



VAASAN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Marcus Segervall

Best HR Practices for an International company

Observations from time spent working in HR

International Business
2023

ABSTRACT

Author	Marcus Segervall
Title	Best HR Practices for an International Company
Year	2023
Language	English
Pages	36 + 3 Appendices
Name of Supervisor	Thomas Sabel

The purpose of this research study was to write about the HR practices observed during the author's time as an Intern as a part of the Human Resources department at an international company. The study was to determine if the practices observed were successful, or to point out the shortcomings in them by comparing them to pre-existing HR theory and offer an overall guide of the best HR practices at an international company.

The research method used to collect the data for this research was strictly observations from the time spent as an intern. Working as an intern in the HR department, the author took advantage of a unique opportunity to get an insight of HR practices in the real world and was able to gauge which practices were effective and which ones needed improvement. 3 main key aspects of HR were chosen to focus on during this research which included Effective HR Systems, Company Events, and Employee feedback. These were the main HR aspects observed during the internship thus they were the ones covered throughout the research study.

The research ended up producing useful results as there was a consistent mix of effective practices to emulate as well as some which needed improving, culminating into a well-rounded report which looks to offer some insight for any company looking to improve their HR strategy.

Keywords HR, HR Systems, Employee Recognition, Employee Feedback

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 HR Background

Cambridge dictionary defines Human Resources (or HR) as "The department in a company that is responsible for dealing with employees, for example by employing them, training them, dealing with their problems, and managing their records" (Cambridge) The HR department is an integral part of any organization as they responsible for managing the companies most important assets, the employees. A functional HR department looks to keep employees satisfied as according to the University of Oxford "Happy workers are 13% more productive"(Oxford) and happier workers mean lower turnover rates. Even when an employee decides to leave a company, an effective HR team conducts an exit interview with the employee before they source a new suitable candidate and train them within a short period of time.

An effective HR team aims to create an optimal work environment for employees. This can include resolving issues employees may have with other employees or with the manner in which certain processes are conducted within the company. Employee feedback is crucial for understanding which process employees are having issues with, in order to address them. An exit interview, like previously mentioned, or employee surveys are great opportunities for an HR department to gather data on which issues can be improved.

Another pivotal aspect of creating an optimal working environment is ensuring standard processes like Administration of benefits, Payroll, or time off processes are running smoothly. With these processes running efficiently, it frees up the employees' time to focus more on their work and keeps their satisfaction levels high as they do not have to struggle with inefficient systems.

An optimal working environment can also be achieved by hosting events that value and recognize employees for both work and non-work-related motives creating more of a social atmosphere in the workplace and one that is not only work oriented.

With HR being such a contributing factor for employee satisfaction and turnover rate, it is critical that companies place much importance on always looking to improve their HR strategy and practices as a recent Gallup study by Jim Harter on the American workforce found that 13% of employees have a miserable experience at work (Gallup). This highlights the importance of research studies like mine which look to offer guidelines for the best HR practices to follow and is the reason for my topic selection.

1.1.1 Place of work Background

During My Practical Training period I had the privilege of working for A residential Cruise company called “*The World, Residences at Sea*” in the capacity of Human Resources (HR) Intern replacing the HR Coordinator while she was out for a few months and then working closely with her when she returned as well as working with the Vice President of Human Resources who was my direct supervisor.

The World is a cruise ship unlike any other in the luxury industry in that the ship is in fact less of a “Cruise Ship” and more of a Residential Yacht where the Residents aboard live in apartments that they own. With home to 165 residences, The World is the largest private residential ship on the planet (The World 2023). The Ship consists of an international community of Residents & Guests that spend extensive time exploring the most exotic and well-traveled destinations on earth, to then return onboard to a lifestyle of high class and luxury.

Being an owner of one of these luxurious apartments also comes with the added bonus of being a part of the decision-making onboard the ship. There is a board of residents that regularly meets with the senior leadership of the company where they play a big role in the key decisions that occur on board from crew wellbeing to Itinerary planning to other operational decisions. As an example, the route the Ship takes every year is different from that of the previous year and is voted on by the Residents. This sense of power in the decision-making process of the company is something unique that sets The World apart from other companies and is often an attractive proposition to potential buyers who know that they will have a say in the way things are being run.

The World has its Shoreside Corporate office in Ft. Lauderdale Florida where I was working from. From here all key decisions are made for the ship anywhere from Human Resources to Operations, to Supply Chain, to IT. With our sales and Marketing team also being based there as well. Members of the Senior Leadership team will regularly visit the ship as well to ensure everything is running in good order. The Shoreside Corporate office consisted of about 35 employees with there being well over 400 on the actual ship. Working in HR I would work with both shoreside and seaside employees depending on the assignment.

1.2 Aim Of Thesis

The aim of this thesis will be to cement the ever-important role human resources plays in a company by identifying key HR practices which were observed during my time working as an HR intern. There were practices that were commendable and some which could be improved upon. This research offers an opportunity to evaluate the HR practices observed during my practical training to offer an overall guide of the best practices to follow in a successful HR department based on my observations, which may serve as guide for businesses developing their HR strategy.

The main 3 key HR aspects that will be covered will be:

- Effective HR Systems
- Company Events
- Employee Feedback

Working as an HR intern for over half a year has placed me in a unique position to be able to observe the HR practices at the company and be able to identify the most important practices of HR along with the implementation of such, as a good idea can sometimes do more harm than good with poor implementation.

This topic is one best studied in the field with a real-world case company as when dealing with HR sometimes the best ideas on paper do not always play out well when tested with individual employees. They might find not find any use in the practice or a new practice ultimately ends up making things worse than before.

