Keywords: Human Resource Management; University Libraries; Competencies; Staff Training and Development; Motivation

Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) is one of the foremost areas of management, relevant to organizational development and success. HRM is involved with managing people who are working in the organization for the provision of qualitative goods or services for the customers. The working people or employees of libraries are the librarians and other allied staff. Libraries are service based organizations like hospitals, schools, universities, day care centers, and military camps. Hence, the provision of a qualitative service for library customers or users or readers is the principal goal of the library. For this purpose, libraries require a well trained, qualified, experienced and dedicated staff. How to deploy such type of qualitative staff is a core matter related to HRM in the organizations or libraries. University libraries are comprised of higher number of employees when compared with the other libraries like school, public, special. Therefore, HRM is an area which is very much required concerning the university libraries. This study is based on a research conducted on the human resource planning in University Libraries in Sri Lanka (ULSL). In this study, the researcher explores the problems, faced by the university librarians in HRM in ULSL. These HRM problems are identified by the researcher as the key issues in the HRM in university libraries. The following objectives were formulated in order to study the key HRM issues.

Objectives of the study

To identify the major problems of HRM

To gain a best picture about these problems

To rank these problems on the order of higher influence to lower influence for libraries

To study what are the additional HRM problems indicated by the Librarians

To explore the possible alternative solutions for these problems.

Human Resource Management

Bratton and Gold (1999) define HRM as "part of the management process which specifies in the management of people in work organization. HRM emphasizes that employees are critical to achieving sustainable competitive advantage, that human resource practices need to be integrated with corporate strategy, and that human resources specialists help organizational controllers to meet efficiency, equity and objectives." This definition illustrates that it is a process of people in work organizations and the major point here is the achievement of organizational objectives through corporate strategy. The researcher specifying different definitions given by reputed authors like Storey (1989); Legge (1989); and Cole (1997), could define HRM as "employing, developing and managing right personnel, at the right work, right time, at the most right manner, in order to achieve the objectives of both the organization and its human resources, considering the human resource as the most valuable asset and to deploy them in a more collaborative, teamwork, human and customer friendly, self-committed and cultured environment, (it implies the national culture or a suitable culture which is to be developed in the organization) through utilizing appropriate policies and strategies." Fundamental philosophy of this definition is that both the objectives of the organization as well as the human resource are to be fulfilled. Further, it states that utilization of policies and strategies is a prime requirement through adopting and developing a suitable culture or grasping the existing national culture. A thorough literature survey was conducted in order to have a clear picture about the different HRM problems faced by the various libraries in the globe. It is stated below.

Literature Review

Literature survey was conducted using LISA (Library and Information Science Abstract), printed and e-journals, theses and the e-articles and reports. Researcher could collect literature pertaining to different aspects of staff management problems in countries like India, United States, United Kingdom and Africa. In a study, Kapoor (1997) identified that lack of influence, power and authority of librarians in India have badly affected their decision making ability and it creates obstacles for providing better library service in India. Khanna (1981) has identified the fact that library becomes a more effective place using participative management according to a survey carried out by him in 25 university libraries in India. Pugliese's (1985) survey reveals the fact

that only a very few library administrators have been trained or prepared for management, especially in HRM and he argues the need of accreditation of HRM education in United States. Nawe (1992) indicates that in the human resource field, one of the major problems is said to be the lack of consensus among those involved in the training process and programs, like employers, trainers or employees in terms of HRM. Employers have the desire for training their staff, but do not possess any vision to identify the cognitive behavior and skills required for the library staff. Trainers have advanced knowledge but are unable to identify the level of cognitive behavior and skills needed for staff. The employees are eagerly waiting to acquire training skills, but they lack such chances and therefore, as a solutions Nawe suggests a consensus regarding the cognitive behavior and skills contents should be matched against the actual organizations requirements and demands of the library when acquisition of staff, staff utilization, training and retention. Edem (1999) identified and rated that major obstacles for career advancement for university librarians in Nigeria through a survey and concluded that a combination of professional duties with academic work of publishing as a major obstacle for career advancement. The second obstacle is the lack of opportunities to reach the rank of university librarian, third obstacle is the lack of higher educational qualifications in librarianship, and fourth problem is the lack of a generally accepted laid down policy on promotion criteria. Higher educational opportunities, retirement benefits, creation of uniformity in designations were identified as solutions. Ranawella's (1999) study on staff development and training facilities available in university libraries in Sri Lanka reveals several drawbacks like lack of supportive staff, absence of a clearly defined staff development policy, non-existence of a properly designed staff appraisal system, lack of opportunities for the staff to improve themselves. She suggests that library professionals should achieve further qualifications, increase participation at conferences, workshops, meetings, increase the number of professional development programs. Ifidon (2000) studied on personnel management in a university library in a rural setting in Nigeria and found very significant causative elements like the lack of skills, knowledge and experience on HRM by senior library professionals including Heads of Departments of the library and he identified the differences between a library environment in a rural setting with an urban and highly industrialized library setting in the country. The employee's behavior, attitude towards work, motivation, capacity to work, attendance are some

