Organizational Strategy and Human Resource Development: Key Determinants to Implementing Business Strategy in Nigerian Organizaitons

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Abstract

Employee development has traditionally been seen as a cost rather than an investment in Nigerian organizations, although this is certainly changing in some organizations. It has been argued that Nigerian organizations give little support to training and development of personnel compared with our foreign partners. This lack of investment in training and development has been identified as a major factor in Nigeria's economic performance, and it has been argued that without such investment we will be trapped in a low wage, and low skills economy. This study reviewed issues concerning organizational strategy and human resource development as important mechanisms to implementing business strategy in Nigerian organizations. The study revealed that, there is currently a voluntarist approach to training and development in Nigeria, which means that employers make their own choices about the extent to which they train. It was recommended among others, that human resource development strategy needs to focus on the

organization's strategy and objectives and should involve identifying the skills and competencies required to achieve this, now and in the future.

Key Words: Organization, Strategy, Human, Resource, Development, Management, Implementation, Business.

Introduction

The need for managers in Nigerian organizations will increase with the development of more complex enterprises. Rapid growth of knowledge useful to management will demand a higher quality of managers. Greater effort is being given to the development of persons who can better perform managerial functions. The characteristics of a good manager may be described in broad terms of initiative, dependability, intelligence, judgement, good health, integrity, perseverance, and so on.

There seems to be general agreement that training and development is a good thing, and that it increases productivity, but the question is how much? It is even difficult to show a causal link between human resource development and organizational performance, partly because such terms are difficult to define precisely, and partly because the payoff from development may not be seen in the short term. It is also difficult to tie down performance improvements to the development itself and to understand the nature of the link. For example, is performance better because of increased or different human resource development, because the reward package has improved or because we have a clearer set of organizational and individual objectives? If there is a link with human resource development initiatives, is it that employees have better skills, or that they are better motivated, or that they have been selected from a more able group of candidates attracted to the organization as it offers a high level of development?

Inspite of these difficulties it is important to identify the contribution of human resource development to business success, and wider measures for

assessing business success, beyond the standard financial indicators, make this more feasible (Kaplan and Norton, 1992). While the search for evidence goes on, the current climate encourages high levels of attention to human resource development, which is increasingly seen not only as a route to achieving business strategy, but also as a means of building core competence over the longer term to promote organizational growth and sustained competitive advantage. Global competition and a fast pace of change have emphasized the importance of the human capital in the organization, and the speed and ways in which they learn. A Green Paper produced by the Department for Education and Employment (1998) stated that "investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the 21st century". In Nigerian organizations, the emphasis on qualifications is increasing and the focus is on the development of directors from this perspective.

In addition, levels and sophistication of training and development have received considerable attention in the context of the new "psychological contract" and the need to promote employability. There is some evidence that employee demand for training and development may be a vital tool in recruitment and retention, and considered to be a reward when promotion or monetary rewards are less available. However, Stewart and Tansley (2002) found significant structural and cultural barriers to formal and informal learning in organizations, in particular lack of time was identified as an issue.

More recently it has been argued, however, that it is not a lack of investment in training that is the problem but the way such investment is distributed, that is, who it is spent on and the content of the training. It is generally agreed that training spend is unevenly distributed. For example, Stevens (2001) posits that it is the people at the lower end of the hierarchy that miss out on training, and Westwood (2001) reports that: "Access to workforce development is unequal with managers and professionals or those with a

