
Summing Up Speech

Dr. (Mrs) Bhadra J. H. Arachchige

B.Sc. Public Administration (Special) (SJP); PGDED (Colombo); PhD (Wellington); Diploma in Psychology (IPS-Colombo)

Department of Human Resource Management
Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce
University of Sri Jayewardenepura

[07]

Summing Up Speech

Dr. (Mrs) Bhadra Archchige

Our HR Conference commenced this afternoon with a most illuminating keynote address from Senior Professor H. H. D. N. P. Opatha in which he examined the topic of Research Culture. He highlighted for us the nature of research, the reasons for doing research, the relevance of research in the context of the work of an academic department, and the four essential HR requirements for creating and enhancing a research culture – competencies, attitude, behaviour and results.

Professor Opatha introduced the concept of Employee Research Performance in the workplace. This is a very interesting and thought-provoking idea which I believe organizations should seriously consider and adopt. In the very competitive and rapidly changing business environment of the present day, it is imperative that companies constantly seek new opportunities, new or improved products and services, and new strategies to implement these developments. Where do these initiatives come from? They don't fall off trees, unless perhaps you are selling fruit. They will come from serious and well-designed research. If an organization doesn't have the resource personnel with the research competencies that Professor Opatha referred to, its ability to stay abreast of change and competitive challenges is likely to be severely diminished. Our HRM graduates from the university of Sri Jayewardenepura are very fortunate in that they receive a very sound grounding in research methodologies. Considerable emphasis is given to what Professor Opatha referred to as research competencies and attitude. The research project that they undertake in their final year studies builds a foundation for research behaviour and research results. It is my hope that organizational representatives at the HR Dialogue and Conference will give serious consideration to Professor Opatha's message today, and, if they haven't done so in the past, draw upon the very valuable research skills of our graduates in the workplace.

Following on from the keynote address we moved into the Technical Session where five research papers were presented.

Dr. Dinoka Perera (Dr. GDN Perera) gave us a thoroughly researched paper on the impact of employee-organizational congruence on factory employees' job satisfaction and job

performance in Sri Lanka's apparel sector. This study is very valuable, as unless employee productivity can be improved it is going to be increasingly difficult for garment producers to maintain financial viability in the light of increasing competitive pressures from other South Asian and Southeast Asian countries.

Dr Dinoka's study reveals that, in relation to factory employees in the garment industry, employee-organizational congruence has a significant influence on both job satisfaction and productivity. For HR departments in the apparel industry this research has direct relevance. But it also leads one to ponder as to what degree these findings may be replicated in other employment sectors, both industrial and service oriented. I feel that this would be extremely beneficial if either Dinoka or other researchers could employ the same research methodology and apply it to these sectors. If this could be done I have no doubt that Sri Lankan HR practices, as well as organizational productivity, would gain significant benefits from application of the findings, especially if it leads to better strategies for increasing employee-organizational relationships.

In the second paper T. D. N. Chaturangi and W. D. T. Padmasiri looked at conflict management, which is undoubtedly a topic of relevance across the spectrum of all organizations. To HRM professionals the management of conflict is an area where considerable professional skill is required, especially in employer-employee negotiations. Their research model focused on factors influencing an individual's conflict management style for improving workplace relations and productivity. The researchers sampled bank employees in Sri Lanka's Western Province, and the quantitative approach employed a range of appropriate statistical methods used to interpret the responses to the set questionnaire.

It is interesting that the findings indicated very little difference in conflict management styles on the basis of the demographic independent variables tested, namely religion, marital status, educational qualifications, age, work experience and gender. We could therefore possibly draw the conclusion that conflict management style may relate more so to the organizational setting or the nature of the conflict itself. I hope that the authors, or other researchers, may build upon T. D. N. Chaturangi and W. D. T. Padmasiri's work and explore this very interesting area further.

Companies world wide these days go to considerable lengths and expense to develop a corporate vision and mission, which is used to support its marketing, corporate identity and strategic planning processes. What really is a corporate vision, why is it important, what is its purpose, and how is it developed and implemented? I'm sure that many of us have never stopped to really consider the answer to these questions, so I found J. M. Suranga's examination of corporate vision very enlightening. I have been involved in the development of corporate strategic management tools for a range of Sri Lankan organizations so I firmly agree with the author that the construction of a vision statement is a complex task, but, at the same time, highly important for the long term growth of an organization. I hope that Mr Suranga's interest and research into this topic can be disseminated further so that it will lead to productive outcomes in relation to corporate strategy development in Sri Lankan organizations, public and private.

The relevance of concepts developed by overseas research within the Sri Lankan context is an important area of study and has been a recurrent theme in all papers this afternoon. K. A. K. S. Rathnakara's study of the relationship between emotional intelligence and the psychological well-being of employees is a welcome addition to our HRM research base. The

fact that the study was conducted in relation to a broad range of organizational types and sizes, both public and private, adds to its value and application. The major finding is that emotionally intelligent employees possess a higher level of psychological well-being which positively impacts on their success at work and outside work.

My immediate thought after listening to K. A. K. S. Rathnakara's paper is, that if we want employees with higher levels of psychological well-being how can we ensure that they have higher levels of emotional intelligence, although, of course, EI is only one of many factors which contribute to psychological well-being. Should EI be a selection criterion? Can we make employees more emotionally intelligent? Complex issues, of course, but interesting to consider in the light of the research paper presented this afternoon.

All of the first four papers presented raised interesting and relevant issues for HRM in Sri Lanka. The final paper, Gender differences of HR Professionals by T. J. D. Silva also makes a similar contribution. This is a well-documented piece of quantitative research that applies an internationally recognized measurement tool to ascertain the gender role orientation of HR professionals. The paper concludes that HR professionals value masculine behavioural traits rather than feminine orientation behaviour. Although 36% of respondents were female, none indicated that they used a feminine role type. The study in itself gives the reader much material for thought. Why is HRM, an employment field highly represented by females, so inclined towards masculine behaviours? Could, or should, HR practices be more "feminised", if there is such a word. Is the domination of males in senior HRM positions stifling the disposition of females to develop more gentle, cheerful, sensitive attributes in the conduct of their profession. There are many more questions, but given the fact that the majority of HRM students at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura are female, the implications of the findings should certainly be considered in relation to both curriculum development and career planning.

I conclude by thanking all presenters this afternoon. Research is exciting, empowering and satisfying. I am sure that our audience will agree that the papers have left us with these feelings as a result of this afternoon's presentations.