EXAMINING HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: INSIGHTS FROM BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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SUMMARY

This study explores the significance of HR in higher education and its role in elevating educational standards. The study introduces a framework for HRM in higher education, analysing its implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina's private and public institutions. By examining current practices, communication challenges, and field realities, the study aims to enhance HRM understanding. It surveyed academic, managerial, and administrative staff (257 respondents) across both institution types, revealing variations in HR practice adoption. Certain practices receive more attention, highlighting HR strategies' status in Bosnia and Herzegovina's institutions. Comprehensive recommendations are provided to enhance HRM, focusing on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

KEYWORDS: *Human resource management, Higher education institutions, Communication, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

ISPITIVANJE PRAKSE UPRAVLJANJA LJUDSKIM RESURSIMA I KOMUNIKACIJSKIH IZAZOVA U VISOKOŠKOLSKIM USTANOVAMA: PRIMJER IZ BOSNE I HERCEGOVINE

SAŽETAK

Ova studija istražuje značaj HR-a u visokom obrazovanju i njegovu ulogu u podizanju obrazovnih standarda. Studija predstavlja okvir za upravljanje ljudskim resursima u visokom obrazovanju, analizirajući njegovu implementaciju u privatnim i javnim institucijama Bosne i

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Hercegovine. Ispitujući trenutnu praksu, komunikacijske izazove i realnost na terenu, studija ima za cilj poboljšati razumijevanje upravljanja ljudskim resursima. Anketirano je akademsko, rukovodno i administrativno osoblje (257 ispitanika) u oba tipa institucija, otkrivajući varijacije u usvajanju prakse ljudskih resursa. Određenim praksama se posvećuje veća pažnja, naglašavajući status HR strategija u institucijama Bosne i Hercegovine. Date su sveobuhvatne preporuke za unapređenje upravljanja ljudskim resursima, sa fokusom na Bosnu i Hercegovinu.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education drives societal progress, emphasizing individual attributes over infrastructure or politics. Education's core aim, especially in higher education, is character enhancement. The international higher education summit (UNESCO, 1998) stresses reform to meet 21st-century demands, nurturing competent, enlightened individuals crucial for a nation's progress. HRM's integration into higher education is recognized promoting HR's strategic value and skilled professionals. Bosnia and Herzegovina's higher education drives socio-cultural and economic advancement. Its education system, evolving since 1949 (University of Sarajevo), includes public and private universities. With 39 institutions by 2023 (HEA BiH, 2023), they enrolled 85,042 students in 2022/2023, supported by 10,588 academic staff (BHAS, 2023). Structural changes aim to enhance higher education quality and efficiency, necessitating effective HRM aligned with societal goals (Education, 1996). Human resources significantly impact educational outcomes, requiring efficient strategies. Existing studies (Hyslop, 1986; Mangla, 1992; Chisholm & Vally, 1996; Smith & Schalekamp, 1997) underscore HR attributes but lack methodologies for aligned strategies.

This article quantitatively examines HR practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina's higher education. Section two highlights the pivotal role of HR in educational institutions and addresses communication challenges, drawing from pertinent literature. Section three delineates the research methodology, while section four details the data collection process. Section five presents the findings, and section six provides a comprehensive summary in conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizations establish human resource strategies to navigate the evolving landscape and address development needs. For academic staff within educational institutions, customized approaches are crucial, including induction processes, workplace training, research involvement, e-learning, and lifelong learning. Such strategies foster competitive advantage, contributing to institutional growth (Popescu and Băltărețu, 2012). Popescu and Băltărețu (2012) assert that effective utilization of human potential involves aligning staff with institutional goals, facilitating professional integration, and nurturing a strategic organizational culture. This approach enhances efficiency, innovation, problem-solving, and overall effectiveness. A study by Halid, Hung Kee & Abdul Rahim (2020) explores HRM practices' interplay, focusing on recruitment, training, performance appraisal, reward, and career opportunities within private higher education institutions in Malaysia. Peter H. Langford (2009) introduces a comprehensive 7 Ps model correlating HR practices

and outcomes, shedding light on their influence on employee engagement and the organizational climate. Extensive research within the realm of higher education HR practices reveals the multifaceted nature of HR departments' functions. The College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) provides comprehensive guidelines, encompassing employee benefits, diversity policies, HR management processes, performance metrics, recruitment, legal compliance, and more, tailored to the unique needs of higher education institutions. Convertino (2008) advocates for analyzing both internal and external HR practices for competitive advantage. Recruitment, professional development, performance appraisal, systems and technology, and labor relations emerge as pivotal factors. Conway (2004) underscores HR practices' adaptability across diverse organizations, emphasizing customization to reflect employees' preferences for heightened commitment. NetGain's (2004) qualitative exploration of exemplary HR practices reveals the potency of staff retention, policy manuals, relevant training, performance management, and more. These practices align with recent works like Hafford & Moore (2005), Conway (2004), and Gordon & Whitchurch (2007), which spotlight participatory decision-making and optimized job design.