degree up to five times more likely to receive work based training than people with no qualification and/or unskilled jobs". Thomson (2001) explained that broader development is concentrated on those at the beginning of their careers and those in more senior and specialist posts, rather than part-timers and those with fewer qualifications to begin with. In the aerospace and pharmaceutical businesses, defined as high skills sectors, Lloyd (2002) found a conflict of interests between employees' desire for training and development and managerial short-term aims, lack of accreditation of skills, structured development focused on key employees, access to training being dependent on individual initiative, senior managers viewing training as a minor issue to be dealt with by lower level managers and insufficient resources. She suggests that there was under investment and lack of support for flexibility and employability. Westwood (2001) concludes that while we do not do as much training as in Europe, we do spend a lot of money on training that does not last very long and on the people who may not need it. In terms of training content there is evidence to suggest that much training is related to induction and particularly health and safety, and it has been argued that this does nothing to drive the development of a knowledge – based economy (Westwood, 2001). Some view the solution to this problem as increasing state intervention, as many view voluntarism as having a limited effect (Sloman, 2001). It is argued that potential intervention would not mean a return to the levy system, but, for example, statutory rights for paid study leave and employer tax-credits.

Organizational Strategy

Organizational strategy has to do with the type of organizational pattern an enterprise will use. It answers practical questions, for example: How, centralized or decentralized should decision-making authority be? What kinds of departmental patterns are most suitable? How should staff positions be designed? Naturally, organization structures furnish the system of roles and role relationships that helps people accomplish objectives.

Effective Implementation of Organizational Strategies

Organizational strategic planning, to be effective, must go beyond the allocation of resources to achieve organizational objectives. It must be accompanied by strategic thinking that also include designing an appropriate organization structure, an effective management information systems, a budgeting system to facilitate the accomplishment of strategic objectives, a reward system that supports the strategy.

Successful Implementation of Organizational Strategies

It is one thing to develop clear and meaningful strategies. It is another matter, and one of very great practical importance, to implement strategies effectively (Donald and Albert, 1989). If strategic planning is to be successful, certain steps must be taken to implement it. Following are eight recommendations that should be considered by managers in Nigerian organizations who wish to put their strategies to work.

1. Communicating strategies to all key decision-making managers.
2. Developing and communicating planning premises.
3. Ensuring that action plans contribute to and reflect major objectives and strategies.
4. Reviewing strategies regularly.
5. Developing contingency strategies and programmes.
6. Making the organization structure fit planning needs.
7. Continuing to emphasize planning and implementing strategy.
8. Creating a company climate that forces planning.

Major Kinds of Organizational Strategies and Policies

For a business, and with modifications, for other kinds of organizations as well, the major strategies and policies that give an overall direction to operations are likely to be in the following areas:

Growth: Growth strategies give answers to such questions as these: How much growth should occur? How fast" Where? How should it occur?

Finance: Every business enterprise must have a clear strategy for financing its operations. There are various ways of doing this and usually many serious limitations.

Personnel: There can be many major strategies in the area of human resources and relationships. They deal with such topics as union relations, compensation, selection, hiring, training and appraisal, as well as with special matters such as job enrichment.

Public Relations: Strategies in this area can hardly be independent; they support other major strategies and efforts. They must also be designed in light of the company's type of business, its closeness to the public, and its susceptibility to regulation by government agencies.

Product or Service: A business exists to furnish products or services. In a very real sense, profits are merely a measure, although an important one, of how well a company serves its customers. New products or services, more than any other single factor, determine what an enterprise is or will be.

Marketing: Marketing strategies are designed to guide managers in getting products or services to customers and in encouraging customers to buy. Marketing strategies are closely related to product strategies; they must be interrelated and mutually supportive.

Nature and Purpose of Organizational Strategies and Policies

Strategies and policies are closely related. Both give direction, both are the framework for plans, both are the basis of operational plan, and both affect all areas of managing. "Strategy" refers to the determination of the purpose or mission, and the basic long-term objectives of an enterprise, and the

adoption of courses of action and allocation of resources necessary to achieve these aims. Therefore, objectives are part of strategy formulation. On the other hand, policies are general statements or understandings that guide managers' thinking in decision making. They ensure that decisions fall within certain boundaries. They usually do not require action but are intended to guide managers in their commitment to the decision they ultimately make. The essence of policy is direction. Strategy, on the other hand, concerns the direction in which human and material resources will be applied in order to increase the chance of achieving selected objectives.

