

A Qualitative Analysis of HR Managers' Role in the Health Care Sector of Oman

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of HR managers in Omani hospitals through a qualitative analysis. The research involved in-depth interviews with HR managers and healthcare professionals in various Omani hospitals. The study found that HR managers play a vital role in developing the skills and knowledge of healthcare professionals through training, mentoring, and providing opportunities for professional development. However, several challenges, such as a lack of resources and limited budgets, hinder the effective implementation of HR strategies in healthcare organizations. Further, it was identified that most of the healthcare organizations do not have a dedicated HR department, and the HR activities are performed by the senior officials or medical doctors. The study recommends that every established health care system should have a dedicated HR department where the HR managers can collaborate with healthcare professionals to identify their learning needs and prioritize training and development programs to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Keywords: HR Manager, Professional Development, Health Care Professionals, Performance, Training

Introduction:

Health care system and Human Resource Management (HRM) both deal with the humans, and are often viewed as two different domains. On one hand HRM deals with the organizational processes like recruitment, training, performance etc., the health care system deals with the health of individuals in the society. The role of HR in health care system is less represented and needs attention as it can address the component of “*care of health care employees*”. HRM is a vital function within organizations that focuses on effectively managing human capital to achieve organizational goals and objectives. At the core of HRM is the role of HR managers, who are responsible for implementing HR strategies, policies, and practices that support the organization's overall mission. HR managers serve as the bridge between the organization and its employees, ensuring that the workforce is aligned with the organizational strategy and creating an environment conducive to employee development, engagement, and satisfaction.

Role of HR Managers

One of the primary responsibilities of HR managers is talent acquisition and recruitment (Albert, 2019). HR managers conduct interviews, assess candidates' qualifications, and make informed decisions regarding hiring and onboarding. By employing effective recruitment strategies, HR managers ensure that the organization has a skilled and diverse workforce (Malik et al., 2021; Albert, 2019). Once employees are hired, HR managers play a pivotal role in training and development (Ozkeser, 2019). They design and implement training programs that equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their jobs effectively. HR managers identify training needs, provide resources for professional development, and foster a learning culture within the organization. Continuous learning and skill enhancement not only benefit the employees but also contribute to the overall growth and success of the organization (Zareen & Khan, 2023; Ozkeser, 2019).

Further, the HR managers are responsible for performance management and appraisal systems. These managers establish performance metrics, provide feedback on employee performance, and facilitate goal-setting processes. By conducting regular performance appraisals, HR managers help employees identify their strengths and areas for improvement, thereby promoting continuous growth and development (Stone et al., 2020). These evaluations have implications on employee promotions, bonuses, and recognition, ensuring that employees are rewarded for their contributions (Zhang et al., 2019). Along this the HR managers also play a significant role in creating a positive work environment leading to better employee efficiency and job satisfaction. This includes addressing employee concerns, mediate conflicts, and ensure effective communication channels within the organization (Dhir et al., 2020). By prioritizing employee well-being and engagement, HR managers contribute to increased employee loyalty and reduced turnover rates (Boutmaghzoute & Moustaghfir, 2021). HR managers also assess the current and future workforce needs of the organization, identify skill gaps, and develop strategies to attract, develop, and retain talent (Mukhuty et al., 2022).

Health Care Sector in Oman and HRM

The healthcare sector in Oman has witnessed significant growth and development in recent years. The government has made substantial investments to improve the quality and accessibility of healthcare services throughout the country (Al Abri, 2020; Al Kalbani et al., 2020). Oman boasts a comprehensive healthcare system that provides both primary and specialized care to its citizens. The sector encompasses a network of modern hospitals, clinics, and healthcare centers equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and advanced medical technologies. The government's focus on healthcare infrastructure development, coupled with

initiatives to attract highly skilled healthcare professionals, has played a crucial role in meeting the growing healthcare demands of the population (Al Abri, 2020; Al Kalbani et al., 2020). In addition, Oman has prioritized preventive care and health promotion programs, aiming to enhance public health and reduce the burden of chronic diseases (Fadhil et al., 2022). The commitment to continuous improvement and the emphasis on providing high-quality healthcare services have positioned Oman as a regional leader in the healthcare sector.

