

# **IRCAB JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES**

**December, 2012: Vol. 2, No. 2**

**ISSN: 2226-0544**

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Foundation**

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# STRATEGY FOR HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: BEST PRACTICES FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTRES

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## **Abstract:**

*Human resources management is a strategy in the attainment of best practices for library and information services provision in Nigeria. Information services are antidote for sustainable development in the industrial and institutional spheres. This paper examines the contribution of workplace policy as part of human resources management strategy in both public and private establishments- the academic and non-governmental organisations as it relates to information services, storage, accessibility and dissemination. It also addresses how the impact of strategy for human resources management has contributed in bringing out the best practices in the provision of information resources to researchers and other members of the community of users. The paper extensively critiques best practices as a strategy for enhancement; it identified deficiency areas, and examined the impact of human resources on management and challenges for human resources training. Key recommendations on the need for pragmatic strategy human resources management, redevelopment of library school's curriculum and creation of uniform entry standard of education qualifications were made.*

**Keywords:** *human resources, development, best practices, library and information resources, strategy, Nigeria*

## **Introduction**

Strategy for human resources management should provide an opportunity for organisations to bring out their best practices not just for the achievement of their goal and objectives but for organisation to be able to meet other unforeseen challenges. This research study will look at some parameters which an organisation can meet if their human resources management can provide adequate training that promotes staff development and a good appraisal that can reveal deficiencies and how the organisation will overcome them. Library and information centre will excel if there is adequate collaboration with the professional bodies and other stakeholders which can come together in the development of libraries and information centres.

Indeed, effective human resources management, through training, aligned with good policy and practices, will serve as an antidote in the provision of adequate and up-to-date information resources, which are made available and accessible. Best practices are a new paradigm shift for total quality assurance services and product delivery for customers and clients depending on the type of organizations rendering the services and their values. There has been a turning point in the life of library and information resource services throughout the world since the emergence of information communication technology revolution. In like manner, it may be in any form of information resources provision practitioners, academic, public, special, school, national, or private libraries. All of them would be examined under the strategy for human resources training in juxtaposition in order to have a clear picture of their services in relation to the staff training they have that gives rise to team work for best practices.

For instance in a university, the library is an all important academic unit which in a formal sense is without a teaching faculty. It is important because of its centrality to the intellectual pursuits of students and their lecturers with regard to teaching, learning and research (TLR) (Oladele, 2010). This unlike in the library where both the lecturers and students are expected to visit and utilize resources like books, journals, theses and other sources of information pursuits to the attainment of their diverse academic objectives. Against this background, it is apparent that the role or function of the library in a university has been well cut out as it exists to provide information services as the memory of the university by being a repository warehousing the research and intellectual products of students and faculty for wider accessibility and posterity (Tarrant, 2008 in Oladele, 2010)

## **Conceptualising Best Practices and Strategy for Human Resources Management**

Librarianship and information centres have evolved in modern ways of providing information services using the information communication and technology revolution as a platform for accelerating easy access to information. According to Lovato-Gassman, (2003) proposes that librarians should prepare themselves for the modern libraries/information centres of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because it has been energizing to learn how our profession is changing and evolving. Raseroka, (2006:4 cited in Hikwa, 2007) discovers that an information society (IS) demands that people must develop new attitudes towards the exploitation and use of information, which can only be appreciated when the right people are in charge of information storage, retrieval and dissemination through the application of best practices.

Indeed, Mess (2008) critiques that “unfortunately there has been no authoritative definition of best practice that has been agreed upon by academics or practioners. This leads to lack of conceptual clarity of the Human Resources Management practice definition”. However there have been several definitions that have emerged that encompass many of the underlying factors of HRM best practice, allowing us to gain understanding of the topic. Johnson (2000) reiterates, “best practice or high performance work practices are described as HR methods and systems that have universal, addictive, and positive effects on organisational performance.