Training and Developing Employees

Training means giving new or current employees the skills they need to perform their jobs. This might mean showing a new Web designer the intricacies of your site, a new salesperson how to sell your firm's product, or a new supervisor how to complete the firm's weekly payroll sheet. It might involve simply having the current jobholder explain the job to the new hire, or a multi-week training process including classroom or Internet classes. In any case, training is a hallmark of good management, and a task that managers ignore at their peril. Having high-potential employees does not guarantee they will succeed. Instead, they must know what you want them to do and how you want them to do it. If they do not, they will improvise or do nothing useful at all.

Employers today want to make sure their training programmes are supporting their firms' strategic goals (Rita, 2008). In a survey Nancy and Brenda (2004) found that "establishing a link between learning and organizational performance" was the number –one pressing issue in training professionals. Training experts increasingly use the phrase "workplace learning and performance", in lieu of training to underscore training's dual aims of employee learning and organizational performance (Brenda, 2005). Training has an impressive record of influencing

performance, scoring higher than appraisal and feedback, and just below goal setting in its effect on productivity (American Saleman, 2004).

With the programme, designed and budgeted, and objectives set, you can turn to implementing the training programme. This means actually doing the training, using one or more of the training methods such as on-the-job training, which means having a person learn a job by actually doing it. The most popular on-the-job training is the coaching or understudy method. It is not always easy to tell where "training" leaves off and "management development" begins. The latter, however, tends to emphasize both long-term development and a focus on developing current or future managers. "Management development" is any attempt to improve managerial performance by imparting knowledge, changing attitudes, or increasing skills. The management development process consists of (1) assessing the company's strategic needs, for instance, to fill future executive openings or to boost competitiveness; (2) appraising managers' current performance, and then (3) developing the managers, and future managers (John 2004; Rita and Beth, 2006). Management development is usually part of the employer's succession planning. Succession planning refers to the process through which a company plans for and fills senior-level openings (Paula, 2006). Succession planning and management development both stem from the employer's strategy, vision, and personnel plans. For example, strategies to enter new businesses or expand overseas imply that the employer will need managers who have the skills to manage these new businesses. Some management development programmes are company-wide and involve all or most new or potential managers.

Managerial on-the-job training methods include job rotation, the coaching/under study approach, and action learning. There are also many off-the-job techniques for training and developing managers such as case study method, management games, outside seminars, university-related

programmes, role playing, behaviour modeling, corporate universities, executive coaches, strategic human resource management system etc.

Roles of Training and Development Specialists in Human Resource Development Strategy

Salaman and Mabey (1995) identify a range of stakeholders in strategic training and development, each of which will have different interests in, influence over and ownership of training and development activities and outcomes. They identify senior managers as the sponsors of training and development, who will be influenced by professional, personal and political agendas; and business planners as the clients who are concerned about customers, competitors and shareholders. Third, they identify line managers who are responsible for performance, coaching and resources; and fourth, participants who are influenced by their career aspirations and other non-work parts of their lives. Human resource management staff are identified as facilitators who are concerned with best practice, budget credibility and other human resource strategy. Lastly, training specialists are identified as providers, who are influenced by external networks, professional expertise and educational perspectives. The agendas of each of these groups will overlap on some issues and conflict on others.

Most organizational examples suggest that the formation of training and development strategy is not something that should be owned by the Human Resource/Human Resource Development function. The strategy needs to be owned and worked on by the whole organization, with the Human Resource/Human Resource Development function acting in the roles of specialist/expert and coordinator. The actions themselves may be carried out by line management, the Human Resource/Human Resource Development function or outside consultants. Stewart and Tansley (2002) suggest that the immediate and medium-term contribution of Human Resource Development professionals should focus on developing the competence and motivation of managers to manage learning and

development. They confirm that such professionals need to act as facilitators and instructors, and have a focus on the process and design of development rather than its content. Involvement from line management in the delivery of the training and development strategy can have a range of advantages. Top management have a key role in introducing and promoting strategic developments to staff, for example, creating an organization-wide competency identification programme; setting up a system of development centers or introducing a development-based organizational performance management system. Only if management carryout this role can employees see and believe that there is a commitment from the top. At other levels line managers can be trained as trainers, assessors and advisers in delivering the strategy. This is a mechanism not only for getting them involved, but also for tailoring the strategy to meet the real and different needs of different functions and departments.

