

Perspectives of HR Managers Concerning HRD Professional Practices in Thai Large Private Hospitals in Bangkok for the AEC

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Abstract: *This research aims at understanding perspectives of HR managers in Thai large private hospitals concerning HRD current situations, trends, and roles of the HR departments in ensuring the readiness for the ASEAN Economic Community. The research design is qualitative research. About 12 HR managers having at least 5 years of work experiences in Thai large private hospitals accredited the Certificate of Hospital Accreditation standards for hospitals in Bangkok were participants. Purposive sampling and snowball technique were used to identify the participants. The data collection methods were the combination of semi-structured interviews with audio-recording and documents reviews. To code and categorize the obtained data systematically, ATLAS.ti 6.2 which is the qualitative software for data analysis was executed. This study revealed at least four direct areas the HR departments need focusing. These include, 1) strengthening effective training areas/programs, 2) organizing effective HR activities/interventions, 3) developing organization capacities and 4) carefully identifying groups of Trainees. Five HRD trends were shared--1) introducing new learning channels, 2) analyzing groups of trainees, 3) producing new training programs, 4) managing employees' performance and 5) Organization Development. This study, also found that the HR departments need to perform the roles of HRD practitioner include, 1) Ensuring the existence of employees' good quality of work life balance, 2) HRD specialist and 3) Organizational developer.*

Keywords: Human Resource Development, HRD professional practices, Thai large private hospitals, ASEAN Economic Community.

Introduction

In 2015, the economies of 10 ASEAN member countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam has been integrated and made stronger due to the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) agreements, promoting free-trade and single markets among ASEAN member countries. According to AEC Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs), the first 8 professional services will be allowed to move effortlessly. These professional services are engineering, nursing, architectural, surveying and accounting services, tourism professionals, medical practitioners and dental practitioners. It is interesting that in a large hospital nursing, medicine, and dentistry are three of the eight areas identified for service liberalization under the AEC. Thailand Human Development Report (2014, p.37) highlighted that "As these plans are

shaping up, there is a strong possibility that liberalization will mean an inflow of patients and an outflow of medical personnel”.

Medical services are one of the areas slated for liberalization under the AEC. Although the details are not yet worked out, it is possible that Thailand will experience an inflow of patients from neighboring countries and a leakage of medical personnel to other countries within ASEAN (Thailand Human Development Report, 2014). According to National Statistical Office, it is estimated that Thailand's population will increase to 70 million by 2019. The change in population structure will increase demand for medical devices and healthcare products. Along with government policies to promote the growth of the sector, and for the country to become the premier medical hub of Asia by 2020, the Thai medical industry is definitely bright with high growth potential (Thailand Board of Investment, 2014). Therefore, hospitals become one of the business sectors employing large numbers of medical practitioners. While medical practitioners can be employed and traveled freely from one country to another country, due to the AEC new free trade agreement.

Likewise in most organizations, the Human resource development department in a hospital is one of the departments which is responsible for addressing most concerns involving workforce ranging from planning, retaining and development. Metcalfe and Rees (2005) in addition, supported that HRD professionals have their jobs beyond training and development. Almost every function they are carrying must have a direct connection to corporate strategies. These for example include staff and team learning, career development, internal consultancy, organizational learning, knowledge management and manage the intellectual capital of their enterprise. They should understand and possess certain business and global knowledge, skills and perspective so that they can assist and provide executives with data, business viewpoints company's goals, workforce situations, trends, current workforce's competence, and the needs of HRD interventions or programs. This study is beneficial to investigate how HR managers in Thai large private hospitals which have already been International accredited such as the Joint Commission International Accreditation (JCIA) or the Hospital Accreditation (HA) view the impact of AEC and how they are preparing their organizations to face up to, facilitate and ensure the readiness of their organizations.

Research Questions

- 1) How do HR managers of Thai large private hospitals view current HRD situations for the AEC?
- 2) What are the perspectives of HR managers of Thai large private hospitals concerning HRD trends in the hospital sector?
- 3) What are the roles of HRD practitioners in Thai large private hospitals in Bangkok to ensure their competitive workforce for the AEC?