In another sense, relating this to library and information services, librarianship holds indispensable roles, today as life –long learning activities and education trends. These areas are tremendously affected by on-going technology evolution and consequently, the very forces that are changing the processes of learning and education are also changing librarianship. It is therefore necessary that human resources development in information communication and technology as form of best practices in library and information centres, whether in public, school, academic or special libraries is a must. In other words, Delaney and Huselid (1996) propose that, human resources management best practices are designed to enhance the overall performance of employees within the organisation, ultimately resulting in increased organisational performance. Since libraries and information centres have always been places where people could go and be shown how to do something (use the card catalogue, operate microfiche readers/printers, use microfilm readers and, in recent years, search the online catalogue, photocopy, print), people naturally assume that a librarian can help them with all technological applications they may use. According to Fleming (2003), patrons expect that a librarian will have all the necessary technical skills to provide assistance when something goes wrong with the sophisticated equipment present in almost all libraries.

Accepting that, a new librarian of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be facing a career that will be full of challenges and surprises. The combination of all these suggest that a very important trait for the librarian of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the capacity for self-renewal (O’English, 2003). In simple terms, each best practice technique is at developing the employee, increasing their commitment, with the resulting intention to improve the organisational performance, and ultimately create a sustainable competitive advantage. For instance, computer technologies are becoming a part of many library jobs and as we progress into 21<sup>st</sup> century, the role of technology in information services will expand. What technology will become standard or adopted by a particular institution or library is anybody’s guess, but what is certain is that developing good computer skills is essential for the librarian of the future (Kasperek, 2003).

Furthermore, Pfeffer and Veiga (1999) have offered seven of the fifteen best practices thus: The first best practice is that of employee security and employment: This relates to formal policies and procedures employed by the organisation such as, formal contracts, non-redundancy clauses, equal employment opportunities, and general measures set within the organisation that offer some degree of security to the core workforce of the organisation. Library and information centres are not exempted from setting out contracts formalities and other work place policies. Academic libraries operate under Federal Civil Service laws as stipulated by Federal Service Commission in its operational procedures, one of the case studies used for this research work-the Library of Nigeria Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS) has follow the above mentioned formal procedures and policies in their workplace policies as it is written in the organisation. Thus the term “core worker” is important as Purcell (1999) believes that employee security ends with the core workforce as no measures are put in place to protect temporary staff or sub-contractors. Even more, selecting and hiring is another area that has been stressed by many HRM best practice authors, including Pfeffer and Veiga (1999), MacDuffie (1995) and Pfeffer (1995). The aim of selective hiring is to obtain the most suitable candidate for the vacant position. According to Varalakshmi, (2006) he

observes, that the past few decades have brought about revolutionary changes in information handling activities as a result of advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Such monumental changes demand new roles for library and information science (LIS) professionals. The twenty-first century information professional must possess skills in selection, content management, knowledge management, organization of information on intranets and the Internet, research services, developing and maintaining digital libraries, and bringing information resources to the desktop. People with the right skills are crucial for success and competitiveness in contemporary information environment. Therefore, this area of concern can come from internal or external hiring, which selection criteria and channels are used, interview strategies, and other methods designed to recruit the most suitable candidate for the position.

### **Human Resources Management as Strategy**

The term 'human resources' as used in organisations describe available workforce capacity devoted to achievement of their objectives. The subject has drawn upon concepts developed in industrial/organisational psychology and system theory. Human Resources have at least two related interpretations depending on context. The original usage derives from political economy and economics, where it was traditionally called labour, one of four factors of production. The perspective has shifted as a consequence of further ongoing research into more applied approaches. The subject has expanded to human resources development, also called investment in human capital. Such development may apply to individuals within an organisation or applied beyond the level of the organisation to that of industrial sectors and nations.

In fact, the expectation of librarians and information managers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century forms the basis for the need to strategies on human resources training that will bring out the best of practices information resources development. Swan (2003) urges that the successful librarian of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must argue for the relevancy of the profession in a way none of his predecessors were required to do. Hereman (2000) cited in Swan (2003) thinks, that organisation and human resources strategy work together to fulfil a mission and accompany goals and objectives for the organisation. Human resource strategy focused on decisions about how the work forces would be acquired, trained, managed, rewarded, and retained. Staffing strategy is an outgrowth of organisation and human resource strategy. It focuses on decisions regarding the acquisition and deployment of the workforces.

