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IMPLICATIONS OF EMPLOYEE'S PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE AND ACTIVITY OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT IN ROMANIAN TOURISM&HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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Abstract: This paper is focused on the results of a study which has as main objective the assessment of the perception that employees have on the activity and the role of the Human Resources Department in Romanian Tourism and Hospitality Industry.

The study was based on the administration of a questionnaire designed especially for this purpose addressed to the employees². The dimensions included in the questionnaire:

- The role of the HR Department from the employees' perspective
- Typical activities of the HR Department from the employees' perspective
- The relationship of the HR Department with the employees – trust and interaction
- The investment in employees– the development of the employees.

Key words: human resources department, employee's perception.

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² The questionnaire was inspired from the one used in the study titled: "The Human Resources Department - element of equilibrium or stimulating factor?", Popescu A., N. Coord., 2006, www.hr.romania.ro.

INTRODUCTION

The objectives of the HR department which cannot be achieved if there is no acceptance from the part of the employees. No matter how well created HR policies and strategies are, difficulties may appear in their implementation if they do not have the support and acceptance of the employees who are directly or indirectly involved.

The reasons for this may be various and that is why it is very important for the activity of any HR department to know and to attract its internal clients, the employees. From this point of view, the HR department has to have its own marketing, both for the top management and for the employees, as internal clients.

Objectives

The study had as main objective the assessment of the perception that employees have on the activity and the role of the Human Resources Department of a company.

Duration

May – July 2007

The study was based on the administration of one questionnaire designed especially for this purpose, addressed to the employees. The dimensions included in the questionnaire were grouped as follows:

- The role of the HR Department from the employees' perspective
- Typical activities of the HR Department from the employees' perspective
- The relationship of the HR Department with the employees – trust and interaction
- The investment in employees– the development of the employees.

Sample

130 employees from different companies which activate in Romania in tourism&hospitality industry, both Romanian and international, accepted the invitation to take part in this study.

Fig. 1: Origin of the capital of the company

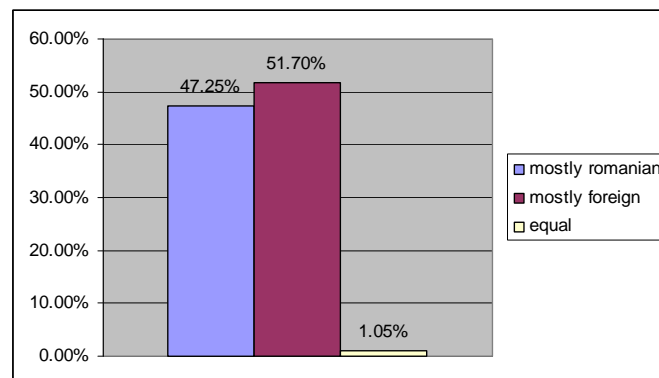


Fig. 2: Professional field of activity

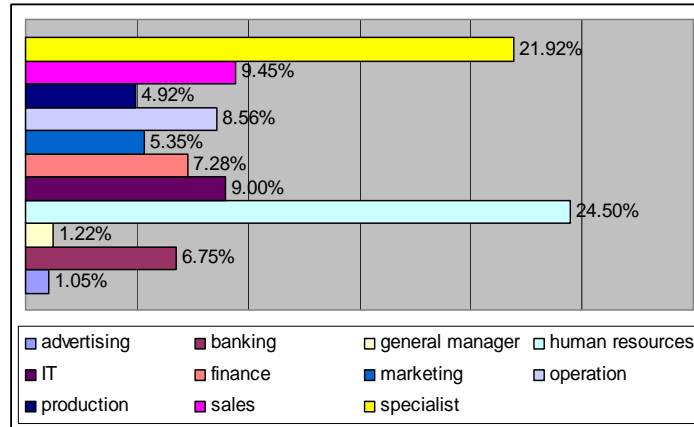
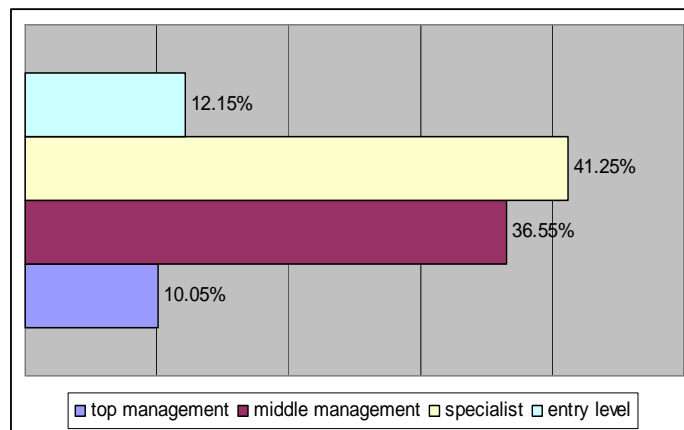


