1. What is HR/why is HR important/ strategic HRM

One way to set the stage at the start of a Human Resources (HR) class (and the beginning of this book) is to engage the class in a scenario that goes something like this:

Imagine you are out with friends at a local restaurant. The positive experience gets you thinking about starting your own business. You look around the restaurant, mentally capturing what you see in order to reflect on what you'll need to do to start the business and compete.

Will you be able to offer a similar menu? Of course. If these menu items are popular, there's nothing stopping you from offering a similar array; however, your purchasing power (and economies of scale) will be less than that of the big chains ... meaning that your costs will be somewhat higher.

Will you be able to offer a similar visual experience? Of course. There is nothing precluding you from purchasing similar furniture, décor, and lighting. Again, given your size and start-up status, your costs may be higher and your extended credit may be lower.

Will you be able to hire similar employees to greet, serve, and cook food for customers? Of course. There is nothing stopping you from using similar methods for identifying and recruiting employees; however, they may be more interested in a chain as it is likely to have better training programs, career opportunities, etc. In addition, you will hire managers to supervise groups of lower-level employees.

So, copy and paste. You can effectively compete against similar organizations, right?

Well, that depends. On the one hand, it's true that capital and financial resources are fairly generic. However, the competitive advantage lies in the human resources, which aren't as easy to copy and paste. What customers remember most is the experience, not just the food, but also how they are treated – interactions with the host/hostess, server, chef, etc. How customers are treated will depend on how employees are treated: how they are selected, trained, recognized, promoted, and managed. The organization's values about and culture toward employees (and customers, for that

matter), will have a huge impact on customer experiences and willingness to return and recommend.

Quite simply, of all the resources that comprise an organization, human resources are the most important, and perhaps the most difficult to copy, manage, and optimize.

Despite the importance of humans in organizations, far too often the management of HR is viewed as a policing process. In other words, HR representatives tell you what you can and can't do, and frequently after a problem has been identified. This perspective is not consistent with the perspective that the role of HR is to contribute with the organization's leadership as a strategic and proactive partner.

In this chapter, we feature several exercises that help students understand the value of HR/HRM: What it is, why it's important, and the need for thinking about HR strategically. Importantly, several of these exercises have an artistic/visual component, which may aid in reorienting HRM from a policing/reactive function to one that is more strategic and proactive. One uses pictures that convey HR practices, while another asks students to draw a picture that represents the HR culture of their organization. There is also an exercise that makes use of a new approach to slide presentations throughout the semester. Groups are encouraged to create and deliver Pecha Kucha presentations (20 slides, automatically timed at 20 seconds each, for a total of six minutes and 40 seconds) on current events in HR. This activity encourages group members to operate as facilitators in ways that intensify deep thinking and engagement, and at the same time requires students to be succinct and apposite.

Current Events in Human Resource Management

Monica Forret

PURPOSE

The purpose of this assignment is to spark the interest of students on current HR issues, and to develop their teamwork and presentation skills. Students form groups (usually 3–4) to conduct research and discuss the implications of a current HR story in the news (e.g., unethical practices and firing of employees at Wells Fargo, the impact of a proposed travel ban on companies, sexual harassment at Fox News). Each group conducts

AUDIENCE
GROUP SIZE	<10, 10–30, >30
DELIVERY
HOMEWORK
TIME
TRUST

a live presentation in class using the Pecha Kucha format (20 PowerPoint slides that transition automatically every 20 seconds), in which students describe and discuss the implications of a current HR issue they selected. Students do need to have the HR issue they are researching approved by the professor to ensure they understand the nature of the assignment.

TIME

It takes research and coordination outside of class for students to prepare for the in-class group presentation. Students need to research their issue, determine how to convey the HR issue and its implications, select the photos/words they will use in developing their presentation, and practice it so they can smoothly present it in the Pecha Kucha format. The Pecha Kucha presentations are spread throughout the semester (typically only one presentation is held in any particular class period). The presentation itself lasts just under seven minutes.

RESOURCES

When introducing the Pecha Kucha group assignment (see below for the document distributed to students), it is helpful to show a Pecha Kucha in class as most students are unfamiliar with the format. The site www.pechakucha.org has several Pecha Kucha presentations that can be shown. One Pecha Kucha that is very popular with students is Fear Pain Humor by Mark Rickmeier (www.pechakucha.org/presentations/fear-pain-humor). A computer and projector are needed in order for students to conduct their presentations.