Likewise Oladele (2010:12) describes the need to set agenda for library quality assurance in the Nigerian university system. He is of the view that through the provision of general framework and guidelines, the Governing Council often makes explicit and implicit pronouncement on issues of standards or quality as they relate human resources, structure, funding and the general administrative mechanism of the university. In this statement human resources development definitely stands to play a crucial roles in the quality assurance. Mathew (2007) suggests that human resource is set of tools to help you organise, plan, and implement activities in an organisation. Human resources paid staff, volunteer and members of the board.

Certainly, one of the cardinal points of best practices is recruitment of best hands in an organisation; library and information centre cannot but work with professionals. The library of today is a dynamic and challenging environment that offers many opportunities to new librarians (Burd, 2003). Most times hiring and firing may be considered, since this will allow you to be proactively plan for succession planning, allows HR to coordinate resources, supervise managers or senior librarians through HR strategies. Jones, (2003) expressed this view that as "we hire librarians in the coming century; we must first remember that libraries are no longer contained within the physical walls of our library buildings. We need an excellent librarian who will not only have the basic computer skills, but will know how to update those skills as needs rapidly change during the course of a career. A really excellent librarian will not know how to use technology, but will have a vision of how technology is likely to change-over the coming years and what influence those changes will have on current investments and decisions.

### **Training as Human Resource Strategy:**

Baldwin, (2001) agreed that training is a critical component of a business human resource strategy for best practices. Effective training in any form has the potential to reduce the need to recruit from outside the firm. often a time-consuming and expensive process. Gregory (2003) observed that technical services librarian for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, must not be that librarian holed up in the "back room", sorting through sacks of catalogs to order new additions for the collection, or someone hunched over a computer, poring over lists of the library's materials,

trying to track down errant books". For best practices, the fundamental nature of technical services has changed over the past several decades. The emphasis is no longer on traditional tasks such as cataloguing or ordering materials. Now technical services librarians manage these processes, whether they are done by professionals or outsourced to vendors

### **Best Practices as a HR Strategy for Enhancement:**

In view of the fact that there is a need for effective development for library and information resource centres in Nigeria, whether academic, public, special, or school libraries. Private or public organisations, basically they all perform the same functions, with slight differences here and depending on the areas of focus. Information communication technology has brought tremendous changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the best of the practices are expected from any of the organisations and other practitioners. In terms of achieving their stated objectives, the backbone of any organisation is the HR, as they called it in old parlance 'the personnel'.

A useful starting point for this conceptualization in this discourse is the academic library. Oladele (2010) explained, that the responsibility for ensuring quality assurance in the Nigerian university system is a joint responsibility of the individual university and the National University Commission. At the individual level, the Governing Council and Senate of each university have joint responsibility of ensuring quality assurance. The Senate on the other hand provides quality assurance frameworks for issues of academic nature. These include quality control for existing programs and modalities for mounting new ones, curriculum development, requirements for determining class of degrees, career progression for academics, research and scholarship, academic linkages, issues bordering on global academic best practices and library matters.

As a matter of fact, to underscore the importance of library to the attainment of the university academic objectives, there is a standing committee of Senate on library matters. The committee on behalf of the Senate has oversight responsibilities for the development of the library. Through the committee, Senate can make pronouncements on issues pertaining to the quality of collections, personnel (HR) and general quality of services in the library. It may be the same thing in other types of library, with management at the top ensuring adequate policy and practices are made for the development of libraries.

### **Deficiency areas of Library and Information Services Provision:**

The qualities of a 21<sup>st</sup> century librarian will determine its effectiveness and development in the global best practices. Most of our libraries; public, school or special and even some local government ones are nothing to write home about, except some of the private –British Council and Whitney Young Information Resource Centre of the United States, Public Affairs Commission in Lagos and Abuja that is given us hope on how an information resource centre should be.

Jones (2003) urges that as we hire librarians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must first remember that libraries are longer contained within the physical walls of our library buildings. It is necessary therefore that information professional are well trained outside their academic qualification, by attending seminar and conferences where latest development in information and communication technologies facilities are discussed. For example, online databases, not to mention Internet sites themselves, are proliferating in greater numbers; and they also create a learning curve that must be continuously re-evaluated. Stanley, (2003) recommends that the librarian of today must keep more and more on the cutting edge of many areas of technology. The librarians are to assist patrons in making use of most of these innovations, and then the librarians themselves must keep one step or more ahead in their uses and knowledge of the data available.