The adoption of best sourcing practices offers dynamic solutions, aligned with an organization's ethos and policies, culminating in optimized strategic and financial outcomes. Hafford and Moore (2005) delineate vital steps in maintaining these practices, from defining scope to linking practices to financial performance. In embracing these opportunities, HR professionals empower organizational leadership to grasp HR's pivotal role in achieving strategic objectives and elevating business quality and performance. Patton (2007) champions the deployment of best practices, cementing HR's significance in realizing these goals.

In today's global organizations, communication has evolved from a mere management function to a strategic variable, enabling businesses to convey their products, mission, and values (Cervera, 2015). Organizational communication encompasses corporate, internal, and external domains, requiring coherent strategies across them to establish a consistent image both inside and outside (Cervera, 2015). Internal communication pertains to employees and is intertwined with human resources, while external communication promotes products, and corporate communication, also known as branding, forges emotional connections with customers (Enrique, 2008). Line managers are key conduits for employee communication, sharing work-related information, and HR practices (Nishii & Wright, 2008). However, disparities in execution may lead to discrepancies in employee perceptions of HR practices, often arising from communication gaps (Nishii & Wright, 2008). The alignment between organizational intentions and employee perceptions hinges on managers' communication quality. Effective communication, characterized by accuracy and relevance, reduces uncertainty and aids employees' understanding (Kernan & Hanges, 2002). Clear, consistent communication fosters comprehension of organizational policies, while vague messages can lead to subjective interpretations (Nishii & Wright, 2008). This emphasis on communication quality resonates with Bowen and Ostroff (2004), who stress the need for unambiguous information for effective functioning and accurate attributions (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Beyond content, communication's process impacts its success, as highlighted by message-based persuasion theories (Chaiken, Wood, & Eagly, 1996) and its role in HR practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii & Wright, 2008).

Although the explicit examination of communication quality within HRM is limited, varied communication styles significantly affect employees (Kernan & Hanges, 2002). Managerial communication competence, using motivational language, enhances perceived effectiveness and employee satisfaction (Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006; Madlock, 2008). Enhanced organizational communication by managers improves employee understanding of HR practices, narrowing the gap between intent and perception (Nishii & Wright, 2008). This alignment cultivates clarity, elevating employee satisfaction and perception of unit performance. Overall, the significance of communication quality in HRM enhances organizational success and employee well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the pivotal role of human resources in higher education, assessing their impact on quality and development. It quantitatively evaluates the state of human resources in Bosnia and Herzegovina higher education. Two aligned models emerged from the literature, the model developed by Peter H. Langford (2009) and the model modified by Halid et al. (2020) which consists of five essential practices - recruitment, training, performance, rewards, and career advancement from which a questionnaire was developed to collect data on human resource practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study scrutinizes the implementation of these practices in higher education for competitive advantage.

DATA COLLECTION

An online survey was conducted over two months, from March to May 2023, reaching 257 respondents from 17 Bosnian universities. Of these, 55.6% were from public and 44.4% from private institutions. Gender distribution showed 52.9% female and 47.1% male respondents. Most (80.9%) held academic roles, 7.4% were in administration, and 11.7% were managerial staff. Age distribution ranged from 18 to 65+, with a majority (74.3%) holding a PhD. Work experience varied, with 3.1% having over 30 years, 18.7% 21-30 years, 37.4% 11-20 years, 19.5% 6-10 years, and 21.4% 1-5 years (Table 1.).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

Variable	Demographics	Number	Valid percentage
Gender	Female	136	52.90%
	Male	121	47.10%
Age	18–24	8	3.10%
	25–34	54	21.00%
	35–44	83	32.30%
	45–54	74	28.80%
	55–64	29	11.30%
	65 or above	9	3.50%

Education	Doctoral or professional degree or equivalent	191	74.30%
	Master's degree or equivalent	42	16.30%
	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	21	8.20%
	Some college, no degree	1	0.40%
	High school diploma or equivalent	2	0.80%
University	Private	114	44.40%
	Public	143	55.60%
Job position	Academic staff	208	80.90%
	Administrative staff	19	7.40%
	Managerial staff (Head, Dean, Rector)	30	11.70%
University work experience	1–5 years	55	21.40%
	6–10 years	50	19.50%
	11–20 years	96	37.40%
	21–30 years	48	18.70%
	more than 30 years	8	3.10%

FINDINGS

The study surveyed 257 participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina's higher education institutions, revealing variations in human resource practices between public and private institutions. The research investigated five core human resource practices, highlighting differing adoption rates. Recruitment and selection, crucial for hiring qualified individuals, were observed in both sectors but with distinct task-specific disparities. Notably, private institutions (81.58%) prioritized strategic staffing more than public ones (71.05%), aligning hiring decisions with long-term goals. Talent recognition, identifying exceptional candidates, was valued by both, with a slight emphasis in private institutions (78.59% vs. 68.53%). Similarly, transparent hiring criteria were acknowledged by both, with private institutions (78.77%) showing slightly stronger commitment. This investment in recruitment and selection signifies dedication to workforce quality, though potential improvements exist.

Table 2. Applied tasks in recruitment and selection.