Limitations of the Study

Since this study mainly applies a qualitative approach, the generalizability of this study is limited. In other words, the research findings in this study can be different in medium or small size, private or public hospitals in Bangkok, or elsewhere.

Definition of term

Purposive sampling refer to the researcher selecting participants by choosing only those who met the following criteria: the appropriate participants are HR managers working at the large hospitals which have already been accredited the HA or the JCIA standards for

hospitals and the participants must be HR managers working in the hospital for at least five years experiences.

Snowball technique refer to the sampling criteria technique that assist researcher to identify participants, providing rich information to assist researcher's understanding of phenomenon being studied (Flick, 2007).

Review of Literature

The concept of HRD

ESC Toulouse (2002, cited in McGuire, 2011) expressed that HRD encompasses adult learning at the workplace, training, and development, organizational development and change, organizational learning, knowledge management, management development, coaching, performance improvement, competence development and strategic human resource development. The purposes of HRD could be said to be changing and evolving in accordance with Organizational strategies and goals. Moreover, the concepts and purposes of HRD are suggested to be in consonance with the individual country's requirements and structure (McLean and McLean, 2001).

In this study, HRD is the integrated use of Individual Development (Training and Development), Career Planning and Development, Organizational Development (Change Management) and Performance improvement to improve individual and organizational effectiveness.

The Importance of the Health Care within ASEAN

The health care sector in the ASEAN region provides a picture of contrasts among countries, and often between urban and rural regions within individual countries. There is already a significant cross-border movement of workers taking place in the region, both among ASEAN countries and between ASEAN countries and countries outside the region (Thailand Human Development Report, 2014). "Some ASEAN members boast world-class medical facilities and run aggressive health tourism promotion campaigns. Singapore and Thailand have been among the frontrunners in this respect. Both have undertaken significant investment in hospital infrastructure, and both are facing a potential medical and nursing staff shortage crisis. At the other extreme, Cambodia and Laos are battling to strengthen their health care systems and to provide their citizens with access to the most basic care. In between are Indonesia and the Philippines, the latter being one of the world's leading exporters of nurses. In the case of outflows from ASEAN countries, the proficiency of Filipinos in the English language is an important element in the movement of nursing professionals, considering that communication is vital in patient care" (ASEAN – ANU Migration Research Team, 2005, p.11). In Thailand, one critical factor contributing to a sharp increase in the employment of doctors is the government policy to promote the country as a medical hub of Asia (Chalamwong and Tansaewee, 2005). The reason that Thai hospitals could grow and attract many foreign customers when the country enters the AEC can also be seen when Amornvivat (2015) highlighted that the 32 hospitals in Thailand have received the international standard certificate called JCIA is the highest number of hospitals in Asia, and also that the medical cost is also considerably cheaper than in many countries (Sathapongpakdee, 2016).

Readiness of HRD for the AEC in Thai large private hospitals

Now Thai private hospitals are gearing up to take advantage of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which begins at the end of 2015. With the most competitive healthcare industry in Southeast Asia, Thailand is positioned to expand its role as a medical hub. For the Thai healthcare system, there is much to gain from the upcoming integration (Amornvivat, 2015). As health systems grow in response to increasing need and demand it will become increasingly important to conduct research in the area of human resource development for the healthcare sector. In words, Minister of Public Health Thailand regarding the approach Thailand is adopting "*I think we have stabilised the problem of our health workforce ... if we set up and follow the western standard and apply it to Thailand we will have a human capital shortage forever*" (Sintavanarong, 2014, p.11). To adapt to the coming of the AEC in Thailand, based on these trends, Tuekla (2011) further proposed that HR staff should consider some new strategic ways of doing their jobs. These include: 1) setting up new criteria for recruiting new employees; 2) developing and preparing new training programs; 3) creating new policies about work in abroad; 4) revising promotion criteria for abroad experienced workers; and 5) sharing useful information about the characteristics that the organization needs from new graduates.