Not much has been done in terms of acquiring training for library and information services personnel in Nigeria and this can be due to the fact that the type of services being rendered is yet to transcend beyond the traditional activities such as reference and information service, circulation, inter-library loan/exchange, photocopying, occasional provision of current awareness services, selective dissemination of information and manual compilation of bibliographies, indexes, and abstracts mostly on demand. There is need for adequate training to turn some of these tasks into automation by injecting adequate funding either by increasing the budget allocation, so that staff can have the opportunity of attending current training that can make them be competitive among their colleagues in terms of information provision and accessibility by users.

## **Impact of Strategy for Human Resource Management**

In the light of this Delery and Doty (1996) advocate then that "the pattern of education for librarianship, whatever its defects, is certainly not a static one. The long- standing insistence in the United States that the only method of qualification for a professional librarian is a first or second degree followed by a qualification in librarianship has had considerable influence on other countries. In contrast, most HRM do not follow this, most especially in the private or some of the special libraries owned by indigenous people. Where they even employed a qualified librarian they do not know how to grade them and their title, whether Librarian One or Chief Librarian or Documentalist, different titles or without nomenclature.

In discussing this, productivity growth depends on the implementation of new technologies and the development of new innovative ideas. Both technology use and innovation increase the need for highly skilled employees (Baldwin and Johnson, 1996, Baldwin, Gray and Johnson; Baldwin and Da Pont, 1996 cited in Baldwin & Peters, 2001). The decision to hire or to train is influence by a variety of factors. One is the nature of the skills required. If the need is for more generic skills that are readily available in outside labour markets, firms might be more inclined to hire new staff. Conversely, plant –specific (tacit) knowledge is difficult to find outside the organisation; thus training existing staff is more likely to be the preferred option in this case (Baldwin, Gray and Johnson, 1996). To the extent that research has shown that both innovation and technological change are associated with an increased emphasis on human resources. "When information resource centres or academic or research libraries adopt new technologies or innovate, they are likely to upgrade the skill level of their employees- either through recruitment or training. Most studies have shown there is interplay between the use of advanced technology and innovation and the human resources strategies that an organisation pursues. It is common knowledge, that computer technologies are becoming a part of many library jobs and as we progress into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the role of technology in information services will expand" (Kasperek, 2003).

## **Challenges of Effective Strategic HR Training:**

At this juncture, strategising human resources training for best practices and development in library and information resources is germane for effective information delivery to users and researcherS for improvement in the drive for information resources and for national development policy in Nigeria. Without doubt, there are many challenges facing human resources development which robs off on library and information resources centres' development. For instance, ten years ago, the University of Arizona librarian asked, "If we are to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what should we be doing and how should we be organising our work"? (Stolf. Morris, & Trjo cited in Bridges, 2003).

In Nigeria, it is imperative for professional bodies to come out with uniform entry qualifications for library and information resource management schools in order to create better standards for our professionals. This is happening in order professions e.g. Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria (ICAN), Nigeria Medical Association of Nigeria (NMA), Chattered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria (CIBN) etc. They regulate their profession so not anyone can just qualify for their respective courses. It made things easier for human resources management in organisation to recruit staff through them. For instance in academic libraries, only the Universities of Lagos is requesting their library staff who are also members of the academic staff to have PhD before they can be confirmed by one of the ex-Vice Chancellors, until recently when it was amended; that they should have it before they can be promoted; this is happening in University of Lagos alone, and the Nigeria Library Association is not doing anything about it.

Although, in the United States, the mandate for academic librarians today is instruction; they are no longer simply handing out information. The instructional role is now as great as or even greater than traditional reference role. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century begins, academic librarians face renewed challenges in their role or providing traditional information services in a rapidly changing world (Birks & Oesleby cited in Bridges, 2003). This has to reflect by developing a new curriculum of our library schools in collaboration with Nigeria Library Association, the Vice-Chancellors and the University librarians, at the private levels, the human resources manager should always invite NLA members as part of the interview panels when recruiting new staff.