External consultants may be used at any stage. They may add to the strategy development process, but there is always the worry that their contribution comes down to an offering of their ready-packaged solution, with a bit of tailoring here and there, rather than something which really meets the needs of the organization. It is useful to have an outside perspective, but there is an art in defining the role of that outside contribution. In delivery, external consultants may make a valuable contribution where a large number of courses have to be run over a short period. The disadvantages are that they can never really understand all the organizational issues, and that they may be seen as someone from outside imposing a new process on the organization.

The External Labor Market and Human Resource Strategic Integration

The external availability of individuals with the skills and competencies required by the organization will also have an impact on employee development strategy. If skilled individuals are plentiful, the organization has the choice of whether, and to what extent it wishes, to develop staff

internally. If skilled individuals are in short supply, then internal development invariably becomes a priority. Predicting demographic and social changes is critical in identifying the extent of internal development required and also who will be available to be developed. In-depth analysis may challenge traditionally held assumptions about who will be developed, how and to what extent. For example, the predicted shortage of younger age groups in the labor market, coupled with a shortage of specific skills, may result in a strategy to develop older rather than younger recruits. This poses potential problems about the need to develop older workers some of whom may learn more slowly. What is the best form of development programme for employees with a very varied base of skills and experiences? Another critical issue is that of redeployment of potentially redundant staff and their development to provide skills that are in short supply.

Prediction of skills availability is critical, as for some jobs the training required will take years rather than months. Realizing in January that the skills required in August by the organization will not be available in the labour market is too late if the development needed takes three years. The external labor market clearly has a big impact on employee development strategy, so it is important that there is effective integration between human resource development strategy, other aspects of human resource strategy and overall organizational strategy. Where there is a choice between recruiting required skills or developing them internally, given a strategic approach, the decision will reflect on the positioning of the organization and its strategy. A further issue is that of ensuring a consistency between the skills criteria used for recruitment and development. From a slight different perspective, the impact of the organization's development strategy on recruitment and retention, either explicit or implicit, is often underestimated. There is increasing evidence to show that employees and potential employees are more interested in development opportunities, especially structured ones, than in improvements in financial rewards.

Development activity can drive motivation and commitment, and can be used in a strategic way to contribute towards these. For these ends, publishing and marketing the strategy is key, as well as ensuring that the rhetoric is backed up by action. There is also the tricky question of access to and eligibility for development. If it is offered only very selectively, it can have the reserve of the intended impact.

However, not all employees see the need for, or the value of, developing and this means that reward systems need to be supportive of the development strategy. If we want employees to learn new skills and become multi-skilled, it is skills development we need to reward rather than the job that is currently done. If we wish employees to gain vocational qualifications, we need to reflect this in our recruitment criteria and reward systems. Harrison (1993) noted that these links are not very strong in most organizations. Other forms of reward, for example, promotions and career moves also need to reflect the development strategy; for example, in providing appropriate, matrix career pathways if the strategy is to encourage a multi-functional, creative perspective in the development of future general management. Not only do the pathways have to be available, they also have to be used, and this means encouraging current managers to use them for their staff.

Finally, an organization needs to reinforce the skills and competencies it wishes to develop by appraising those skills and competencies rather than something else. Developmentally based appraisal systems can clearly be of particular value here. Mabey and Iles (1993) note that a strategic approach to development differs from a tactical one in that a consistent approach to assessment and development is identified with a common skills language and skills criteria attached to overall business objectives. They also note the importance of a decreasing emphasis on objective assessment. To this end many organizations have introduced a series of development centers, similar to the assessment centers, but with a clear, outcome of individual

development plans for each participant related to their current levels of competence and potential career moves, and key competencies required by the business.