As the healthcare sector continues to flourish, effective HRM practices become essential in ensuring the availability of skilled healthcare professionals and the efficient management of human capital (Hamouche, 2021). The role of HR managers is crucial in every organization including the ones that belongs to the health care sector (Thurman et al., 2021). Their responsibilities go beyond recruitment and administrative tasks, extending to fostering a supportive work environment, facilitating continuous learning, and nurturing talent. This article aims to provide a qualitative analysis of the crucial role HR managers play in developing healthcare professionals in Omani hospitals, highlighting the strategies, challenges, and outcomes of their efforts. As Omani healthcare sector is less researched sector from the perspective of the role of HR Managers, this study aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1. What is the current role of HR in healthcare services in Oman?

RQ2. What are the Challenges in the role of HRM within healthcare organizations in Oman?

RQ3. What are the effective solutions that can improve the role and engagement of HRM in the healthcare system in Oman?

Problem statement

The healthcare industry in Oman is experiencing rapid growth, leading to an increased demand for competent and well-trained healthcare professionals. HR managers play a crucial role in developing these professionals in Omani hospitals, ensuring they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver high-quality healthcare services. However, HR managers face various challenges in fulfilling this role. Firstly, the scarcity of healthcare professionals in Oman poses difficulties in recruiting and retaining skilled individuals. Secondly, limited training and development opportunities hinder the professional growth of healthcare professionals. Thirdly, the hierarchical structure of Omani hospitals can impede effective communication and collaboration between HR managers and healthcare professionals. Additionally, the cultural diversity within Oman adds complexity, requiring HR managers to be culturally sensitive and aware of the diverse needs and expectations of healthcare professionals. Consequently, it is important to explore the role of HR managers in developing healthcare professionals in Omani

hospitals, examining the current state of training opportunities and the challenges encountered by HR managers. By identifying effective strategies and best practices, HR managers can be better equipped to support the development of healthcare professionals, contributing to the long-term success of Oman's healthcare sector.

Objective

Based on the research questions, following objectives are established:

- To identify the current role of HR in health care services in Oman.
- To identify the Challenges in the role of HRM with health care organization in Oman.
- To explore effective solutions that improve the role and engagement of HRM in the health care system

Literature Review

Role of HRM and HR Manager

While exploring the role of HRM and HR manager in the context of health care sector, it is evident that like any other sector, the HR plays an important role in health care sector as well. This role starts with Talent acquisition and recruitment (Albert, 2019), where the HR manager needs to conduct interviews, evaluate candidates' qualifications, and make informed decisions regarding hiring and onboarding of the health care professionals. The health care sector includes two types of employees i.e., clinical and non-clinical staff (Schute et al., 2020). The employees who are responsible for providing health services are considered one of the most important inputs, performance and benefits of the health care system depend mainly on their skills, motivation and knowledge. (Sheikh et al., 2019). Through the implementation of effective recruitment strategies, HR managers ensure that the organization maintains a diverse and skilled workforce (Malik et al., 2021; Albert, 2019). The next important role that has an implication as per the topic of this study, is the development of employees through training and development (Ozkeser, 2019). HR managers need to create and implement training programs designed to equip employees with the necessary knowledge and skills for effective job performance. Identifying training needs, providing resources for professional growth, and cultivating a culture of continuous learning within the organization are all part of the HR manager's responsibilities (Zareen & Khan, 2023; Ozkeser, 2019). HR needs to establish standards for employee performance based on which the appraisal of the employees can happen. This involves creation of performance metrics, offering feedback on employee performance, and facilitating goal-setting processes (Stone et al., 2020). Regular performance appraisals conducted by HR managers enable employees to identify