Fig. 3: Hierarchy



EMPLOYEE PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE AND ACTIVITY OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

1. Employee perspective on the role of the HR department

The objectives of the HR department cannot be achieved if there is no acceptance from the part of the employees. No matter how well created HR policies and strategies are, difficulties may appear in their implementation if they do not have the support and acceptance of the employees who are directly or indirectly involved.³

³ Amaxinoae I., *The Romanian Human Resources Market – Overview* - www.cariereonline.ro, February 2007.

The reasons for this may be various and that is why it is very important for the activity of any HR department to know and to attract its internal clients, the employees. From this point of view, the HR department has to have its own marketing, both for the top management and for the employees, as internal clients.

At a declarative level, the great majority of the employees surveyed consider that the HR department is very useful in the development strategy of any organization (Fig. 1). For them, the role of the HR department is personnel organization and administration, support or employee development, employee maintenance, development of employee relationships and stimulation of employee involvement. (Fig.2)

Fig. 4: The usefulness of the HR department from the employee perspective

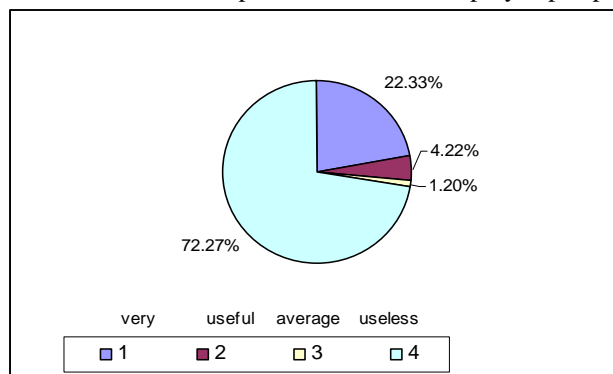
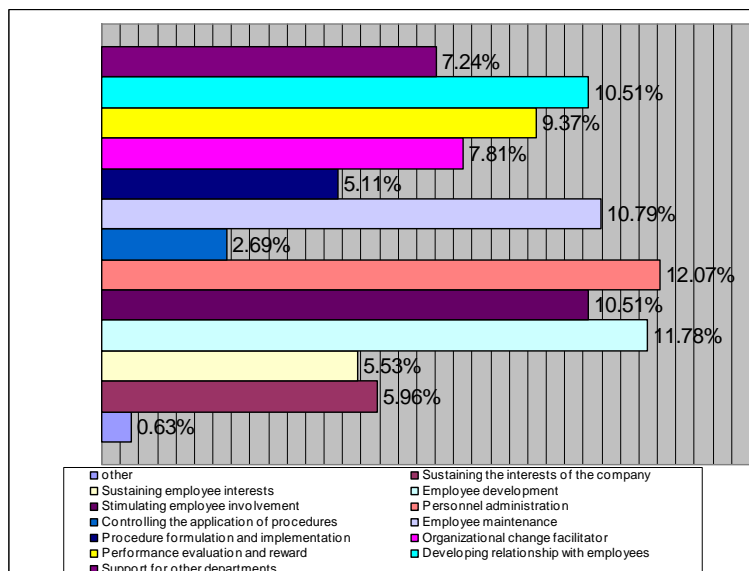
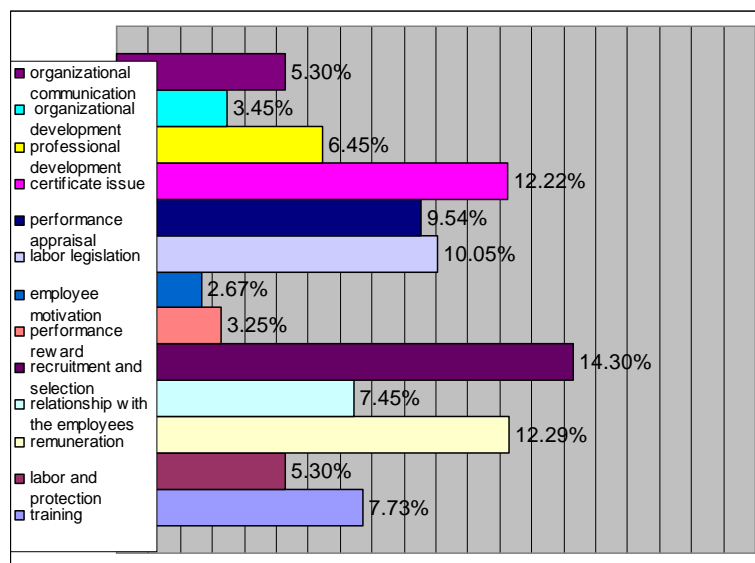