Staff training and development; there is need to identify training needs among staff, some of the challenges facing library and information resource centres is the ability to manage new ideas coming from ICT. Perhaps, most

librarians cannot function if they lack adequate knowledge of digitization, web. 2.0 (social networking), virtual library, e-learning, open public access (OPAC), database creation and other soft ware that brings out best practices. Apparently, we all talk about global superhighway yet some of the librarians are yet to be carried along, this is what strategic human resources training is supposed to achieve in organisations.

Regardless of the level of members of the organisation, staff appraisal is one of the valuable aids in identifying individual training needs and, as indicated above in the literature review. Jordan (1998) observed that a good manager does not view appraisal simply in terms of an annual event but is constantly observing and noting deficiencies. These can be categorized in knowledge skills and attitudes...by analysing job descriptions and specifications for the knowledge, skills and attitudes required and the deficiencies which exist. Exit interviews can also be used, and this is common in private establishment, staff who resign can reveal deficiencies which training could go a long way to repairing. Where there is high turnover of staff this is especially important. Exit interview normally carried out with those who have voluntarily resigned. They are interchanges 'between the employees who is leaving the organisation and a manager or staff person of that organisation conducted close to the time that the employees leaves the organization. In some libraries, where an effort is being made to take training more seriously, surveys have been made of the staff discover the training needs which staff feel they have.

It would be garnered from the above statements, that human resources may set strategies and develop policies, standards, systems, and processes that will implement these strategies in a whole range of areas. The following are typical of a wide range of areas that can be developed to meet best practices for human resources management for effective library and information resource centres in Nigeria:

- Recruitment, selection, and out-sourcing or resourcing;
- Organizational design and development;
- Business transformation and change management for both public and private;
- Industrial and employee relations;
- Performance, conduct and behavioural management;
- Human resources (workforce) analysis and workforce personnel data management;
- Compensation, rewards, and benefits management and
- Training and development (learning management) (Wikipedia.org)

These would serve as a solution if well created and implemented, because such policies, pronouncements or standards may be directly managed by the HR functions itself, or the functions may indirectly supervise the implementation of such activities by managers, other business functions or via third -party external partner organisations. Applicable legal issues, such as the potential for disparity treatment and disparate impact, are also extremely important to HR managers in organisational development.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Effective human resources management and development, aligned with good policy and best practices are the tools required for adequate provision of information services, which have to be made available and accessible. An organisational workplace policy must reflect and centre on how to achieve set objectives drawing upon concepts developed in industrial and organisational psychology and system theory. This can only be achieved through adequate capacity building for the human resources management, through proper training. Information services is crucial for development in a competitive world, it gives room for competitive advantage among industrial and other institutional based organisations

There is need for human resources development strategy, which can enhance library and information professionals in the discharge of their duties. Library and information services have gone beyond traditional practices, the 21st century information and communication technology is a type of leverage that can assist library and information service provider to develop themselves. The surprise is that many of these ICT facilities are yet to be acquired not to talk of using them. Library and information resources centres' effectiveness in Nigeria needs pragmatic strategic human resources management before best practices in information services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be achieved.

There is need to re-develop the curriculum of our library schools all over the country, create uniform entry standard for educational qualifications, so as to create room for better recruitment personnel for human resources management.

Best practices are not only in librarianship and information practitioners, it is a new concept for corporate or firms who want quality assurance services to her clients or information users as the case may be. Staff trainings is the best and it can only come when it has been channelled to the needs of the organisation to achieve its aim and objectives; challenges can be overcome if the human resources and management determines to implement policies and practices of the organisation.

Not much has been done in the area of funding, academic libraries are not better, not to talk of private library and information centres. The academic library is the heart of the university yet this has not translated into providing adequate funding; it is on record that 10 percent of the university budget is supposed to be provided for library development, but this not the case. That is why there are no current information services in some of the academic libraries; such as books, journals, magazines, database, etc. Some of the books are obsolete, when compared to what obtains at advanced countries. The private ones are not better; most of the information resources centres are there to compliment their work and a sort of reading rooms.

Finally, the workplace policy on human resource development should capture how workers can be motivated and organisational developmental programme. Apart from the higher institutions where some of these academic libraries are located as parent body, some of the private libraries have no workplace policy for the growth of their library and information centres.

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