This was the reason for my topic selection, I believe that the best HR practices are the ones that are tried and tested by real working employees rather than ones that only sound good on paper.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When conducting a research paper such as this one it is important to be aware of the different research methodologies available when collecting data. The main two research methods for collecting data are qualitative and quantitative. The two methods vary in their data collection and the importance and understanding of each method should be well studied before choosing a topic and research methodology.

2.1 Qualitative vs. Quantitative

In brief according to Grand Canyon University's article "What Is Qualitative vs. Quantitative Study?" it states that "Quantitative studies rely on numerical or measurable data. In contrast, qualitative studies rely on personal accounts or documents that illustrate in detail how people think or respond within society."(Hoover) The article mentions how sources of qualitative data can include Interviews, Focus groups, Personal accounts, and Observations while sources of quantitative data can include Experiments, Questionnaires, Surveys, and Database reports. It is clear to see that Quantitative studies are more appropriate when dealing with data that can be quantified with real numbers as part of the data while Qualitative studies are more geared towards deepening the understanding of a certain topic in the real world rather than the quantifiability of data and numbers. It is important to understand the difference between these methodologies and determine which one will best suit their research purposes as each methodology comes with its own pros and cons.

Since Qualitative studies deal with less quantifiable data they are more open to varied interpretations, but this can also serve as a negative. According to the Grand Canyon University article "The qualitative method allows for creativity, varied interpretations and flexibility. The scope of the research project can change as more information is gathered. However, qualitative studies are more subjective in their results and interpretation than are quantitative studies. The expertise and perspective of the researcher may strongly influence the interpretation of results and the conclusions reached, as personal bias can be hard to manage." (Hoover)

This method can be effective when attempting to analyse certain behaviour that can not be explained in quantifiable data but one must consider the subjectivity of the person analysing the data as well as the personal bias the researcher might have when analysing the data. The researcher if possible, must attempt to remove as much personal bias as possible when analysing the data in order to have a credible research report.

With Quantitative data dealing with more objective and number-based data, this eliminates the subjectivity issue of quantitative data but this methodology also comes with cons to consider. According to the Grand Canyon University article “Quantitative results can be clearly communicated through statistics and numbers. Yet, while the objectivity is a benefit of the quantitative method, it can be viewed as a more restrictive form of study. Participants cannot tailor their responses or add context.” (Hoover) When comparing quantitative data to qualitative its clear to see that if one wishes to write a research report utilizing quantitative data in order to avoid author subjectivity and personal bias, they must understand that the report will be more restrictive in nature since it deals more with quantifiable figures and statistics and does not allow for the freedom in the interpretation of results found using qualitative means.

2.2 Selection of Research Methodology

After brief research was conducted on both research methodologies it was evident that my thesis would indeed be a qualitative research study. My research will consist of my personal account of my time spent working at *The World* and writing about these experiences in a manner that may be subjective. According to the European Journal of Education Studies’ article titled “Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods” it states “Qualitative research is not concerned with numerical representativity, but with the deepening of understanding a given problem” and “Qualitative research is therefore concerned with aspects of reality that cannot be quantified, focusing on the understanding and explanation of the dynamics of social relations.” (Queiros, Faria, & Almeida) With regards to my thesis, a qualitative method would be the best method to conduct my research as I look to deepen my understanding of HR which can be

a topic where numbers and statistics are not necessarily the best way to analyse this. HR is a very people-focused industry where the data is not so quantifiable as personal experiences and social dynamics are more relevant in this industry more than others.

There are various types of qualitative research methods one can choose from like Interviews, surveys, or case studies. For this thesis paper the selected qualitative research method will be observations. The European Journal of Education Studies article states that “Observation is a systematic process of collecting information, in which researchers observe a given phenomenon in their natural environment.” (Queiros, Faria, & Almeida) This will be the exact type of qualitative method conducted in this research paper as to not disturb the natural corporate environment at *The World* and to be able to collect valid observations of a typical HR setting. The European Journal of Education Studies article mentions some pros and cons for this qualitative method of conducting research with the unobtrusive nature of this method being a key advantage. It is also important to keep some of the negative aspects of this method in mind which include the fact that it’s a very time consuming method and that it requires significant preparation beforehand. Fortunately I had identified this to be my thesis topic from when I began my internship many months ago so preparation was no issue. The time-consuming nature of this method didn’t prove to be much of a challenge as I was collecting data while doing an internship which I had to do anyway, making the process effective instead of time consuming. The main negative aspect besides these was the one that qualitative methods suffer from as a whole, which is that the collection of data and analyses of it is dependent on the observer’s impartiality. As previously stated, when utilizing qualitative methods it is important to consider the researcher’s own subjectivity and bias. This aspect was seriously considered when collecting my data as the observations I made were of the natural events that occurred in the company with limited room for subjectivity or personal bias when collecting the data.

2.3 Reliability and Validity of Results

According to Colorado State University “Reliability is the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials.” While “Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure.” (Jonathan) It is important to analyze the reliability and validity of results in a research report in order to point out any shortcomings present in data collection methods which may skew results of the research and to acknowledge them so that the reader may consider them when reading the findings.

As this research was conducted via Qualitative means, the reliability of the results might come into question. The research collecting method for this report was the use of observations so it is possible that had this research been conducted at a different company it could yield different results as each company is different and will have different issues they face. The results obtained from this research are based on my personal experience at this particular company and could vary if done again at a different company or in another role. Nonetheless, this does not take away from the fact that the research offers important guidelines for any company who wishes to improve these specific aspects of HR. Even if situations may differ at different companies, the research still serves as insightful observations for potential HR strategy.