DISCUSSION/DEBRIEF

At the conclusion of the group Pecha Kucha presentation, the instructor solicits questions from their classmates on the issue presented. Depending on the issue selected, the discussion may run for 10–20 minutes.

PECHA KUCHA GROUP ASSIGNMENT ON CURRENT HR ISSUE

To help students stay abreast of current issues in HRM and to develop presentation skills, students will work in groups to research and develop a short Pecha

Kucha presentation which will be delivered “live” in class. In a Pecha Kucha, there are 20 PowerPoint slides containing primarily visuals or perhaps a word/phrase (the audience does not read) that transition automatically using the timer function in PowerPoint every 20 seconds. I am looking for presentations on current issues in the human resource field (e.g., unethical practices and firing of employees at Wells Fargo, the impact of a proposed travel ban on companies, sexual harassment at Fox News), and the impact of the issue on employees and/or organization as a whole. The presentation topic should be approved by me in order to avoid multiple presentations on the same topic. The presentations will be followed by class discussion. The group presentations will be spread throughout the remainder of our semester. I will ask your group to select a presentation date.

While grading, I will assess (a) whether the requirements of the assignment were met, (b) the depth of analysis and degree of thoughtfulness expressed, and (c) the quality of the presentation, e.g., visuals, smoothness, practiced. In your presentation to the class, maintain eye contact with your audience (i.e., avoid reading notecards) and be sure to project your voice so everyone can hear. This should be practiced beforehand so transition between group members is smooth and the presentation is well organized.

Helpful Pecha Kucha Links

The site www.pechakucha.org includes a lot of information about Pecha Kuchas, and many that you may view for examples. There are also several “how to create” Pecha Kucha videos on YouTube that you can look up to see how to create your PowerPoint and make it advance automatically every 20 seconds.

You can utilize your own photos in your Pecha Kucha, or follow fair use policies for the photos incorporated in your presentations. The links below will help you:

Guidelines: <http://www.gcflearnfree.org/useinformationcorrectly/copyright-and-fair-use/full>

Searching for creative commons photos: <http://search.creativecommons.org/>

Human Resource Management Functions – Dots and Circles Views

Diana Smrt

AUDIENCE
GROUP SIZE	10–30
DELIVERY
HOMEWORK
TIME
TRUST

PURPOSE

The purpose of this activity is to highlight some of the major functions of HRM.

TIME

Total time needed to run and debrief the exercises: 15 minutes.

RESOURCES/SET-UP

Students work individually on the task.

Instructor brings to class:

- Timer.
- White sheets of paper, so that each student has one sheet.
- Pre-printed sheets with randomly positioned letters of the alphabet (see example at the end of the exercise). These pre-printed sheets must be placed and distributed in manila folders, so that students do not see them ahead of time.
- An Excel file with students' names and three additional columns:

	A	B	C	D
1	Name	Trial 1	Trial 2	Trial 3
2	John Smith			
3	Jane Warren			
4	Average Performance	=AVERAGE(B2:B3)		

The instructor gives each student a white sheet of paper and asks students to put their name on the sheet. Then the instructor reads the following instructions:

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

We are going to conduct some experiments. During the first of these experiments, do exactly as I say, and do not ask any questions or compare notes with other people. I have already distributed each and every one of you a sheet of paper. You will need something with which to write.

For trial 1, I want you to perform a simple clerical task. Listen to the instructions, but do not start until I tell you to do so. On my "Go", you will write the letters of the alphabet. For each letter that has a fully enclosed

component, you will place a dot inside that component. For each letter that does not have a fully enclosed component, you will draw a circle around the entire letter. For example, the letter O has a fully enclosed component, and you should place a dot inside this component, like so [instructor demonstrates on the board]:

However, the letter C does not have a fully enclosed component and should, therefore, be circled:

Your objective in completing this task is to dot and circle as many letters as you can in the allotted time of ten seconds. When I say “Go” start working and continue until I tell you to stop.

Ready, go!