their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering continuous growth and development (Stone et al., 2020). These evaluations also have implications for employee promotions, bonuses, and recognition, ensuring that employees receive appropriate rewards for their contributions (Zhang et al., 2019). As the mental health of the employees is also very important, keeping the employees free from stress is an important consideration for HRM (Bocar et al., 2022; Gavin et al., 2022). This involves addressing employee concerns, mediating conflicts, and establishing effective communication channels within the organization (Dhir et al., 2020). This helps in creation of a positive work environment, which enhances employee efficiency and job satisfaction. By prioritizing employee well-being and engagement, HR managers contribute to higher employee loyalty and reduced turnover rates (Boutmaghzoute & Moustaghfir, 2021). Additionally, HR managers assess the current and future workforce needs of the organization, identify skill gaps, and develop strategies for attracting, developing, and retaining talent (Mukhuty et al., 2022). This allows the health care sector to attract better human capital (health care professionals) who can contribute better in the field of health care and can help Oman in improving its health care index.

Health Care System in Oman

Ministry of Health (MoH) alone owns 49 hospitals (84.5% of the total) and has 84.1% of beds in Oman. Four of these hospitals serve as national referral hospitals, ten are regional hospitals that provide tertiary and secondary medical services (the last five are also provided through Vilayet Hospital) (Al-Kalbani et al., 2020). In addition, MoH operates a network of 30 regional hospitals and 167 health centers that provide PHC services. The government places particular emphasis on the role of the private sector in the medical industry (Al-Kalbani et al., 2020). Participation in this sector will help reduce the increasing burden on the public health system, create a competitive environment between the private and public health care sectors, and thereby improve the quality of care provided in the country. Therefore, the government has devised several strategies to encourage the private sector to invest in health (Alshishtawy, 2010; Kabene et al., 2006). The government is funding the private health care sector through laws that treat the private health care sector on par with those who invest in the industry. They are given equal interests and equal grants. In addition, MoH provides all the technical support that the private sector needs to set up its own hospitals and clinics. (White, 2012). In addition, MoH has privatized most of its support services in hospitals and medical institutions, allowing the private sector to play an important role in the market segment as well (Al-Kalbani et al., 2020).

HRM and Health Care sector

When analyzing global healthcare systems, it is valuable and crucial to understand the influence of human resources on the reform of the healthcare sector (Cabini

et al., 2006). Although the specific process of healthcare reform varies from one country to another, certain trends can be observed. The three main objectives encompass quality, equity, and efficiency. Various initiatives related to human resources have been implemented to enhance efficiency. One such initiative is outsourcing, which involves converting fixed labor costs into variable costs to improve efficiency (Vermeeren et al., 2014). Examples of these methods include canceling contracts, employing internal contracts, and implementing performance contracts. With good human resources hired in the organization the service quality and patients' satisfaction levels can be improved (Cabini et al., 2006). Health care quality has two types i.e., technical healthcare quality and socio-cultural health care quality. While technical quality deals with the available service to the population and their health conditions, the socio-cultural quality means the level of acceptance of services and the ability to meet expectations of the patients' (Sharif, 2020).

Human resources and their development form the backbone of any health care system; it is people who manage and perform health care services for the population (Kim, 2019). Thus, they must be effective and qualified in carrying out the tasks assigned to them, considering one of the necessary and fundamental factors that add value to the organization and make the organization capable of overlapping and adapting. (Hennekam et al., 2021) With the surrounding factors, it is a training of human resources within the organization, which makes them able to develop and adapt to make management decisions that can improve the management of the organization (Kabene et al., 2006; Vermeeren et al., 2014). At the present time, there is no health institution devoid of human resources and cannot continue or achieve the goals of health care without managing human resources, so we will talk about the importance of the role of human resources for health care, its effective role in the continuity of the health institution. (Dhanpat et al., 2020; Pillai & Senthilraj, 2019). There are many roles for human resources in health care, and each role differs according to the services it provides and the employees working in it, but all roles are important and complementary to each other (Dhanpat et al., 2020; Pillai & Senthilraj, 2019). In this study, we will talk about the importance of human resources and all they can offer to health care and their effective role in contributing to the development of health care, and how to manage human resources successfully and make them useful for health in the community.