Fig. 5: The role of the HR department from the employee perspective (%)



The aspects connected to organizational strategy and development tend not to be associated to the activity of the HR department. In exchange, employees tend to associate the actual activity of the HR department in their company with recruitment and administrative activities – issue of certificates, remuneration, etc., which implies that for many employees the HR department is still the traditional “Personnel”. Very few of the participants at the study associate the activity of the HR department with activities connected to organizational communication, organizational development, employee motivation or performance reward. (Fig.6)

Fig. 6: Typical activities of the HR department – employee perspective (%)



Even if none of the participants at the study said the the HR department is very little if at all useful for the development strategy of an organization, at a functional level, 30% of them think that the HR department in their company is not very important, and 7% think that it is not at all important for their organization. The others give more importance to the role of the HR department in their company. Still, 10% of the employees in the Romanian companies consider that the HR department is not at all important.

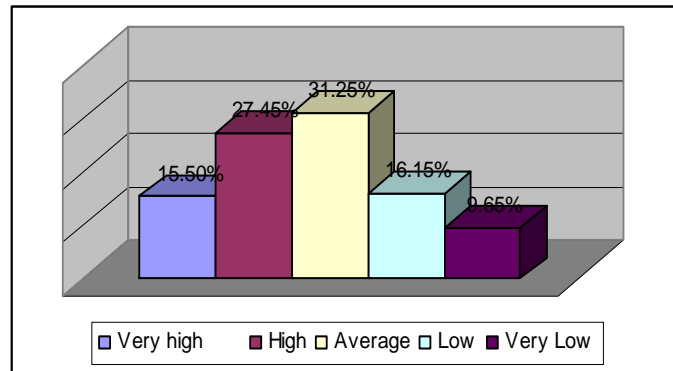
The involvement of top management in the direct relationship with the HR department and with the need for such a department is very clear, as with one exception only, all the top managers surveyed said that the HR department is not less important than other departments in their company.

If the activity of the HR department is considered useful and very useful by the employees, then the HR manager has to rise to their expectations, both professionally and personally.

2. Typical activities of the HR department seen from the employee perspective

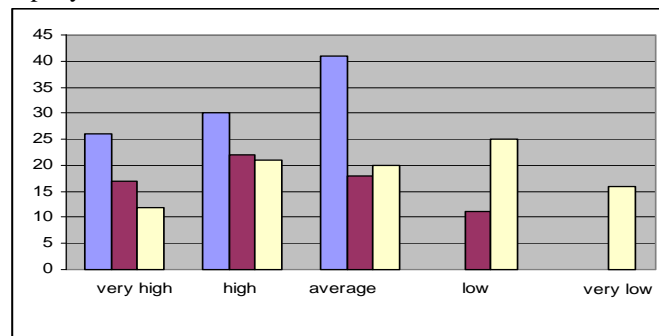
The effect of the HR department activities is felt on the long run at the level of employees, among other indicators, also in the degree of trust that they have in the activity of this department and the staff of the department. It is a relationship that goes both ways, and which should be based on feedback.⁴ The employees in the HR department interact with all the other employees, who react by psycho-social behaviors and attitudes. From this perspective, the degree of trust towards the personnel in the HR department is very high and high for 42% and very low and low for 26%. (Fig. 7)

Fig.7: The degree of trust that employees have in the HR department of the company they work for



We cannot define a unique tendency here, so their degree of trust varies according to more indicators. The difference is set at the level of top management, who generally tends to give great importance to the specialists in the HR department. (Fig.8) Another important thing to notice is that no manager, regardless of the managerial level, said that they have little trust in the HR department of the company where they work.