At the end of the time for trial 1 (ten seconds), each participant will be asked to exchange papers with the person seated next to him or her. I will give directions for scoring:

Now score your neighbor’s work. Give one point for each lower case letter that is correctly dotted or circled. You do not give points in any instance where upper case letters were used.

There will be a lot of “zeros” and disappointed students, who might be saying, “But you did not tell us.” That is the point! Record the scores on the excel sheet.

Begin Trial 2 by saying:

Let’s consider the experiment we just completed to be a practice session. We’ll try the same task again. Does everyone know what is expected? Turn your sheets, place your name on the top of the page. You will be given ten seconds and keep in mind – only lower case letters matter!

Ready, go!

Start the second trial (again for 10 seconds). At the end, let students trade papers and score the performance. Record the scores next to the scores from the first trial.

Deliver the manila folders with the pre-printed letters. Make sure that students do not open these folders until they are instructed to do so. Begin trial 3 by saying:

Now let's repeat the same task, but change the goal. This time, your objective is to be the top performer. Thus, the person who scores the highest will receive ... [3 extra credit points or \$5]. Same rules as in the previous round apply. I have enclosed pre-printed sheets with letters in your folders. On my "Go," open the folder and dot and circle the letters. You will have ten seconds.

Ready, go!

Start the third trial (for ten seconds). At the end, let students trade papers and score the performance. Record the scores next to the scores from the second trial. Announce the winner.

DISCUSSION/DEBRIEF

After all three trials/experiments have been conducted and recorded, the instructor asks the entire class:

1. *What was the issue with trial 1? Why did so many of you do so poorly? How did you feel about the instructions that you were given? Has this ever happened to you at work? How did these feelings impact your performance?*

Students should now grasp that the trials illustrate the impact on employees when expectations are unclear. The implications for performance and state of mind, become clear.

2. *What are the HR implications for: goal setting, clear performance standards in good communications, and having the entire team involved in clarifying goals in performance evaluation?*

3. *Consider your second trial. Let's look at how the overall scores improved with clear expectations* [point at the comparison between columns one and two].

4. *What was the point of trial 2?*

Answer: It illustrated the impact of being trained/having the proper ability to do a task.

Point out that performance is affected by ability; some people are better than others at a specific task. There is a range of ability in many groups in both work and non-work settings.

5. *What is the impact of job design?*

Answer: Employees understand what they need to do.

6. *Consider the final trial. How did the experience differ from the previous one?*

Answer: A reward was offered.

7. *Did you feel motivated?*

8. *Did you feel other students in the classroom were motivated?*

9. *What can you conclude about the effects of motivation (benefit and bonuses in particular) on performance?*

The instructor then concludes with the following points:

This exercise highlights some of the major functions of HRM. More specifically, when the organization has established its mission, goals, and structure, HR then comes into play and establishes:

- *relevant job standards*
- *performance evaluation procedures*
- *job designs (so that employees understand what they need to do) and job descriptions*
- *the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to perform jobs*
- *compensation/motivation.*

a	m	c	g	h	y	g
h	i	d	k	o	m	j
o	c	q	t	e	t	u
v	e	x	f	z	a	r
p	w	r	f	d	l	p
b	k	s	y	z	n	q
n	x	g	w	u	p	b
a	j	q	h	d	z	l
o	c	q	t	e	t	u

NAME _____

SCORE _____ points

Note: Faculty should enlarge the graphic before distributing to students.

Draw Your HR Culture

Sherry E. Sullivan and Shawn M. Carraher

PURPOSE

To examine how HR practices, procedures, and programs influence employees’ perceptions of how they are treated and valued by the organization.

TIME

The total time to complete the exercise and debrief is 50 to 75 minutes. It typically takes participants 10 to 15 minutes to complete their drawings. Next, 20 to 30 minutes should be allocated to permit participants to briefly present their drawings to the class. The discussion of drawings and debrief usually requires 20 to 30 minutes. The process can be altered to accommodate larger class sizes by having only a certain number of participants present their drawings to the class.