Research Methodology

This study is based on Qualitative research, where interview was conducted with the HR leaders that includes HR Manager and HR director. For this purpose, several hospitals were selected considering the feasibility of conducting this study, and these hospitals were representative of four cities of Sultanate of Oman i.e., Sohar, Al Buraimi, Saham & Muscat. Prior interview appointments were fixed with

the concerned persons and subsequently the interviews were conducted. It was identified that most of the hospitals do not have a dedicated HR Manager or office, and the dealings like performance appraisal and other employee related activities were conducted by Medical Officer or Assistant Director of Financial and Administrative affairs.

Data Analysis

Role of HR department and HR Managers

To address this issue, a question was asked to the respondents, ***“What is the role of human resources department and HR managers in the health care sector?”***. Six of the respondents said that the HR manager is in charge for: regular and sick leave; their role in working on the resignations and appointment of staff in the hospital ;Salary certificates and orders. Reservation of travel tickets and renewal of visas. Thus, we can see that the role of the HR manager in a hospital is more clerical in nature rather than a leadership role. However, one hospital mentioned, “Human resources seek to improve health care in hospitals, so all employees in the hospital must obtain experience and training to gain knowledge that contributes to the success of health care. The role of human resources is not limited to providing service only but has reached the advancement of health care and service recipients. Human resources have a clear role in strengthening performance in health care.”

As role of HR is meaningless without understanding the authority level that HR manager enjoys, in order to address these issues, a question was asked to the respondents, ***“What are the powers available to the director of HR in the hospital?”***. The directors of HR in the hospital said that: The powers they have include a selection of nurses and heads of departments and approval of vacations and annuals Employee data in addition to appointment, providing training and employment opportunities for health personnel. In terms of authority, he (he or they?) does (if it is ‘they’, then should be ‘do’ instead of ‘does’) not have direct authority and does not have a job registration. One of the hospitals said: the authority available to the manager in human resources for the health care sector is to unify human resources management procedures in all health care sector institutions in order to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided by human resources departments in these hospitals, evaluate the performance of employees and submit reports to the company's management, publish advertisements, pay salaries, promotions, support, supervision, interviewing, evaluation and monitoring.

The researchers also considered including the expectations in terms of authority handling as well. For which the powers/ authority expected by the employees needed to be studied as well, for this, a question was asked to the respondents, ***“As a director of human resources in the health care sector what power do***

you think you should be entitled to for the development of hospital services". Three hospitals said: Determining the number of nurses in the departments and determining working hours. Powers to develop patient service in terms of rooms, medical staff, number of nurses, quality of health equipment, and others. The medical field is known for its challenges and high levels of stress, particularly because managers are responsible for overseeing doctors and nurses. In the healthcare sector, human resources director/manager play a vital role in the development and improvement of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and the quality of care delivered to patients. It is crucial for human resources to collaborate closely with healthcare practitioners to achieve these goals. By employing appropriate strategies and tools, human resources can effectively enhance employee effectiveness and job satisfaction. As the medical field evolves, it is essential for human resources in healthcare to adapt and evolve alongside it, keeping up with the changing dynamics and requirements.

Employee Appraisal and Performance Appraisal

While addressing the issue of performance appraisal, the first step is to know the basis for which the question ***"On what basis are employees in your hospital evaluated?"*** was asked to the respondents. one of the hospitals said through a report, the job performance assessment complete for Staff is evaluated by assessment factors which are: Commitment with rules, regulations and occupational safety, the quality level at performance job duties and responsibilities, honesty, and confidentiality, performing duties, respecting work deadlines, Accept advice and guidance, Desire for self-improvement, Cooperation and good conflict, overall approach. Another hospital said: Employees are evaluated through an assessment developed by the Ministry of Health. Also, on the quality of work, activity, and commitment to work times, Human resources employees in health care are evaluated on the basis of competence, good skill, and approved training certificates. Saham hospital told: new employees are evaluated every 3 months, while permanent employees have an annual evaluation. The last hospital said: employees are evaluated through a program called Al-Barwa, and soon another application will be activated to evaluate employees called *Al-Ejadah*.

Further, the hospitals were found to have performance appraisal system based on standard procedure and format prescribed by the MoH, Government of Oman. Thus, the designated authorities were found to have limited role in that. The Question asked to understand this was, ***"How HR managers determine/ evaluate the performance of the employees"***.