Due to the qualitative nature of the data collection method, results are subject to my own subjectivity and bias as results are not quantifiable. This may have an effect on validity as my version of a successful HR department may differ from others. Since results are non-quantifiable, there is no universal HR strategy that everyone will agree on so it can be difficult to determine which exactly are the best HR practices or key aspects to consider. The research however, as mentioned previously, serves as an insight into what effect these practices had on our company and can serve as valuable data for a company attempting to improve their own HR practices whether they choose to follow our example or not.

3 EFFICIENT HR SYSTEMS

The Society for Human Resource management defines A Human Resource Management system as “A software application used to store employee information and support various human resource functions, such as benefits, payroll, recruiting, training, etc.” (SHRM) Having such systems in place are fundamental for businesses and their HR departments as these HR systems facilitate basic HR processes and allow for HR functions to be conducted in a more efficient streamline manner as the same data tends to overlap from one process to another. Having a an effective HR system can make the difference from a productive HR department to an overworked HR department.

3.1 Work Observations

Throughout my time working in the HR department, I was exposed to the two main HR systems we used by the company. One used primarily for Shoreside employees called ADP, and the other one used primarily for our seaside employees called Adonis. Throughout my practical training I was given administrator credentials to both systems in order to make changes and update the systems. Working from our corporate office in Florida I was more involved with ADP but Adonis was still used on a daily basis as well.

3.1.1 ADP

ADP or Automatic Data Processing is one of the biggest providers of human resources software solutions and outsourced services in the world. Everything from Payroll, to Time off, to time and attendance is done in ADP. During my time as HR intern, I was the ADP administrator in the corporate office. If asked by employees I could enter in sick time or vacation time for them as well as access more personal documents such as paystubs etc. upon request. I could also view the time and attendance for hourly employees and ensure there were no errors.

Upon my arrival, the office was right about to switch from the outdated “ADP run” system to the new “ADP Workforce Now” system. The change in fact occurred during my first week there and I was solely responsible for the transition.

The old system had worked fine with limited issues and the new system promised a more efficient upgrade to what we currently had by allowing us to add Payroll and benefits to our system. Quick and seamless integration was promised but this turned out to be far from the truth. Plenty of employee information including vacation hours had to be manually transferred from one system to another one by one putting a huge burden on the HR department. The other issue would come in that “ADP Workforce” was a completely new portal and user login and password compared to the old system. This would lead to a wide variety of issues that would consist of anything from employees using their old credentials on the new system, to employees accidentally logging into the old system and placing time off requests to be approved when they should’ve been made in the new system. A main reason for all this confusion was due to ADP sending out a mass email to all employees with sign up instructions against our warning to not do so. The HR team still wanted to make sure all the information had transferred over from system to system correctly before we let the whole office login to the new system. Unfortunately due to a mis confusion this was misunderstood and we then had to inform employees to keep using the old system for the time being, so when the time to switch over to the new system many employees did not do so or had login issues.

Although met with a rough launch, once the whole office was on the new system it did prove to streamline most of our process by combining most of our process into one system. We could now process payroll on the same system where our time and attendance were recorded for example. Enrollment and administration of Medical benefits and Retirement plans were also able to be done on the new system which also helped streamline those processes as well.

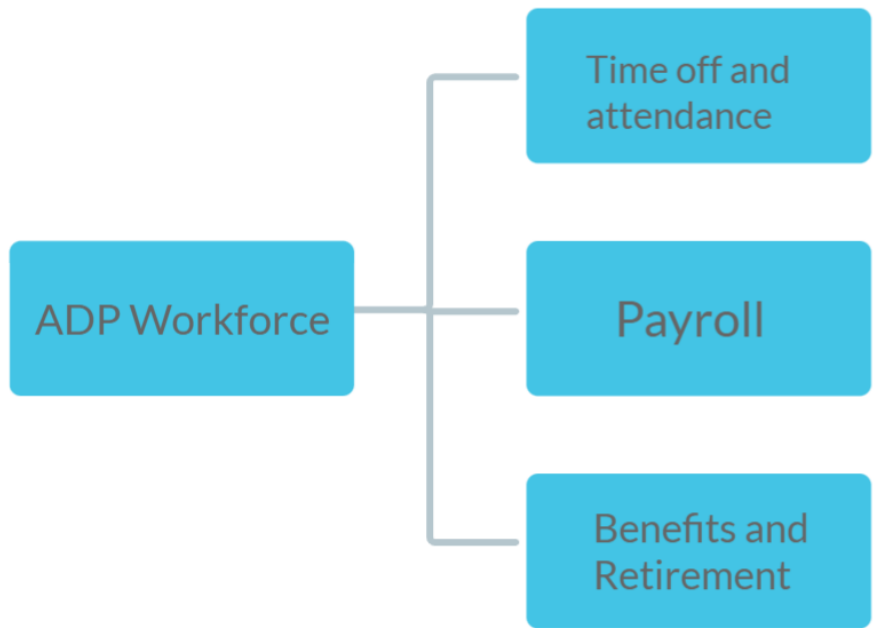


Figure 1 ADP Workforce Uses

3.1.2 Adonis

As previously mentioned Adonis was the HR system we would use with our sea-side employees, it served as our HR Software and platform for dealing with our onboard crew. Adonis is well known to be the Market Leader in HR and Payroll systems for the maritime market. On Adonis, you can find the ship's entire crew Database with all types of information about the crew member like Passport number, Position, Emergency contact, Seafarer certifications, and Visa information just to name a few. My role would be to upload new information and documents every time a new crew member would join. I would need to add both the actual copy of the document like a passport or Visa and then the manual data entry like the Passport or visa number and expiry date. Adonis serves as a great database for all the crew of a ship and it's easy to see why a ship would employ such a system in order to have everything streamlined in one place. The system also could also be used for payroll purposes as well as planning in the onboarding/offboarding process for Crew as we would have alternating crew members for each position.