of the negative forces of the rural university library which require appropriate HRM strategies. He further discusses and concludes that environmental factors of the library bring such negative forces. Matook (2003) after surveying 215 libraries attached to seven university libraries in Saudi Arabia found few major constraints like poor management, lack of training opportunities, and lack of IT literate human resources in librarianship, lack of motivation pertaining to library professionals that make it difficult for their libraries to enhance and develop their IT skills. Fenner and Fenner (2005) discuss the issues and trends affecting HRM in libraries in the United States and identified four issues which are given below.

i. Issues that affect human resources within the different, individual sub-functions of human resources,
ii. Issues that affect human resources across the entire Human Resources Department,
iii. Issues that affect human resources throughout the entire organization, caused by internal factors such as executive decisions and organizational plans,
iv. Issues that affect human resources throughout the entire organization, caused by external or environmental factors such as changing demographics and technology.

Roknuzzaman (2007) in a recent survey done on directly on HRM in five public university libraries in Bangladesh concluded that staff selection is done against the vacant positions, leave provisions, transfers and promotions.

Research methodology

The research method used for this study was the descriptive research. Survey technique was used in order to collect data. The population of the study was the librarians in ULSL. No sample was required since it was finite. Primary data was collected circulating a structured questionnaire among the university librarians and they were asked to rank the ten major HRM problems defined by the researcher. Open ended question was asked in order to gather, further HRM problems encountered by the librarians. Analysis of data was done using SPSS.

Survey, findings and discussions

Altogether there are 16 universities in Sri Lanka. Two universities i.e. the 'Uva-Wellassa' and the 'Visual and Performing Arts' were exempted as these universities were instituted recently and did not have the professional library staff when the survey was carried out. Therefore questionnaires were circulated among 14 university libraries. They are Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka, University of Colombo, University of Eastern Sri Lanka, University of Jaffna, University of Kelaniya, University of Moratuwa, Open University of Sri Lanka, University of Peradeniya, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, University of Ruhuna, University of Sabaragamuwa, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, Wayamba University of Sri Lanka. Out of 14, only 10 (71%) university librarians responded.

Demographic data

Gender of respondents
Chart 1.

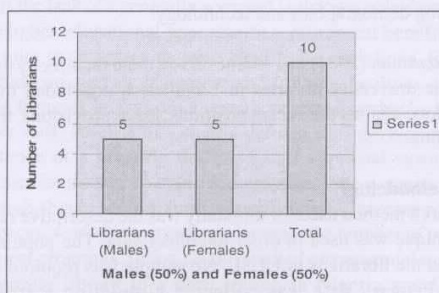**Gender and total responses for Librarians questionnaire**

Chart 1 shows that five (50%) librarians are males and five (50%) librarians are females, hence the gender is equivalent in ten university libraries.

Universities and gender of respondents

Table 1.

Universities and gender of respondents-Librarians

Universities	Male	Female	Total
Buddhist and Pali	1	-	1
Colombo	-	1	1
Moratuwa	-	1	1
Open University	-	1	1
Peradeniya	1	-	1
Rajarata	-	1	1
Ruhuna	1	-	1
Sabaragamuwa	-	1	1
South Eastern	1	-	1
Wayamba	1	-	1
Total	5	5	10

The above Table 1 indicates that librarians' gender balance (is 50% female, and 50% male ratio) and gender distribution (is 50% among ULSL) are both equal.