Challenges faced by HR managers in Hospitals in Oman

Intending to address this issue a question was asked to the respondents, ***"what challenges do you face managing HR in your hospital?"***. Five hospitals

informed that, it took a lot of time to change from the old system to the new system. Agreeing with department heads to coordinate employee vacation. Some powers are not fully available to improve the quality of services. Some difficulties in satisfying patients due to the lack of full power to improve quality, the human resource manager in the hospital faces many challenges and pressures, and works under great pressure. Examples of these challenges are: *Staff shortage: due to the limited capacity of nursing programs, and the lack of sufficient supply to meet the growing demand. This lack of arrangements has resulted in an unfair advantage for nurses. * Employee fatigue: Stress has a negative impact on both the manager and patient safety because emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion makes service providers, doctors, and nurses, unable to do their best. One hospital said: No data update.

Solution you think will solve the challenges you have been through

So as to address this issue a question was asked to the respondents, ***“what solution do you think will solve the challenges you have been through”***. Six hospitals said: Speed up the system update process. Digital transformation. Giving more powers to the human resources manager to improve health quality. Disposal of paperwork. Giving more powers. HR in the healthcare sector has the potential to alleviate some of the fatigue experienced by healthcare professionals by implementing reward and recognition strategies, along with comprehensive training programs. These initiatives can contribute to increasing job satisfaction among healthcare workers. Recognizing and appreciating their hard work and dedication through rewards and incentives can help boost morale and motivation. Additionally, providing ongoing training and development opportunities can enhance professional growth and skill acquisition, enabling employees to feel more fulfilled and satisfied in their roles. By prioritizing these strategies, HR department/managers can contribute to improving the overall well-being and job satisfaction of healthcare professionals.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study gathered insights from respondents in the healthcare sector regarding the role of HR departments and HR managers. While the majority of hospitals described HR managers' roles as primarily administrative, focused on tasks like leave management and appointment processing, one hospital emphasized the importance of HR department in improving healthcare through employee experience and training. The authority level of HR managers varies, with the power to select staff, approve vacations, and evaluate employee performance being common, but direct authority and job registration were limited. Standardizing HR

management procedures and granting more authority were suggested to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Employee appraisal factors included commitment, job performance, honesty, and cooperation, with evaluations based on ministry-developed assessments and training certificates. Challenges faced by HR managers included transitioning to new systems, coordinating vacations, limited powers, and addressing staff shortages and fatigue. Potential solutions involved system updates, digital transformation, empowerment of HR managers, and implementing reward and recognition strategies and training programs to improve job satisfaction. Overall, the responses highlighted the multifaceted role of HR departments and managers in healthcare sector, the need for effective authority handling, standardized evaluation procedures, and the importance of addressing challenges through system improvements, digital transformation, and empowering HR managers.

Recommendations

It was identified that most of the hospitals in Oman are not having trained and qualified HR professionals to deal with the HR practices within the organisation. Most of the time, the appraisal and other HR related process is undertaken by a finance staff or a general director. It also came to notice of the researchers, that many a times a senior doctor is assigned with the task of staff evaluation, hiring and appraisal. This signals a huge deficiency, and as discussed as part of introduction and literature review of this article, there is a strong need to establish a dedicated team of HR professionals who can take care of the work of HR processes and can do better justice in dealing with Human capital within the organisations. This perhaps is the reason why the HR related work seems more clerical than managerial in nature. It is important for anyone who officiates as an HR manager, to undertake the responsibility of Human Resource Development within the system.

Direction for Future Studies

Future studies on the role of HR managers in developing healthcare professionals in Omani hospitals are essential to improve the quality of healthcare services provided in the country. By exploring the challenges faced by HR managers, examining the strategies used to develop healthcare professionals, identifying the impact of these strategies on performance, and analyzing the role of HR managers in promoting continuous learning and development, future studies can provide valuable insights that can be used to improve the effectiveness of HR management in Omani hospitals. For this purpose, mixed method approach i.e., mix of Qualitative and Quantitative data is recommended from the side of the researchers.

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