3.2 HR Systems Theory

The Book “HR Transformation Technology: Delivering Systems to Support the New HR Model” was written by Allan Boroughs and Mr. Les Palmer and focuses on the new types of HR systems that are now available to businesses and about how they are able to support the HR process in a more modern with these systems available. According to the book “For most organizations there was little significant development of the HR or as, it was then more commonly known, the ‘Personnel’ function prior to the 1960s, and the focus sat mainly with the administration of core activities such as payroll or timesheets.”(Boroughs & Palmer) As times changed, HR systems became more and more advanced, this was evident in the early 2000’s with the rise of the personal computer as according to book “The development of the personal computer and related trends in computing such as client-server architectures unleashed a whole new set of computing possibilities for HR.”(Boroughs & Palmer) The invention of the internet allowed HR systems to be accessed via websites where with the use of a Username and password an HR employee could access all HR information from their PC anywhere in the world. The world of HR systems is always changing and evolving and it is important for businesses to stay ahead of new developments within HR systems, which was why our organization decided make the switch to a more modern version of our HR system going from ADP Run to ADP Workforce.

3.2.1 Integration of HR Functions

Along with advancements in technology HR systems also must be able to combining multiple HR functions into one system to become more efficient for the benefit of the HR employee. According to Boroughs and Palmers book “The development of an integrated approach to the back office meant the potential to eliminate the complexities of integrating cross-functional processes such as the management of organization structures and paved the way for fully integrated solutions that might cover multiple back office processes and geographies.” (Boroughs & Palmer) And it is in fact specifically mentioned in chapter 2 of the book that “New HR technologies have to address the need for integration on several levels” and that “there is a critical demand for related processes to share a common view of data

and drive a seamless process.” (Boroughs & Palmer). The main driving factor for our organization to make the switch to the more modern HR system was the promise of combining most of our standard HR practices into one system. As stated in the Observations, the new ADP workforce system would allow us to combine our payroll system and administration of benefits all in the same system. The book by Boroughs & Palmer mentions these two exact functions when discussing which HR functions can be streamlined into the same system. Functions that overlap should be grouped in the same system whenever possible like Payroll for example where Boroughs & Palmers book states “it is desirable for the payroll system to be integrated with the core HR system, since there is considerable overlap of data and process.” (Boroughs & Palmer). With most HR functions integrated in our HR system, it led to a simpler more streamlined system of doing our work and workload decreased for the HR department once the system was successfully implemented.

3.2.2 Proper Implementation of HR Systems

It has been established that an efficient HR system is crucial for an effective HR department. What might be equally important to mention is the importance of properly implementing the new HR system. PeopleGoal’s Article “How to Implement a New HR System” states that it is important to have a “Pilot Group” to test out the HR system before its launched to the rest of the company. According to the People Goal article “point of a pilot group is to gather feedback and to be able to change the processes to make them more relevant for employees and managers.” (People Goal) This had originally been our intention at the HR department, however due to poor communication, this sentiment was not understood by our system vendor (ADP) and the new system was launched without our consent and all employees received an invitation to sign up to an HR system that had not been properly tested yet. It was clear that strong communication was missing from us and the vendor. According to SHRM’s Article “Designing and Managing a Human Resource Information System” it states that “Some of the most common problems encountered when implementing technology projects include scope creep of the deliverables, poorly defined requirements resulting in rejected deliverables, late delivery or poor communication between stakeholders, project man-

agement and vendors. A strong project implementation team will identify problems early on to keep the project on track.” (SHRM). Looking back at our implementation, it is clear to see that proper communication was missing from us and the vendor but there also was not much of an implementation team present during the transition. There would be one or two representatives who we could approach with questions, but their response time was not optimal and would often be hesitant to solve issues for us, electing to explain to us how we could fix the issue instead. It is evident to see that our new HR system was hindered by poor implementation.

The style of implementation also presented some issue for our employees as the transition from our old system to our new one was meant to be done by the employee through a link sent to their work email where they would then be asked to create a new username and password for the new HR system. Some less tech savvy employees proved to struggle with making the transition which made the already complex situation even more complicated with these issues needing personal assistance from the HR team to correct. According to Boroughs & Palmers book “Given the historical complexities of implementation and the sometimes very public disasters that have been incurred, together with the growing complexity of IT solutions for HR, organizations would be well advised to place much greater emphasis in future on low cost, low risk, practical methods of delivering HR systems safely.” (Boroughs & Palmer). Given what the article states combined with our own experience we can see that having the employee register for the new system by themselves may’ve resulted in creating a complicated process for them and should have been handled in a simpler more practical manner.

The SHRM article states that when transitioning to a new HR system an organization can either elect to shut off the old system as soon as the new system is introduced or they can leave the old system running for some time while the transition is being made. In our case we were left with little choice as the new system was launched without our consent overnight, so we had to leave the old system still running and told employees to continue to use it while we worked on fixing issues in the new system. The Issue would then arise when employees wouldn’t know when to actually make the switch over to the new system or thought they

were already in the new system when they were in fact still in the old one. The concept of leaving both systems running at the same is a good one, allowing for a comparison of both systems to see what's different and amend any issues in the new system by comparing it with the data in the old one. The issue came with our implementation, leading to confusion among the employees. If a transition like this is to occur again in the future, it would be wise to have clear communications set up between the HR department, the System vendors, and the employees which highlight what occurs at every step of the implementation process in order to avoid confusion along with a dedicated implementation team ready to assist if needed. It is also key to have clear communication with the employees about the implementation process as well in order to make the transition as easy as possible for them and to avoid confusion.