In conclusion, reviewing the above literature indicated that the healthcare sector, especially in private hospitals, will be one of the most challenging business sectors influenced by the possible movement of medical staff. Therefore, The key questions for HR Executives are how to manage the flow of people and how to adapt people development practices to cope with the changing workforce.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen as the research design and takes the view of the constructivist paradigm, in order to explore the perspectives of HR managers concerning current HRD situations, HRD trends and HRD roles for the AEC in Thai large private hospitals in Bangkok, Thailand. To ensure the richness of obtaining data which could be used to address research questions, purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques all together were applied to identify suitable HR managers to be sampled in this study.

Data collection

The semi-structured in-depth interview was the main data collection technique. An in-depth interview was employed to gather the participants' perspectives. The researcher constructed the research instrument, which was an interview guide. An interview guide was developed based on steps and suggestions guided by Jougtrakul (2010) and Patton (2002). This interview guide was validated by experts to ensure that the questions were valid and reliable forgoing to the data collection process. During an interviews process, an interview guide and an audio-recorder were used to assist at the interview. The data is recorded approximately 60-90 minutes of interviews with each participants.

Data Analysis

The researcher began the data analysis after the first data collection was finished, transcribed into the word documents and using coding technique – to reduce the data and propose key concepts or themes. The findings by using ATLAS.ti 6.2, the qualitative

software for data analysis to organize, code, and categorize the data, and the results were presented through description. All data in Thai was translated into English by the researcher. The translation was reviewed and revised by the specialist native English speaker, who is familiar with the Thai context to minimize the loss of meaning in translation.

Rigor or Trustworthiness

The researcher used triangulation techniques and peer debriefing to establish credibility, using an audit trail, which is a recording of activities over time together with the reflexive notes for dependability and confirmation criteria. The researcher selected the informants according to inclusion criteria for gaining rich, in-depth data about their perceptions of HRD professionals in Thai large private hospitals for transferability, therefore, the readers are able to determine the applicability of the research findings.

Participant Profile

This study collected data by conducting in-depth interviews with 12 HR executives in Thai large private hospitals. The hospital they were working at the time this study was conducted were hospitals containing 100-400 beds. About seven hospitals in Bangkok where the participants were working in had had HA and five of them had had JCIA. The participants' ages are between 34-70 years. There are 7 females and 5 males. The participants' work experience are between 5-20 years.

Research Findings

The major findings of the study. While examples of data analysis processes were included, only themes, some direct quotations and researcher's descriptive accounts of the structures drawn from the data were reported. The assigned HR 1, HR 2, HR 3,...HR 12 were used instead of their real identifying information to connect back to the participants.

In responding to the first question, it has been found that the HR managers recognized that HR managers offered training courses specially designed for healthcare professionals such as English conversation for servicing foreign patients, IT internal customer service, legal and international health insurance. These included: 1) strengthening effective training areas/programs, 2) organizing effective HR activities/interventions, 3) developing organization capacities and 4) being more specific when identifying groups of trainees. The following are some interesting direct quotations://... *The main activities of development in the private hospital have performed continues in the past to present are training in excellent service (HR 1) ...//... Our IT staff can train to the user about new medical technology. We introduce new technology or new modern devices, we need to plan some HRD training programs to make sure that our staff knows how to use them for their patients (HR 3) ...//... We developing the front line team to improve a communication skill that is not only welcome, but the Frontline team must to advice and describe process implement to patients (HR4)...//*

Findings of the second question concerned HR managers describing their perspectives of HRD trends in the future for preparing and developing the medical staff and the organization these include:1) introducing new learning channels, 2) analyzing groups of trainees, 3) producing new training programs, 4) managing employees' performance and 5) Organization development. The following are some interesting direct quotations://... *In the future self-learning and E- learning are tools in the hospital because it is easy to access, such as a web page or training program online (HR10) ...//... My point of view in the future we must to training about Basic Life Support and Advance Cardiovascular-life Support to ER team (HR8) ...//... In the future trend of business, health will focus on a new disease, we need*

to send staff to training with new diseases and focus on quality assurance with new trends (HR5) ...//... We will develop and implement evaluation plans because all employees are committed to fostering high performance (HR6) ...//... We lookforward to making CSR and Branding to strong and success in health care business and organizations focused on Health is wealth (HR9) ...//