Fig. 8: Employee degree of trust in the HR department, according to their position in the company

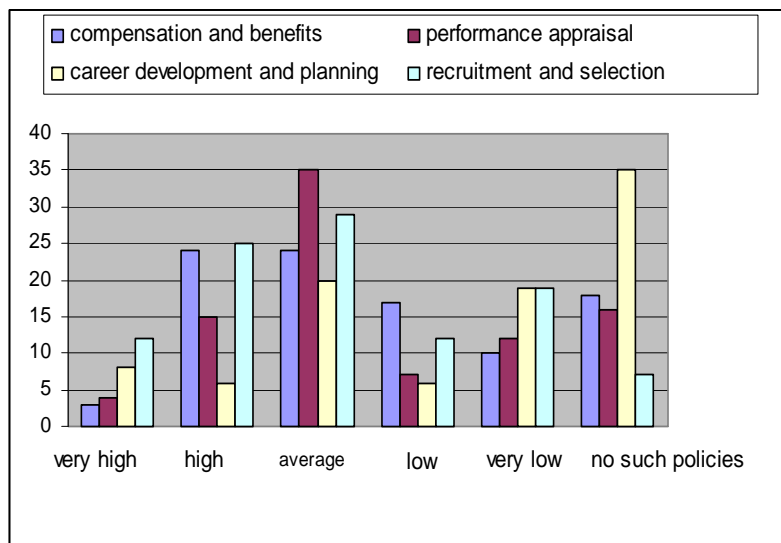


⁴ Timothy, C., *European Human Resource Management*, Blackwell Publishers Inc., Cambridge, 1996

In what regards employee satisfaction with respect to the existent HR policies, this tends to be high only for the “entrance” of the employees in the company, that is for recruiting and selection. Satisfaction regarding compensations and benefits, career planning and development is average, low and very low. (Fig.9)

A significant number of employees say that there are no such policies in the company they belong to. This may be real, but it is also possible that the employees are not aware of the existence of such policies.

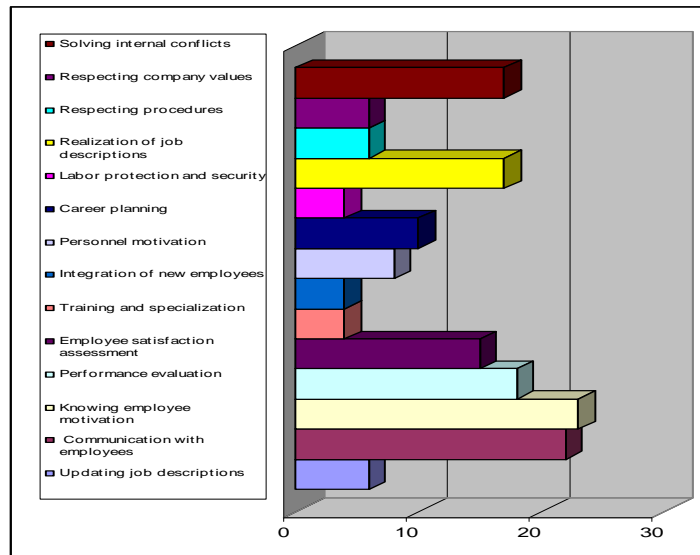
Fig.9: Employee satisfaction regarding HR policies



In recognition of their professional performance, employees tend to prefer benefits to bonuses. At the level of the individual, this has a far higher motivational value and it also corresponds to concrete needs. Usually it is much easier to motivate and set somebody into motion when the reward is correspondent to some real needs. The satisfaction of fulfilling a certain need is much higher than the satisfaction of getting some money and wondering what to do with it.

The results of the study confirm that money is not a stimulus for employee motivation. That is why, the role of the HR department should be, among others, to identify the employee motivational engines. From this point of view, only 13% of the participants at the study consider that the HR department in their company devotes time to finding employee motivational sources. (Fig.10) The main activities of the HR department, as viewed by the employees, are the following:

Fig. 10: Main activities of the HR department, from the employees' perspective



We can notice that from the perspective of the employees, the main activities of the HR department are connected to control and organization, rather than to employee relationships or feedback.