4 COMPANY EVENTS

Company events, whether large or small, serve as a great opportunity to recognize employees for their achievements both in their working life as well as their personal and make them feel valued by the company. They can also aid in creating a more relaxing company environment where the employees are viewed more like individuals rather than just employees, which increases employee satisfaction rates. Keeping employee satisfaction rates high can have its benefits for companies as well as happy employees tend to be more productive and are less likely to leave the company in the long term.

4.1 Work Observations

Throughout my Practical training I was responsible for coordinating most of the company events we would have for our employees and was thoroughly impressed to see the effect they would have on employee morale and just how much employees would enjoy them. Employees would be celebrated for their birthdays or anniversary working at the company along with other office events. There would typically be an office event for every major holiday and employees still made it clear in surveys that they felt that there should be more, especially some after work hours.

4.1.1 Employee Recognition

As mentioned, employees would be celebrated for either their birthday or work anniversary. Every month the HR team would organize a birthday celebration for all employees who had a birthday that month and the conference room would be decorated and some cakes would be purchased with candles to sing happy birthday. Although this event didn't take long, it provided a nice break in the middle of the workday for employees to disconnect for a few minutes and refresh their minds while also recognizing employees for their special day. The work anniversary celebration was tamer with the employee receiving an anniversary pin for the number of years they had worked during our weekly employee meeting, but these little events made the employees feel recognized by the company and were much appreciated.

4.1.2 Seasonal Events

Throughout the year the HR team would host plenty of events for major Holidays including Thanksgiving, Valentines day, and Christmas for example. These events would always consist of some type of lunch with the conference room decorated to match. The thanksgiving event would consist of a Potluck where everyone would bring their own homemade dish which would really make the event seem like more of a community event which would lead to better relationships between employees.

For Christmas, the company always has a big Christmas party where they would rent a venue on the top floor of a building overlooking the whole city which the employees always enjoy. The party would have live music, food, and drinks and provide the employees with a nice relaxing environment where they could develop relationships with their coworkers creating a sense of team unity and a more positive all around work environment. Prizes would also be handed out ranging anywhere from gift cards to hotel nights and flights, making employees feel valued and promoting good company culture as well as viewing the employees as more of individuals than just workers.

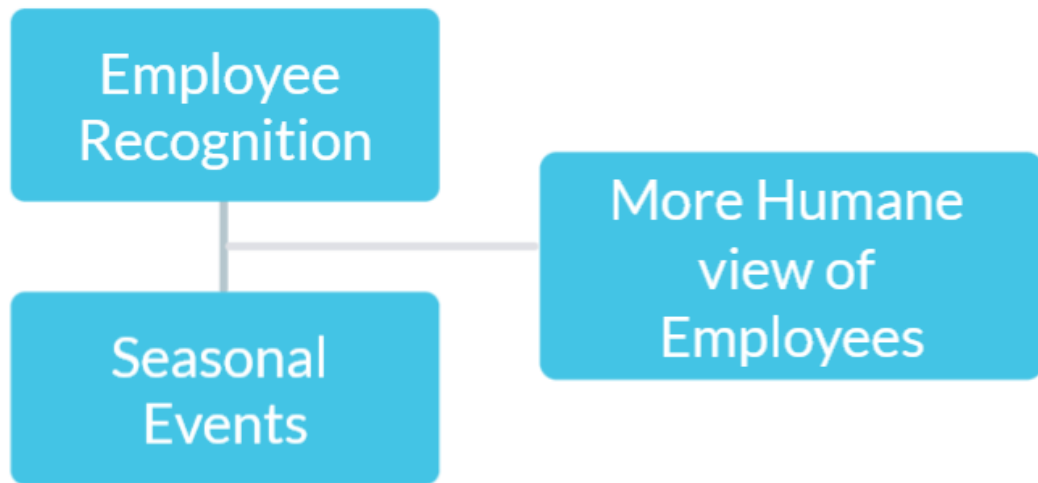


Figure 2 Effects of Company events

4.2 Theory on Employee Recognition and Appreciation

The Article “Recognizing employees: reification, dignity and promoting care in management” is one written by Associate Professor of Business Administration Gazi Islam at Grenoble Ecole de Management. In this Article Islam tackles the theme of recognition theory in organisations and the potential benefits that exist for employees from being recognized at the workplace. His findings closely parallel my own observations from working in HR so I have decided to analyse his Article as it pertains to employee recognition.

In his Article Islam mentions how he has “used recognition theory to describe how management can promote a more humane view of employees” and how “One clear advantage of a recognition perspective on work is that it extends the importance of employee well-being beyond economic concerns” (Islam) This is the main takeaway from his findings as he goes on to state that “Thus, creating a humane workplace cannot be solely discussed in terms of providing adequate benefits and material working conditions, although such conditions are, of course, important. It means recognizing that, as all human institutions, contemporary organi-

zations provide sites in which individuals build their identities, and create their life stories in a social context” (Islam)

The employee recognition events we hold at the company are geared toward this theory. When celebrating employee work anniversaries, it’s a moment to step back and acknowledge the employee as a an individual who had dedicated so many years to the company which in turn would create a healthy company culture. This effect was also felt when celebrating employee birthdays as this was a moment of recognition which did not derive from work-based criteria and presented another opportunity to create a social environment within employees.

The seasonal events would also present times where all employees would meet together for non-work-related activities and would also build the idea that the employees were more than just workers for the organization, but rather a group of individuals coming together in social context thus ensuring employee well-being beyond economic concerns.