Organizational Strategy and Human Resource Development Strategy.

For training and development to be effective in terms of business success there is a well-rehearsed argument that it should be linked up front with business strategy. McClelland (1994) research is one of many studies that show that organizations generally do not consider development issues to be part of their competitive strategy formulation, although he found that those that do so identified it to be of value in gaining as well as maintaining competitive advantage. Miller (1994), writing specifically of management development, points to a lack of fit between business strategy and development activity. Pettigrew, Sparrow and Hendry (1988) did find, though that development issues receive a higher priority when they are linked to organizational needs and take a more strategic approach. Miller makes the point that although at the organizational level it is difficult to identify quantitatively the direct impact of strategic investment in development, this impact is well supported by anecdotal evidence and easily demonstrated at the micro level.

Those organizations that do consider human resource development at a strategic level usually see it as a key to implementing business strategy in a reactive way. Luoma (2000) categories this approach as a "needs driven" approach, where the purpose of the human resource development strategy is to identify, and remedy skill deficiencies in relation to the organizational strategy. Luoma suggests that in many articles this is implicitly referred to as the only way of managing strategic human resource development. Miller (1994), for example, has demonstrated how management development can be aligned with the strategic positioning of the firm, and this can be seen as coming within the broad remit of such approaches as a need-driven approach. He has produced a matrix demonstrating how

development content and processes can reflect stable growth, unstable growth, unstable decline and competitive positions, as shown in Table 1. He offers the model as suggestive, only, of the possibilities in designing strategically-oriented management development programmes.

Luoma (2000), however, identifies a second approach to human resource development strategy which is an "opportunistic approach", where the impetus is external rather than internal. This would include applying leading ideas on development to the organization in a more general way, rather than specifically in relation to meeting the current business objectives. Such ideas may be developed from benchmarking, case studies, networking and the academic and practitioner press. Such ideas could include content and method, for example, the development of a corporate university, and the concept of developing non-employees who perhaps work for suppliers or who are contracted to the organization. The abilities thus developed may indeed be relevant in achieving business objectives, but they may also be relevant in developing abilities and behaviours which may be the source of future competiveness. Thus, they may also be a means of achieving culture change and/or facilitating the strategy process itself by constructing it as a learning process. In this approach the learning potential of all employees will be emphasized, and the human resource development strategy may meet reactive needs in implementation of business strategy, but may also be proactive in influencing the formation of future business strategy.

The third approach to the strategy link suggested by Luoma (2000) is based on the concept of organizational capability as the key to sustained competitive advantage, the resource based view of the firm. This approach is proactive that it focuses on the desired state of the organization as defined in its future vision. Within this would come the interest in anticipatory learning, which has been attracting some interest, where future needs are predicted and development takes place in advance. The Journal of

Management Education and Development (1994) devoted an entire issue to anticipatory learning, which included some ideas on how it might be identified and achieved.

Table 1: Linking Management Development to Strategic Solutions

	Environment Condition			
	Stable	**Unstable Growth**	**Unstable Decline**	**Competitive**
Content	Environment scanning skills understanding sources of stability (e.g. geographically isolated product market, state of technology) Defense Strategies Industrial relations skills (but depends on source of stability)	Environment scanning skills Industry analysis skills Sales, marketing Financial control Creative thinking Team building Organization structure skills Forecasting techniques	Stakeholder relations Executive retention skills Understanding competitor Environment Negotiating skills Diversification skills (technology, human resources)	Competitive strategy development Competitor analysis Marketing/cost control (dependent on Competitive strategy)
Process	Slow pace but 'eventful' Modest emphasis on individual development Non-competitive but 'aggressive' Reactive	Fast-moving High pressure Intense Team-oriented Proactive	Medium pace Co-operative environment Reactive	High pressure Competitive

Source: P. Miller (1997). A Strategic Look at Management: Personnel Management, August, p. 47. Reproduced with permission of the author.