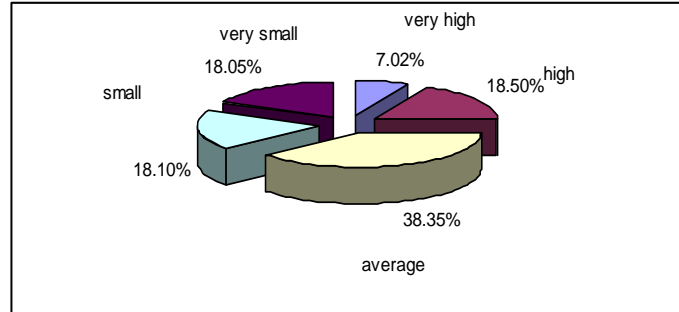
If the HR department regarded its activity as service marketing for its internal clients, the employees, then it should take into account the employees' suggestions for improving their activity and stimulating their involvement. The first suggestion that employees have is for the HR department to get more involved in motivation employees. Here the HR specialists come into the picture, as they should identify what a happy employee means. Other recommendations that employees have are about improving communication with employees and professional counseling. This kind of investments are more difficult to measure, but they are worth on the long run, having great effects on employee effectiveness.

3. The relationship of the HR department employees with the employees in the other departments – trust and interaction

In what regards the collaboration between the employees and the personnel in the HR department, the employees see this as generally positive. The employees who took part in this study think that the attitude of the HR department representatives is generally amiable, benevolent, constructive, positive and relaxed.

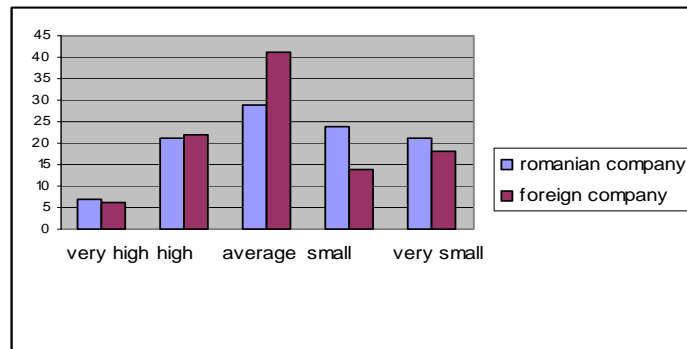
Still, there is a category of employees who think that the attitude of the HR department staff towards the other employees is not very benevolent or constructive. This category of employees considers that the HR department does not meet their needs. Only 25% of the participants at the study think that the HR department is involved in their needs and almost 40% consider that the HR department is little preoccupied by their specific needs.

Fig. 11: Openness of the HR department to employee needs – employee perspective



The lack of involvement in employee needs is felt more by the employees in the Romanian companies than by those in foreign companies (Fig.12)

Fig. 12: Openness of the HR department to employee needs – employee perspective, according to the company they work for



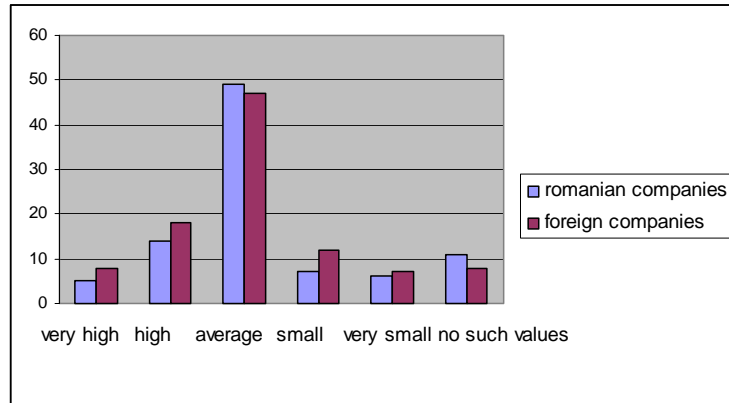
The authenticity of the communication between the HR department personnel and the other employees can also be seen in the degree to which employees respect the declared values of the company they belong to.

Only 18% of them consider that values are respected to a great extent in their company, while 42% think that the degree of value consideration is average. Here the HR department has to be able to facilitate communication, to help assimilate and internalize company values in employees' professional attitudes and behaviors.

The difference that appears here between the Romanian and the foreign companies is that 10% of the employees in the Romanian companies say that there are no declared values in the companies they work for.