Here it is important to clearly state the difference between employee recognition and appreciation as they are two separate topics. According to Mike Robbins’ Harvard Business Review Article “Why Employees need both recognition and appreciation” Robbins states “Appreciation is about acknowledging a person’s inherent value. The point isn’t their accomplishments. It’s their worth as a colleague and a human being. In simple terms, recognition is about what people do; appreciation is about who they are.” (Robbins) While I’ve stated that employees receive recognition for work related accomplishments like work anniversaries, personal appreciation would come in the form of celebrating birthdays or personal milestones celebrating the employee as an individual thus creating a more humane view of the employees.

Employee recognition provides great benefits for organizations as well as for employees. The most prevalent benefit being that employee recognition reduces turnover rates. According to Matt Teney’s Article “Why Recognition Is So Important” he states “There is an undeniable link between employee recognition and employee retention. Companies that recognize employee achievements see less turnover than companies that do not make employee recognition a part of their

organizational culture.”(Teney) Furthermore according to Annamarie Mann and Nate Dvorak’s article “Employees who do not feel adequately recognized are twice as likely to say they’ll quit in the next year.”(Mann & Dvorak) The HR department is fully aware of these statistics which is why plenty was done to ensure that employees felt recognized with special anniversary celebrations for landmark years (like 5, 10, 20) and appreciated with celebrations like baby showers and birthdays.

Keeping company turnover rates low for a company can be invaluable especially when one begins to consider the cost of onboarding a new employee to replace the departing one. According to William Craig’s Forbes article “3 Reasons Why Employee Recognition Will Always Matter” William states that “ According to some estimates, welcoming a new hire into the fold could cost as much as \$3,500 for recruitment and as much as \$1,200 and 32 hours per year in ongoing training. All told, a new hire might cost \$4,129 and as many as 42 days in lost or compromised productivity.”(Craig) With these expenses and loss in productivity it would stand to reason why a company would try to do their best to hold on to their employees by recognizing them and not have to deal with these additional complications.

5 EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

It is important for every successful business to take feedback from their employees and listen to what they have to say. Collecting employee feedback can be done in various ways either through a suggestion box, actively listening in person, etc. but the most effective measure of collecting employee feedback is through the use of a survey. A well-executed survey can lead to great insight as to how employees feel and make the employees feel like they are being listened to by management. It is crucial for management to act upon the feedback received in order to demonstrate to employees that management is committed to fixing the issues that were mentioned in the feedback.

5.1 Work Observations

Around halfway through my practical training, the company had its annual employee satisfaction survey where employees could give their opinions and feedback on what they liked at the company and what could use improving. Plenty of effort was placed on promoting the survey to ensure the maximum number of employees were able to take it before we analyzed the results. There were signs in the kitchen and reception to remind employees and even reminder emails were sent. This ultimately led to a positive result as we had over a 90% response rate in the office.

These survey results were then analyzed and the HR team highlighted the major issues that the employees faced and the major positives and presented them to the rest of the office in order to give them a general idea of how everyone in the office felt. The following week we had a people specialist come in to do some workshops with the employees based on the survey to get a better understanding of why they felt that way about the negative aspects and what could be done to fix this. The employees' supervisors were not present in order to give the employees more of a sense of freedom to say what they truly felt without feeling like they were being judged by their supervisors. The senior leadership instead had their own workshop where they themselves reflected on what could be better done from

their side as supervisors to ensure that these issues could be resolved from a leadership side.

The results of the survey were taken quite seriously and I was surprised to see just how fast the HR team had acted on them with our various workshops and was able to see changes made soon to reflect the survey results. Much attention was brought to the lack of events that are held after-hours, so a regular happy hour day was introduced for employees to be able to socialize when they get off from work.

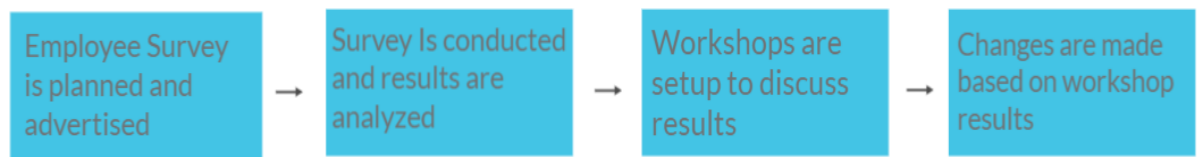


Figure 3 Employee Survey Timeline

In addition to the annual survey, there is a suggestion box that stays in the kitchen year-round where employees are free to anonymously leave any suggestions or comments they might have about anything. At the end of the day the CEO of the company checks the box and reads what people have written to have an idea of how people feel in the office. Between the survey and the suggestion box, the concerns of the employees were indeed being well listened to and their feedback was considered for future decisions and was all done in a smart sensible manner.

5.2 Employee Feedback Theory

Employee Feedback is a fundamental aspect of every organization and is important for establishing a good company culture. Giving employees the opportunity to give quality feedback can be as beneficial to the organization as it is to the employee. The Organization here has a great opportunity to collect data on what

they might be doing wrong and potentially improve on it but many fail to give employees a voice or do not make any meaningful changes with the information collected. According to a poll of 2000 Working Americans in Benjamin Laker's article "3 Ways Listening To Employee Feedback Can Contribute To Business Growth" "Companies' failure to act on employee feedback might be driving employee flight. Nearly half (41%) of Millennials said they don't believe their feedback leads to meaningful organizational change and more than half (53%) reported they're looking for a new job. The lack of attention to employee feedback is felt at all levels, according to the study. Nearly half of respondents (45%) and 40% of executives also say they don't believe their feedback leads to meaningful change." (Laker) As stated by the article, it is of the utmost importance for organizations to realize the importance of listening to their employees and acting upon the results. Many agree that one of the best ways to judge employee feedback is through an employee satisfaction survey, however this is only true if the survey is carried out properly. Conversely, a poorly executed employee survey can raise expectations among employees only for there to be no change and lead to an HR disaster. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has an article on managing employee surveys in the most effective manner possible and I will be comparing how the employee survey at my company was conducted with their findings as they share many similarities.