Universities and age group of respondents

Table 2.

Universities and age group of respondents- Librarians

Universities	Age group 41-45	Age group Above 51	Total
Buddhist and Pali	-	1	1
Colombo	-	1	1
Moratuwa	1	-	1
Open University	-	1	1
Peradeniya	-	1	1
Rajarata	-	1	1
Ruhuna	-	1	1
Sabaragamuwa	1	-	1
South Eastern	1	-	1
Wayamba	-	1	1
Total	3	7	10

Table 2 demonstrates the age group of librarians among ULSL. Only (30%) university librarians' age group is from 41-45 and they are from universities i.e., Moratuwa, Sabaragamuwa, and South Eastern. Majority means (70%) librarians are above the age of 51 and they are from universities viz. Buddhist and Pali, Colombo, Open, Peradeniya, Rajarata, Ruhuna, and Wayamba respectively. It indicates that majority librarians are matured category of staff.

Experiences of Librarians and AL and SAL

Table 3.

Experiences of Librarians and AL and SAL

No of librarians Years of experience	No of librarians	%
1-9	-	-
10-19	3	30
20-29	5	50
30-39	2	20
Total	10	100

Among the librarians responded, majority of (50%) librarians were between 20-29 years of experience, (30%) between 10-19, and (20%) between 30-39 years of experience (Table 3). This illustrates that majority of librarians (70%) possess experience more than 20 years.

Universities and experience of respondents

Table 4.

Universities and experience of respondents- Librarians

Universities	Experience Years 10-19	Experience 20-29	Experience 30-39	Total
Buddhist and Pali	-	-	1	1
Colombo	-	-	1	1
Moratuwa	-	1	-	1
Open University	-	1	-	1
Peradeniya	-	1	-	1
Rajarata	-	1	-	1
Ruhuna	1	-	-	1
Sabaragamuwa	-	1	-	1
South Eastern	1	-	-	1
Wayamba	1	-	-	1
Total	3	5	2	10

Table 4 shows that librarians who possessed the lowest experienced category are from 10-19 years (30%) belong to universities like Ruhuna, South Eastern, and Wayamba, while the highest experienced category of librarians, from 30-39 years (20%) belong to universities like Buddhist and Pali, and Colombo. It indicates that majority (50%) of librarians, belong to the universities like Moratuwa, Open University, Peradeniya, Rajarata, and Sabaragamuwa have 20-29 years of experience.

Qualifications of respondents

Table 5.

Qualifications of Librarians

Qualifications of Librarians	No of Librarians	%
Ph. D	1	10
MA/MLib/MLS/MSc/MSSc	9	90
PG. Dip.Lib	3	30

Above Table 5 indicates that, out of all librarians, only 1 librarian is holding a Ph.D. degree, while 9 (90%) have Master degrees and 3 possess PG.Dip.Lib. This indicates that all respondents have postgraduate qualifications.

Problems related to HRM in University Libraries in Sri Lanka

Librarians were asked to rank the problems related to HRM in university libraries. Ten major problems were able to be distinguished. A five point-Likert scale was used to evaluate the importance and the relevance of the problems for ranking purposes. T-test was carried out in order to ensure proper ranking and the ranking was done on the mean scores, based on the 95% interval difference (Lower) and standard deviation. Responses to this question are elaborated in the following Table 6.

Table 6.
Major problems in HRM in ULSL- Ranked by Librarians

Ranking No	Major problems in HRM	Mean score	Interval of the difference (Lower)
1	Improper HRM policy	3.9	3.67
2	Lack of training and development programmes	3.7	3.35
3	Lack of professional manpower	3.6	3.09
4	Lack of ICT literate personnel	2.8	2.49
5	Lack of library resources and facilities (e.g. infrastructure)	2.8	2.34
6	Lack of financial support	2.8	2.14
7	Lack of support given by the UGC	2.5	2.12
8	Inadequacy of ICT facilities	2.5	1.99
9	Lack of support given by university administration	2.3	1.95
10	Influence of rules and regulations	2.3	1.71