Similarly, there is a greater tendency of employees in the foreign companies to appreciate that company values are to a great extent respected by the employees. (Fig.13). Generally, in multinationals, company culture is more pregnant.

Fig. 13: The degree to which employees consider that the values of the company they belong to are respected by the other employees

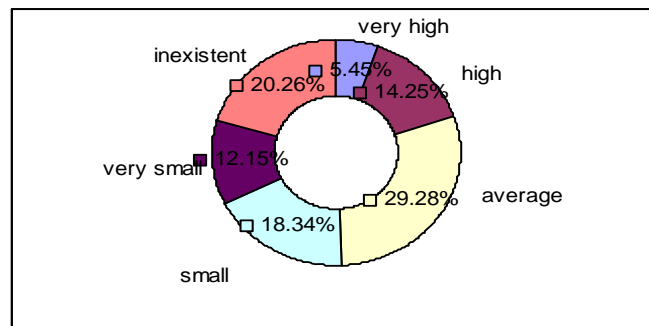


In exchange, the organizational climate is generally perceived as positive and constructive by the employees. The relationships between the employees are characterized as informal, friendly, nice, relaxed, well-meaning, constructive and based on collaboration. But in what regards trust and mutual support, employees have a few reservations, which affects the stability of professional relationships.

4. Investment in employees – employee development

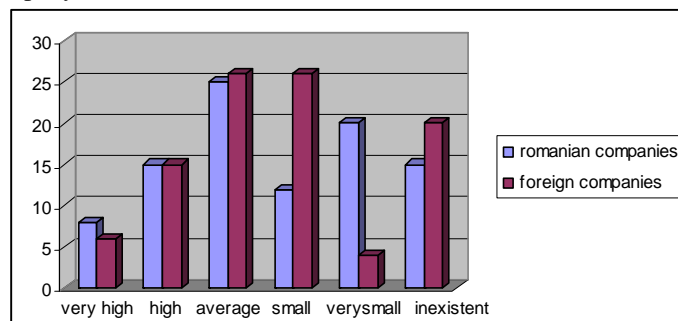
In direct connection with specialists' recommendations for the HR department, which refer to motivating employees and their professional development, there is also the perception of employees towards the identification and utilization of their potential. Only 6% of the employees taking part in the study think that the HR department in their company pay attention to this aspect, and 31% consider that the HR specialists are not really preoccupied with the identification and utilization of employee potential. (Fig.14) What is significant is that 20% of employees think that there is no preoccupation from the HR department for the employee development potential.

Fig. 14: The importance that the HR department gives to the identification and utilization of professional potential – employee perception



From this point of view, correlated also with the answers that HR managers gave (which implied that the HR departments do not give too much importance to career development and employee potential identification), the activity of the HR department should be more oriented toward employee support and development, and it should also be backed by appropriate communication. Surprisingly perhaps, there is a difference of perception between the Romanian and the foreign companies here. (Fig.15) The employees in the foreign companies feel that the HR department is not very interested in their development or in their potential.

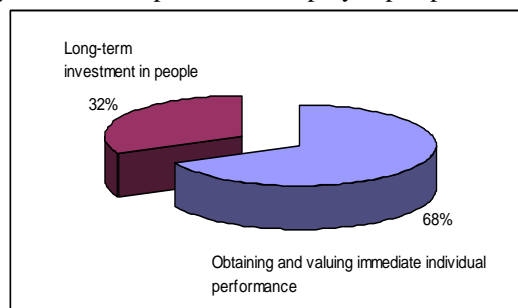
Fig.15: The importance that the HR department gives to the identification and utilization of professional potential – employee perception according to the company



The assumption that the HR department's preoccupation for employee career development is only present at the managerial level is confirmed by the fact that the only ones who think that the HR policy is oriented towards long-term investments in people are those in top management positions. Even those in middle management positions tend to think that obtaining immediate individual performance is much more important for the company than long-term investments in people.

Employee's opinion that the HR department's policy is to obtain and value immediate performance rather than to invest in people on the long run, is in direct connection with the above mentioned. (Fig.16) This aspect is extremely important, since it only envisages short-term objectives and performances, having a direct effect on staff fluctuation and employee loyalty.