5.2.1 Survey Planning and Execution

When scheduling the employee survey According to the SHRM Article "it might be good to avoid conducting the survey during cycles that could skew the results either positively or negatively. Bonus season or high-stress periods can provide an unrealistic picture of normal employee satisfaction if year-over-year normal operating results are the objective." (SHRM) This was well considered when planning our survey as the Employee Excellence Survey was conducted in October during a period where the company was not undergoing any issues at the moment or during bonus season or any other time where employee satisfaction could've potentially been inflated. It was important for us to organize the survey in October to have an accurate depiction of the year as a whole before the end of year bonus period and high stress period.

The Survey itself was conducted by a third-party organization called “People 2 Strategy”, which helped with employees feeling anonymous when answering the survey as according to the SHRM article “Having a third-party vendor conduct the survey usually helps assuage employees’ fears of being identified on surveys.” (SHRM) Anonymity of employee answers was essential for conducting a successful survey as we wanted to ensure the most truthful answers from employees without them having fears of their answers harming them later on. People 2 Strategy saw it best fit to conduct an electronic survey in order to make it more convenient for employees and to be able to analyze data easier. The SHRM article matches this exact sentiment as it states that “Employers are increasingly using sophisticated tools to analyze the data generated from their employee surveys, which makes having the results available electronically even more valuable. Using an electronic system for inputting employee feedback usually results in higher participation rates due to ease of access and in quicker analysis of the data.” (SHRM) This theory produced outstanding results as the company had over a 90% employee survey response rate. The electronic nature of the survey would make the analysis of the data easier by People 2 Strategy as they would be able to analyze and display the data in a variety of different ways which would help us connect the results to potential issues needing correcting.

5.2.2 Question Design

The style and design of questions was also a point heavily emphasized throughout the article and was also something that was prioritized during our survey. According to the SHRM article “Survey design experts advocate the use of items that seek responses based on a numerical scale, such as 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “strongly disagree” and 5 meaning “strongly agree.”(SHRM) It was no coincidence that the survey used by the company was done using this exact question format. These kinds of questions also make it easier to analyze data as information is easier to understand and group together when collecting data on a 1-5 scale. The article mentions this exact point when it states, “The major problems with including open-ended questions are the volume of data generated and the difficulty grouping and analysing them” (SHRM) Having these types of questions made for easier

analysis but the types of questions asked can also play a big impact on survey results and is something our survey can look to improve on.

According to the (SHRM) article “Surveys should be sprinkled with negative statements. If a survey is filled with positive statements such as "My boss is considerate" or "My team is helpful," the results may be unrealistically rosy.” (SHRM) When revisiting our last survey, it is evident to see that we may’ve fell victim to doing this as almost all our questions were designed with positive statements that the employee could then agree with or disagree with. By presenting mainly positive statements the survey could’ve mistakenly depicted a potentially false positive image by the survey takers. Although our survey did produce negative answers to be addressed in the future, it is important to keep in mind this theory when conducting future employee surveys and to have a fair share of both positive and negative statements to produce optimal results.

Question design can also play a role when trying to analyze and decipher data from the survey. According to the SHRM article “A survey question should not be "double-barreled"—two topics that are grouped into one question, even though they may be related. An example: "The pay and benefits are excellent at this company." Employees' responses may not yield useful information because they may think pay is great but not benefits, or vice versa, leaving leadership with no clear follow-up plan.” (SHRM) Once again these “Double Barreled” questions were found throughout our Employee Excellence Survey with that exact example of “The Pay and Benefits are Excellent at this company” being one of our exact questions along with others like “I have the right Tools and equipment to do my job right”. Now with the context of this article it’s simple to see how these types of questions can be misleading as the company is not left with a clear answer when these questions are asked. It is important to note that just because two topics might share similarities, it does not mean that they can be grouped into the same question to make the survey briefer. Our survey results were most likely hindered by Double Barreled questions like these and it would be wise to remove them from surveys being done in the future.

5.2.3 Survey Results and Follow Up

The most important part of a Survey is arguably what occurs after the survey in response to the feedback. It is important to have a follow up session with employees about survey results especially soon after the survey results have been published According to the SHRM article “Such teams should be in place within a month after the organization releases the survey results to signal to employees that senior management is serious about responding to the findings. Employers should monitor the follow-up ideas and recommendations from any cross-functional teams to ensure that change and progress occur.”(SHRM) Our follow up sessions would occur weeks after results were published and would be handled by People 2 Strategy. During These Follow up Workshop Sessions the biggest issues found in the survey would be highlighted and employees would be given the chance to give their honest feedback on why they thought these issues were prevalent. These findings would then be reported back to HR where a strategy would be developed for fixing these issues. We were cautious as to not have any members of the senior leadership attend these workshops as According to the SHRM article “A majority of the team should consist of non-senior employees” (SHRM) By having the senior leadership present at these workshops it may prevent some employees from speaking the truth if they know that their supervisor will be directly listening to what they have to say. Instead, all senior leadership would have their own workshop where they discuss what can be done from the Senior Leadership perspective to address these issues brought up by employees in the survey. As previously stated, all employee comments and recommendations from these workshops would be noted and changes would be made to reflect the results and to demonstrate that the company is serious about responding to the findings. This experience directly matches the SHRM Article where it is mentioned that “Employers should monitor the follow-up ideas and recommendations from any cross-functional teams to ensure that change and progress occur” (SHRM). Overall, how a company decides to follow up survey results matters just as much as conducting a survey in the first place. It does not matter how well a survey is designed if there is no intention to follow up on the results and make a change in the organization and although our survey design could’ve benefited with better question design, the overall issues

were addressed and changes were implemented in a matter of weeks ultimately culminating for a successful Survey overall with some room for improvement.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Overall Impressions and Verdict