Tasks	Private Institutions (%)	Public Institutions (%)
Strategic Staffing	81.58	71.05
Talent Recognition	78.59	68.53
Clear Hiring Criteria	78.77	68.81

Results from Table 3. highlight training and development practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina's higher education institutions. Both public and private sectors invest to some extent, yet improvements are possible. Onboarding Support adoption is higher in private institutions (75.96%) than in public (63.22%), enhancing new employee integration. Continuous Learning is embraced by both, with private institutions slightly ahead (74.38% vs.

63.49%), but more comprehensive opportunities are needed. Performance Enhancement, vital for productivity, is pursued by both, with a slightly stronger focus in private institutions (74.92% vs. 63.77%), reflecting dedication to performance-oriented training.

Table 3. Applied tasks in training and development.

Tasks	Private Institutions (%)	Public Institutions (%)
Onboarding Support	75.96	63.22
Continuous Learning	74.38	63.49
Performance Enhancement	74.92	63.77

Performance appraisal is crucial for evaluating and enhancing employee performance in Bosnian and Herzegovinian higher education institutions. Table 4. results reveal both private and public institutions engage in appraisal to varying degrees, with differences in specific tasks. Private institutions prioritize "Regular Performance Reviews" (78.77%), fostering improvement and clear expectations, exceeding public institutions (68.95%). Both sectors stress a "Fair Evaluation Process" (private: 78.25%, public: 69.79%) but need improvement for unbiased perception. "Actionable Performance Feedback" is recognized by both private (72.11%) and public (65.88%) institutions, yet enhancements are possible. Findings underscore the value of appraisal in both sectors, promoting workforce growth. Continuous improvements are necessary to ensure fairness, transparency, and employee support throughout the process.

Table 4. Applied tasks in performance appraisal.

Tasks	Private Institutions (%)	Public Institutions (%)
Regular Performance Reviews	78.77	68.95
Fair Evaluation Process	78.25	69.79
Actionable Performance Feedback	72.11	65.88

Rewards and recognition are pivotal for motivating and retaining higher education staff in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study presented in Table 5. provides insights into the approaches of both private and public institutions.

Table 5: Applied tasks in rewards and recognition.

Tasks	Private Institutions (%)	Public Institutions (%)
Adequate Rewards	67.19	61.82
Fulfilment of Responsibilities	78.42	71.88
Satisfactory Income	64.56	73.28
Satisfactory Benefits	76.49	77.76

Both sectors acknowledge rewards' importance, with private institutions slightly ahead in three tasks. Public institutions lead in "Satisfactory Income." Results underscore recognizing employee contributions and ensuring competitive income and benefits to attract and retain talent in the higher education domain.

Career opportunities hold immense importance in higher education institutions, impacting staff motivation, job satisfaction, and retention. Bosnia and Herzegovina's study unveils private and public institutions' approaches outlined in Table 6.

Table 6: Applied tasks in career opportunities.

Tasks	Private Institutions (%)	Public Institutions (%)
Effective Career Planning	65.26	66.15
Skill Development Opportunities	70.87	68.25
Career Advancement Prospects	67.72	63.92

Both sectors value career opportunities, with minor variations. Effective career planning aids employees in aligning personal goals with institutional objectives, boosting job satisfaction. Skill development programs are prevalent in both, enhancing expertise and growth. Private institutions slightly lead in career advancement prospects, indicating better promotion and progression chances. Such clear paths stimulate employee excellence and dedication.

CONCLUSION

The study delving into HR practices in higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina offers insightful observations on the current state of human resource management within these establishments. It underscores both shared approaches and divergences in HR practice implementation between public and private institutions. Regarding Recruitment and Selection, recognition of strategic staffing, talent appreciation, and clear hiring criteria is unanimous, yet improvements are needed for a more inclusive and streamlined recruitment process. Establishing standardized, merit-based selection processes, promoting diversity, and ensuring equal opportunities for all candidates are essential steps. Training and Development practices are widespread, with both sectors investing in skill enhancement. Regularly assessing skill gaps and tailoring training programs to individual needs can optimize employee development and align it with institutional goals. Performance Appraisal practices are commonly applied, but enhancements in delivering timely and constructive feedback are vital. Implementing ongoing feedback systems and transparent evaluation processes can boost employee motivation and performance. In the realm of Rewards and Recognition, acknowledging the importance of adequate rewards, fulfilling responsibilities, and satisfactory income and benefits are consistent. Yet, there is room to enhance these programs to foster higher employee motivation. By implementing performance-based rewards and recognition initiatives, an enriching culture of appreciation can be fostered. Both sectors recognize Career Opportunities practices, but improving support with mentorship, job postings, and advancement pathways is crucial for employee growth.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the vital role of HR practices in higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By adopting a comprehensive, strategic approach to HR and bolstering communication, institutions can create an empowering work environment that attracts and retains talent, fostering growth. Elevating employee development, recognition, and career advancement opportunities not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the broader advancement of higher education and societal development

in the region. Embracing these recommendations will undoubtedly elevate the quality and reputation of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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