In answering the final research question about the roles of HRD practitioners in Thai large private hospitals, it found that the new HR practitioners must change management strategies and processes to support the hospital's goals and all medical staff perform at high-performance levels. Furthermore, to ensure that advising on job design and continuous improvement, implementation of new competencies, effective communication and consultation processes to build staff engagement these include: 1) Ensuring the existing employees' enjoy a good quality of work life balance. 2) HRD specialist and 3) Organizational developer. The following are some interesting direct quotations://... *HRD practitioners must be a good at consulting when employees have a problem, they will come to us to ask us to help them (HR7) ...//... I think HR must be an advocate and drive the organization to the hospital's goals. The hospital aimed to encourage employees' happiness in the workplace (HR 9) ...//.... HR must be a good partner. We need to make themselves as acceptable hospital administrators expert (HR10) ...//*

Discussion

Addressing to the first research question for this study is: "How do HR managers of Thai large private hospitals view current HRD situations for AEC?"

In responding to this research question, it was found that the current HRD situation in hospitals has an emphasis on training programs. Continuous medical training is given to doctors and nurses. The medical staff is well trained about patient satisfaction. Service and behavioral training are given to the front-office staff, telephone operators as well as nurses. While the former ensures that services are as per the quality standards set, the latter is essential for the positive mindset of the employees who will deliver the service. It is similar to the description of Debnath (2015) who found that the frequent training of doctors and nurses and other officials, so, they can increase their skills and efficiency to make the hospital an integral part of human resource development. The main highlights of these research findings are training programs and training activities for improving language and communication skills, service skills and cross-cultural knowledge. If the staff are not well trained to handle the customer tactfully, it can backfire on the image of the hospital. Furthermore, this study found that there is no shortage of hospital training programs for doctors. They are already skilled enough. Therefore, it is the second level staff in hospitals such as nurses, receptionists, staff and other people which require proper training programs to be carried out. The different professional groups had a specific training course for them on the topic such as medical professionals' training in new diseases, while staff training emphasized excellence in service and English communication.

The need for improving staff English found in this study matches with the work of Pandey and Sinhaneti (2013) claiming that the English speaking and listening skills were the two most important skills especially needed for healthcare personnel in their workplace. It is also confirmed by the study of Suwannaset (2013, p.58) finding that "HR executive officers in private hospitals in Chon Buri believed that medical practitioners need to improve their English communication skills and knowledge about cross-cultural issues". Culture training and patient's rights are two of the most concerning areas which hospitals must ensure their

healthcare staff is aware of so that they can communicate with patients coming from different cultures (Koh-Shun, 2004).

In summary, the HR managers in private hospitals are challenged to design new training curricula and courses for their staff and prepare new management systems in the organization to support foreign patients and prepare all staff to work with foreign colleagues from AEC countries.

Addressing to the second research question for this study is: “What are the perspectives of HR managers of Thai large private hospitals concerning HRD trends in the hospital sector?” In responding to this research question, it was found that HRD trends are changing the way firms are managed today; organizations in such an environment become competitive high performers. HRD is moving beyond a role that is exclusively supportive of business strategy. The hospitals are now in the marketplace by targeting foreign customers and need to prepare for this change. They should provide new knowledge for employees and prepare a quality reputation for taking care of customers from the AEC countries. The findings of this study were in line with other studies such as Wongprasit (2012) that the HR executives are planning a training program for tackling the language skills of medical staff and prepare English language courses for employees working with foreigners to understand communication and prevent errors. The HR managers are always creating excellent services to address customer needs, they will set up a high empathy standard of service to create a competitive advantage for the organization (Kasper, Helsdingen and Gabbott, 2006). Some hospitals have started the excellence service program (ESB) for developing a service and satisfying the customers and fulfilling expectations. It was found that some hospitals have linked reward to employees’ performance evaluation and try to link the merit increase bonus with performance and set up the KPIs and targets at the beginning of a performance management plan (Akaraborworn, 2014).