The overall experience with upgrading our old HR system to the new one can be summarized as a great idea with poor execution. The new system offered more efficient solution for our HR process by combining a multitude of HR functions under one system like Payroll, Administration of Benefits, Time & attendance, etc. The combination of these HR process under one system is what made idea of switching systems attractive as it would signify less of a workload for the HR team. The main issue here instead was the implementation of such system. One of the main causes for our poor communication was the lack of clear communication between us and the HR system Vendor (ADP). It was poor communication which caused the poor launch of the system, and it was poor communication which made it challenging to solve any issues that would arise while implementing the new system also due to the limited implementation team present. Had there been more clear communication between the HR team and vendor these problems may've never surfaced or not been as severe at the least. Clear communication between the HR team and the employees also made the launch of the new system more challenging than need be as well. Had the employees been properly explained the launch of the new system and how to register for it rather than the vendor handling that part, there may have been less confusion when switching systems. Overall, the idea to continuously be vigilant about new HR systems that can increase efficiency and productivity in the HR department is an exceptional idea but one must ensure proper Implementation of these new systems so that they can produce their desired outcome of efficiency as opposed to causing more confusion and headache for the HR department and the employees.

Of the 3 aspects of HR being analysed in this research paper, "Company Events" looks to be the one to take the most positive from as per the observations. The number of events held by the company was a key factor in the recognition of employees which proved to be massively important as higher employee recognition leads to lower turnover rates. With the amount of time and effort the HR team would spend on onboarding new hires, it was evident to see why employee recog-

tion was prioritized in such a fashion. As stated in the Company Events chapter, emphasis was placed on personal recognition as well as work-related recognition. This would mean that events such as birthdays were given as much attention as work anniversaries in order to have a more humane view of employees and to create more of a social environment between employees. Overall, *The World* was very successful with its company events and recognizing its employees to the point where the only room for improvement regarding this aspect was to make an effort to have more of these events going forward in the future as brought up by an employee during our survey. Events such as the ones mentioned can make employees feel recognized by humanizing the employees as well as recognizing them for non-work-related reasons which in turn leads to lower turnover rates.

Employee feedback is essential for companies to gain an insight on what issues employees could be experiencing and offer possible solutions. Our company for example was able to determine that our employees wanted more employee events due to employee feedback from our survey. Of course, the most effective way to collect employee feedback is with an employee survey and at first glance it appeared that we had conducted a fairly flawless survey, however after additional research, some room for improvement was discovered. In terms of the positives, the planning for the survey was properly handled with enough survey promotion done beforehand to ensure maximum survey engagement as well as scheduling the survey during periods where results could not be skewed like during high stress periods or bonus times. The use of a 3rd party company for the survey is highly recommend as they organized an online survey which not only made taking the survey and collecting the data more convenient, but also made it to analyse and display the data in various metrics. Where our company survey excelled beyond all metrics was in our follow up process. By having a follow up session with the employees detailing all the points of concern as soon as the results were published, it showed that management was serious about rectifying the issues presented in the survey. The additional workshops where employees were free to express their opinions on how things could be improved only bolstered the feeling of management taking the feedback seriously. It was also important to actually act on these results and changes were made based on these workshops to address em-

employee concerns like adding additional company events from the example mentioned in the beginning leading to an overall successful survey. Question design was where our employee survey could be improved as I noticed that our survey used “Double-Barrelled” questions where two topics are grouped in one question like “The pay and benefits are excellent in this company” for example where it’s hard to decipher the results to questions like these. Our survey also suffered from having all the questions stated as positive statements with no negative statements which may’ve cause the results to be more positive than they should’ve been. Overall, with some minor adjustments made to question design, our employee survey process serves as a positive example to look at when attempting to conduct an employee survey to collect employee feedback.

	HR Systems	Company Events	Employee Feedback
Positive	New Effective system streamlined various processes and saved the HR team valuable time.	Made employees feel recognized and appreciated. Created a social work environment and led to a more humane view of employees.	The survey was well planned in anticipation. The survey was followed up with employee workshops. Action was taken quickly due to survey results.
Negative	Implementation and lack of communication.	Lack of Events	Survey Question design

Figure 4 Overall Findings

6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

With this being a qualitative research study based on real world observations, recommendations would include testing to see if this research is subjective to the company I worked with or if these three key HR aspects are commonly shared across various companies. There could be a chance that other companies do not place as much importance to these three key HR aspects as they may have other HR issues which are more prevalent. Collecting a general consensus of the key aspects most companies value and then offering recommendations for these aspects could lead to more useful results for more companies to consider.

Other recommendations are more oriented towards how the research was carried out. Observations were the only means of qualitative research carried therefore the research could have perhaps benefitted with the use of interviews from fellow employees to determine if the correct HR key aspects were being addressed and if there was common consensus with the HR practices being recommended. Having these interviews would reduce the subjectivity and personal bias of the report as it would no longer be based on just my observations and experiences, but rather that of the employees at the company. Reducing the subjectivity and bias of results in a qualitative study is always advisable, as it can lead to more reliable and valid results.

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