Fig. 16: The policy of the HR department – employee perspective



The assumption that the HR department's preoccupation for employee career development is only present at the managerial level is confirmed by the fact that the only ones who think that the HR policy is oriented towards long-term investments in people are those in top management positions. Even those in middle management positions tend to think that obtaining immediate individual performance is much more important for the company than long-term investments in people.

In what regards career development perspectives within the company, 50% of the employees surveyed consider that the most probable thing would be for them to get more responsibilities, which would mean an horizontal development, while 30% consider that there are no internal development possibilities in their company. Only 10% consider that they have chances to promote.

The employees consider that they should be assessed by the HR department firstly on the basis of their professional performance, closely followed by their interest towards the profession⁵. Even if they think that the HR department does not pay enough attention to their development or to the identification of their potential, they think that in their assessment, things like professional development or personal motivations are less important. (Table 1) From this perspective, assessment is naturally followed by reward, which should take into account performance, not personal qualities. Personal motivation and potential are important for development, not for reward.

Table 1: Hierarchy of important aspects in evaluation – employee opinion (ranks)

	Total
Professional performance	1
Professional interest	2
Personal qualities	3
Development potential	4
Personal motivation	5

1 – most important
5 – least important

The employees in middle management positions and those in Romanian companies give more importance to the evaluation of personal qualities than to professional interest. Likewise, even if they hold a middle position in the hierarchy, those in top management and specialists consider that development potential is more important in evaluation than personal qualities. This is easier to understand because specialists want to have the chance to develop, and those in top management evaluate other employees and they pay greater attention to the development of those they directly work with.

⁵ Ilie R., *The talent shortage or the way labour market will look in the following years*, www.cariereonline.ro – March 2006.

In what regards HR managers, there is clearly a difference of opinion between them and the employees in what regards employee evaluation. (Table 2)

HR managers think that development potential is very important in evaluation, but employees do not share the same opinion. It is an apparent contradiction, because even if employees think that the HR department should pay more attention to their development potential, they do not want to be evaluated according to this criterion.

Table 2: The hierarchy of important aspects in evaluation – HR managers' opinion versus employees' opinion (ranking)

	HRM	Employees
Professional performance	1	1
Development potential	2	4
Professional interest	3	2
Personal qualities	4	3

There are different theories regarding employee motivation, each of them promoting a different aspect. Even if the tendency is towards individual motivation, taking into consideration the needs of each employee, on the whole, the participants at the study think that financial reward is the most efficient form of reward in a company (55,66%), followed by the supplementary benefits (28,30%). If it is not materialized, the moral reward is less appreciated by the employees as an efficient form of motivation. Still, those in top management positions think that moral reward is more efficient than financial reward or supplementary benefits. If performed in an organized environment and through a coherent and transparent system, moral reward may be an effective way to motivate the employees.

CONCLUSIONS

From the perspective of the employees, in the Human Resources Department of companies which activate in Romanian Tourism and Hospitality Industry, the main preoccupation of the HR department is rather towards activities of control and organization than towards aspects related to relations and feedback from the employees. If the HR department regarded its activity as a service marketing for its internal clients, then it should take into account the employees' suggestions in order to improve their activity and to involve the employees more. The first suggestion is for the HR department to get more involved in the employees' activity.

The profile of a HR manager, as viewed by the employees, includes the following qualities: diplomacy, openness towards people, decision capacity, communicability, openness to the new, strategic thinking, leadership, organization and orientation towards performance.

The employees say that they most frequently resort to the services of the HR department for administrative problems – certificate issue or others. Most employees never went to the HR department for communication problems with colleagues or superiors, conflicts, counseling or professional development requests. We deal here with a problem of trust and confidence between the employees and the personnel in the HR department.

Almost half of the employees have great trust in the people working in the HR department, whereas for the other half opinions differ.

The employees surveyed definitely prefer the salary packs with included benefits. Because their needs are different, the preference is towards a flexible system of benefits, according to the needs of each employee. This is a tendency that employees should take into account from now on as well, especially when creating compensations and benefits systems for the employees. Employees prefer benefits even instead of extra-money, when they are rewarded for their professional performance. At the individual level, this is far more motivating because it meets actual needs that employees have and the direct effect is employee mobilization.

Almost all the employees share the opinion that the HR department's policy is to immediately obtain and value individual performance, not to invest in employees on the long run. This is extremely significant because it has in view immediate and short-term performances, which directly affects personnel fluctuation and employee loyalty.

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