Of paramount importance, therefore, is the ability to learn. Watkins (1987) discussed that development for strategic capability, rather than just targeting development on achieving business objectives, needs to reinforce an entrepreneurial and innovative culture in which learning is part of

everyday work. He identified the importance of acting successfully in novel and unpredictable circumstances and what employees acquire as a habit of learning the skills and learning and the desire to learn. Within this same perspective Mayo (2000) opined that intangible assets of the organization are increasing in proportion to the value of tangible assets. He recognized that developing intellectual capital may be an "act of faith", or one of budgetary allocation, and suggested that the most useful measures to track such investment are individual capability, individual motivation, the organizational climate and work group effectiveness. While he recognized the value of competency frameworks in respect of individual development he does point out that these neglect such features as experience and the networks and range of personal contacts, both of which are key to the development of core organizational competencies which are key to developing uniqueness. In a slightly different but compatible approach McCracken and Wallace (2000) developed a redefinition of strategic human resource development, based on an initial conception by Garavan (1991). They suggested nine characteristics of a strategic approach to human development, which are that:

1. Human resource development shapes the organization's mission and goals, as well as having a role in strategy implementation.
2. Top management are leaders rather than just supporters of human resource development.
3. Senior management, and not just human resource development professionals, are involved in environmental scanning in relation to human resource development.
4. Human resource development strategies, policies and plans are developed, which relate to both the present and future direction of the organization, and the top management team are involved in this.
5. Line managers are not only committed and involved in human resource development, but involved as strategic partners.

6. There is strategic integration with other aspects of human resource management.
7. Trainers not only have an expanded role, including facilitation and acting as organizational change consultants, but also lead as well as facilitate change.
8. Human resource development professionals have a role in influencing the organizational culture.
9. There is an emphasis on future oriented cost effectiveness and results, in terms of evaluation of human resource development activity.

McCracken and Wallance (2000) asserted that each of these aspects needs to be interrelated in an open system.

Conclusions

There is currently a voluntarist approach to training and development in Nigerian organizations which means that employers make their own choices about the extent to which they train. Human resource development strategy needs to focus on the organization's strategy and objectives and should involve identifying the skills and competencies required to achieve this, now and in the future. Human resource development strategy may also be opportunistic and proactive and influence the development of organizational strategy. It is important that human resource development strategy is reinforced by, and reinforces, other human resource strategy, and the context of the external labour market will be an influencing factor in how these strategies are framed. The human resource/human resource development function does not own human resource development strategy, it must be owned by the organization as a whole.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are noted based on the literature reviewed and conclusions for effective organizational strategy and human resource development in Nigerian organizations.

1. Human resource development strategy needs to focus on the organization's strategy and objectives, and should involve identifying the skills and competencies required to achieve this, now and in the future.
2. Training and development should increase productivity in Nigerian organizations.
3. Human resource development should be seen as a route to achieving business strategy.
4. Human resource development should be a means to build core competencies over a longer term to promote organizational growth and sustained competitive advantage.
5. Opportunities for training and development should be a vital tool in recruitment and retention.
6. Training and development should not be concentrated on those at the beginning of their careers and those in more senior and specialist posts, rather than part-timers and those with fewer qualifications to begin with.
7. Training and development should be linked up with business strategy.
8. Human resource development strategy should identify and remedy skill deficiencies in relation to organizational strategy.
9. Development issues should receive a higher priority when they are linked to organizational needs and take a more strategic approach.
10. Developing intellectual capital in Nigerian organizations should be an act of faith or one of budgetary allocation, and mostly be used to track such investments in individual capability, individual

motivation, the organizational climate, and work-group effectiveness.

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