AUDIENCE

GROUP SIZE

DELIVERY

HOMEWORK

TIME

TRUST

<10, 10–30, >30

RESOURCES/SET-UP

Each participant needs one sheet from a 20" x 23" Post-it self-stick wall pad (or a large poster sheet and masking tape so it can be posted on a wall) and magic markers of several different colors.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Participants are asked:

What movie best represents the culture of your organization's HR department? In other words, what movie best represents how your co-workers perceive the way your organization's HR department conducts business (e.g., practices, procedures, and programs). Please write the name of your chosen movie on the large Post-it paper and draw a picture representing your organization's HR culture using your chosen movie as inspiration. You will be asked to present and explain your drawing. After you have finished your drawing, please post it at the front of the room.

If participants have problems thinking of a movie, the instructions can be expanded to include television shows, books, or songs. If several members of the class belong to the same organization it is recommended that participants not be permitted to work in teams. Often, members of the same organization who work in different units or departments have very different perceptions of the organization's HR culture. These differences in how employees in various organizational units perceive the HR culture can result in an interesting discussion.

DISCUSSION/DEBRIEF

During the presentations, there are usually many "aha" moments whereby participants realize how an organization's HR culture affects many aspects of their work lives ranging from: how their immediate manager treats them, their interactions with co-workers and customers, the quality of their compensation and benefits, their work hours and working conditions, and their feelings of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The impact of an organization's HR culture on employee engagement becomes evident as participants learn about how others feel while working in either a positive or negative HR culture.

Participants working in organizations with positive HR cultures

typically discuss why they like their job or how they are inspired by their boss or co-workers. They talk about being happy or challenged while on the job. Participants working in organizations with a negative HR culture typically discuss why they dislike their job, boss or co-workers. Some are very angry or disappointed. Many mention looking for another job or just doing the minimum work required to earn their paycheck. Participants often use humor when discussing the negative HR culture of their organization.

QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. What are the common characteristics of the positive HR cultures? Why are these characteristics beneficial? How did these HR cultures make employees feel?
2. What are the common characteristics of the negative HR cultures? Why are these characteristics detrimental? How did these HR cultures make employees feel?

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Strategic HRM

Jennifer L. Schultz

PURPOSE

It is important that students gain an understanding of the strategic nature of HRM and develop a lens for better understanding the open systems dynamics of HRM and how it supports firms' competitive advantage. Students should select an image that they think best represents the definition of strategic HRM, and that prepares a rationale to be shared in a small group, and with the class.

TIME

This activity takes approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete, depending on the depth of discussion and the class size. Larger classes take longer.

AUDIENCE
GROUP SIZE	<10, 10–30, >30
DELIVERY
HOMEWORK
TIME
TRUST

RESOURCES/SET-UP

Create a set of photo image cards. Open source free photos are available from numerous sources: www.Pexels.com has a variety of images and all photos are licensed under the Creative Commons Zero (CC0) license, so they can be used without cost, for any personal or commercial purpose. Attribution is not required.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1

Present and discuss with students possible definitions of strategic HRM (SHRM), along with the operational definition.

Academic definitions

- Organizational systems designed to achieve competitive advantage through people (Snell, Youndt, & Wright, 1996).
- SHRM is the linking of HRM with strategic goals and objectives in order to improve business performance and develop organizational cultures that foster innovation and flexibility (Truss & Gratton, 1994).
- The pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities, intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals (Wright & McMahan, 1992).
- SHRM is the process of linking the human resource function with the strategic objectives of the organization, in order to improve performance (Bratton, 2001).

Operational definition

SHRM is the efficient and effective use of resources to support the mission and achieve the goals of the organization. Efficient and effective management is context based in the sense that organizations differ, and the *right* way to do something depends on the organizational culture, growth stage, sector, industry, etc.

The strategic nature emerges from the unique *bundle* of HRM policies, programs, processes, and practices that are used to develop and support current and future competitive advantage(s).

Step 2

Have students find a classmate and jointly choose a photo card that best represents the operational definition of SHRM.

Step 3

Each student should work with his/her partner to explain how the image represents (a) effective and efficient use of resources, and (b) support of a mission, vision, goals and/or competitive advantage.

Step 4

Students share their discussion with the class, first describing the image and then connecting it to the operational definition of SHRM.

DISCUSSION/DEBRIEF

This activity is undertaken early in the semester, so the instructor could select an image that resonated best with the class and incorporate that into future class content, creating a common learning artifact.

ALTERNATE OPTION

The instructor could have students select their own image.

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