In summary, HRD trends in the hospital sector are necessary to develop the system and preparing healthcare staff in hospitals for the AEC has an importance to play, addressing the challenges of designing the HRD activity for their staff in private hospitals in the future.

Addressing to the third research question for this study is: “What are the roles of HRD practitioners in Thai large private hospitals in Bangkok to ensure their competitive workforce for the AEC?” In responding to this research question, it was found that the role of HRD practitioners is very important to the number of useful HRD activities they are able to organize. Anderson (2007) also emphasizes that HRD practitioners were primarily responsible for direct employee development through fostering learning in individuals, groups or the organization. They develop training plans with employees to ensure employees have the necessary expertise to carry out their jobs. They are in a unique position to give ongoing advice to the employee about career counseling, as well, to help employees’ enjoy a good quality of work life balance and develop their careers (Wongprasit, 2012).

The main highlights of these research findings are HRD specialist and HR developer, this study found that HR managers will be experts, bringing deep knowledge from another part of an organization to create training courses according to needs and the quality of the hospital can lead to qualification and certification in accordance with the standards such as those set by the HA or the JCIA standards. This perspective matches with Suwannaset (2013, p.58) finding that “the role of the HR department in preparing their staff towards the AEC, the researcher found that the HR department needs to perform the roles of effective corporate ambassador, CEO strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion and change agent”.

In summary, the HR Manager normally assumed that the roles of HRD practitioners as a good model for all staff and have the capability of excellent communication, have a good consulting background, have a relationship with the employee enabling them to motivate staff to work to achieve the hospitals' goals. Moreover, HRD practitioners responsibilities as a strategic partner and need to be prepared with development tools and always dedicated to a deeper understanding of the laws to ensure their competitive workforce for the AEC (Tuekka, 2011).

Conclusion

The results supported the relevance of important concepts which include individual development, organizational development, career development and performance development being the four main functions of HRD and can be described as interrelated functions within HRD. Moreover, this study contributed important new knowledge in the areas of HRD trends in the future for preparing and developing medical staff and organizations. HR Executives are necessary to integrate the different methods of administration and initiate new solutions through their HRD trends among different contexts of each private hospital to move the hospitals forward towards excellence at an international standard. The new roles of HR practitioners must involve changing management strategies and processes to support the hospitals' goals and all medical staff must achieve high performance. The implications and conclusions of this study can be used to create a competitive advantage and HR development for future studies about the HRD professionals in Thai large private hospitals within the AEC.

Implications and Contribution from the research findings

The implications are drawn from the findings and proposed suggestions to three related parties.:1) In Thai large private hospitals HRD professionals should create an emphasis on organizational development, counseling and works more in the area of organization development. For example, in this study, it was found that private hospitals in Thailand should prepare for a shortage of nurses who are fluent in English. Many hospitals try to motivate these professions if he or she passes the international examination, an additional salary will be paid. 2) HR Executives, HRD professionals provide benefit to the person who wishes to prepare themselves, and new knowledge and tools in order to develop itself in order to cope with the change. 3) For the trainers in hospitals: They can use these results as guidelines and contribute to training activities, planning, implementation, and evaluation, which are appropriate to the individual level of employees.

Recommendations for future research

Firstly, the future research may explore how the HR department in public hospitals are regulate their HR roles to ensure high competitiveness and their workforce readiness for the AEC. Secondly, the future study should investigate new forms of HRD activities and practices which have been exercised in first-grade public and private hospitals in Thailand to ensure the development of workforce service quality, cross-culture, medical technology and ethical awareness. Thirdly, the future study should also focus on more specific development in the new technological innovations to offer in-house staff training as well as comforting foreign patients in private hospitals.

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