1 = not agree; 2 = agree to some extent; 3 = Agree; 4 = strongly agree; 5 = No opinion / Not applicable

Table 6 illustrates that *'improper human resource policy'* (3.9) is the top ranking HRM problem in ULSL. The *'lack of training and development programmes'* (3.7) is the second major HRM problem. The third HRM problem is the *lack of professional manpower* (3.6). The fourth rank received for the *lack of ICT literate personnel* which scored 2.8 mean values. The other HRM problems are *lack of library resources and facilities (e.g. infrastructure), lack of financial support, lack of support given by the UGC, inadequacy of ICT facilities, lack of support given by university administration, Influence of rules and regulations* respectively. The lowest ranked HRM problem is *influence of rules and regulations* that scored mean value 2.3.

It is observed that researcher's main rationale of the significance of applying HRM for ULSL, particularly the HRM policy has been confirmed by the majority of librarians by marking the *improper HRM*

policy as the top ranking HRM problem in ULSL. The survey reveals that *staff training and development* is the top most important HRM function in ULSL and the serious issue which is encountered here is the *lack of training and development programmes* that scored second level ranking as a HRM problem. It is very apparent that different types of best fit (qualitative) and number (quantitative) of *training and development programmes* have to be developed to resolve this problem. Few librarians mentioned certain HRM problems which are very worthy to note, in addition to the above. They are as follows.

i. *policy of the Government*: - According to them, one of the major problems regarding HRM at the moment is the *'policy of the Government.'* Government has not sanctioned a single additional post at professional/high office level. It is necessary to introduce a new post i.e. Network Administrator, System Analyst as approved by the Management Services of the Government of Sri Lanka. It indicates that there is a need of sound HRM policy in ULSL conversely for the whole country Sri Lanka.

ii. *lack of personal interest*: - Personal interest could be interpreted as the actual understanding and the dedication towards the professional work, service and the contribution of individual staff member in HRM. The real term is the *'lack of service attitude and quality.'* It confirms that competency development is a pre-HRM requirement for ULSL, in order to develop *service attitude and quality* among library professionals.

iii. *lack of professional mutual cooperation* and *unnecessary competition*: - The *collaborative* and *cohesive approach* as suggested by the researcher through the proposed HRM model has been authenticated by this problem statement.

iv. *lack of opportunities to motivate and reward dedicated officers* and *lack of opportunities to share experiences with other colleagues (especially in overseas libraries)*:- Researcher found that librarians particularly in favour of introducing more motivational methods and techniques for ULSL and this problem statement confirm the fact. The underlying principles and the ideology proposed by the researcher i.e. *'expert power culture'* are matched with the secondary part of the above problem statement i.e. *'lack of opportunities to share experiences with other colleagues (especially in overseas libraries).*

Findings and suggestions and conclusion

It is well evident that most of the above HRM problems faced by the ULSL are associated with the non availability of sound policy alternatives, and these problems conversely direct the concerned stakeholders for the necessity of designing library policies. Suggestion is made to introduce sound HRM policy for university libraries. According to the librarians, the most important and timely needed HRM function among all other HRM functions is the staff training and development. Researcher suggests to develop staff training and development policy and to identify the key training programmes demanded by the University Libraries in Sri Lanka using qualitative and quantitative approach. Lack of professional staff, lack of training and development programmes and the lack of ICT literate personnel have been three key issues which have been directly related to the first ranking issue the improper HRM policy. It is recommended university librarians to pay much attention to resolve the above four issues. The other issues like, lack of financial support, lack of support, given by the UGC, inadequacy of ICT facilities, lack of support given by university administration and the influence of rules and regulations have been connected with the HRM policy of both ULSL and the government. Some librarians pointed out the government policy has badly affected the recruitment of new kind of staff. Therefore recommendation is made to university authorities and the government to work out for an effective HRM policy for the university libraries. Suggestion is made to library professionals to work out for achieving the status of **expert power culture** and the **service attitude and culture** among all library professionals as proposed by the researcher. It will be favorable resolution for the most HRM issues in University Libraries in Sri Lanka.

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