

Human Resource Practices in Organized Retail: A Study of Selected Outlets

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ABSTRACT

The human capital of any organization is largely responsible for its success or failure. Therefore, the human resource management (HRM) functions play an important and catalytic part in providing a competitive advantage to any organization. The organized retail sector has registered a burgeoning growth in the recent past and has given a strong fillip to the economy of India. This, in turn, has underscored the vital need for improved and more effective HR practices. Due to this direct association between human resource efficiency and organizational productivity, organizations have started paying more attention to the HR practices that they follow. This paper has tried to study the various HR practices in three selected retail organizations, namely, Reliance Super, Spencer's Retail and Big Bazaar. The objectives of the paper were to analyze the human resource practices followed by the selected organized retail outlets in Greater Noida (UP), to identify various problems and challenges faced by HR managers in the execution of HR policies and to suggest measures to solve HR-related problems in the organized retail industry. It was found that training, performance appraisal, proper utilization of skills and abilities of the employees and career development were the major areas of concern. In terms of level of perception towards the HR practices, it was found that, in general, employees had an 'average' perception towards the prevailing HR practices in all the three organizations.

Keywords: Human Resource Practices, Organized Retail, Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

The success of an organization largely depends on its human resources. Therefore, the functional area of human resource management becomes a key functionary in running the day-to-day mechanics of the organization and also in attaining its strategic goals. The retail sector has been hugely instrumental in catalyzing the growth of the Indian economy. The emergence of organized retail has brought about sweeping and cataclysmic changes in this industry. Organized retailing is bracing itself to measure up to the global standards of performance and customer satisfaction. The fiercely competitive nature of business has underscored the need for adoption of better HR practices in organizations. The companies dealing in organized retail in India are increasingly acknowledging the fact that their core strength lies in the efficiency of their manpower and they need to continuously cement their workforce in order to compete in the marketplace, and for this they need to pull up their socks as far as their HR practices. HR practices, therefore, become the focal point of management attention.

Organized retailing refers to the business activities undertaken by the registered entrepreneurs/retailers. These include super-markets, company-owned stores and retail chains and also privately owned large retail stores. India being a country largely dominated by conventional consumers preferring to shop majorly from unorganized retailers, the growth of the organized retail has been relatively low. But due to positive and encouraging steps taken by the Government to boost organized retail, a spurt has been identified in the organized retail scenario. As per the June 2018 report of India Brand Equity Foundation, India has occupied a remarkable position in global retail rankings and the country has high market potential. India is expected to become the world's third largest consumer economy, reaching US\$ 400 billion in consumption by 2025, according to a study by Boston Consulting Group. India is ranked first in the Global Retail Development Index 2017, backed by rising middle class and rapidly growing consumer spending (www.ibef.org). India's retail market witnessed investments worth US\$ 800 million by Private Equity (PE) firms and wealth funds in 2017 and, as per the report of rating agency CRISIL, the share of organized retail in India is expected to rise to 10% by 2020, up from 7% in 2016-17.

Ever since the economic reforms of 1991, better known as 'Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization' (LPG), retailing in

general, and organized retailing in particular, has been growing by leaps and bounds. The retail market in India is still highly heterogeneous and highly skewed towards unorganized retail. Therein lies the real opportunity for organized retailers.

Human resource management is of paramount importance in any organization. It primarily helps place the right man on the right job, in addition to acclimatizing him to the new work environs, equipping him with the requisite skill set through a rigorous training regimen and helping him progressively raise the bar of his performance. Human resource managers are also entrusted with the added responsibility of maintaining the entire workforce in a state of high collective motivation, creating cordial relationships among co-workers, keeping the costs of labour in check and ensuring the physical, mental and emotional well-being of all employees. As far as the retail sector is concerned, human resources are involved in a wide-ranging spectrum of tasks - procurement, store-keeping, book-keeping, sales and marketing, training and customer service. All of these are crucial links in the chain. These activities, if allowed to happen in an uncoordinated manner, can wreak havoc with the overall performance and productivity of the company, which, in turn, will adversely impact the image and goodwill of the organization. Sound and healthy HR practices help the organization keep its internal customers happy so that they, in turn, can keep the external customers happy. In one of the studies conducted by PwC, it was found that inability to translate the corporate vision into reality, real estate issues, infrastructural inefficiencies and talent management problems were the major stumbling blocks for organized retail in India. Amongst the workforce issues the study found that 30% retailers considered talent acquisition, 45% considered talent development and 25% thought talent retention as the cause for slow growth of organized retail in India (www.pwc.in). In spite of all the difficulties, India has a huge market potential and, as per the reports of CRISIL and FICCI over the next 10 years, India's retail market is expected to grow at 7% and by 2020 it is estimated to obtain a size of US\$ 850 billion (www.ficci.com).

This paper mainly aims to address the issues of talent management, as pointed out by the findings of PWC, in the outlets of three representative companies of organized retail, namely, Reliance Super, Spencer's Retail and Big Bazaar, located in Greater Noida (UP).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although human resource management has been identified as one of the most important functional areas of management, there are a number of challenges that are faced by the HR professionals on a daily basis. Rao (2008) in his book titled 'Human Resource Management' has mentioned workforce composition, workforce size, changing socio-cultural dynamics, changing employee expectations, advancements in technology and globalization as the major challenges of HRM. Singh and Dhawan (2013) have pointed out that the HR issues don't just end with the procurement of the right kind of talent but the biggest challenge is to develop and retain them. Rutherford, Buller and McMullen (2004) have considered maintenance and delivery of service quality as a big HR challenge. Francis, Ikemefuna and Mbah (2011) regard multi-skilling as a challenge for HR professionals because the changing environment requires a jack of all trades rather than a master of one.

Due to the emergence of organized retail a number of researches have specifically been undertaken to identify issues that could be held responsible for this sector still struggling to achieve optimum growth in India. McGuire and Cross (2003) have explored the interrelationship of human resource management and competitive strategy. They have also stressed the need for retail organizations to leverage their competitive advantage. The researches underscored the significance of positioning in the retail and service sectors. It clearly identified that competitive strategy has a huge impact on the HR practices that retail organizations follow. The study further identified that the issues relating to cost considerations as part of competitive strategy would have significant impact in determining the overall approach taken towards human resource management. Sohel and Roger (2002) tried to assess the effectiveness of seven HR practices put forth by P. Feffer with respect to country and industry, laying special emphasis on the way these practices impacted the operational performance of the employees. Truss (2004) has dealt with the key role played by human resources in franchise firms. The management of the franchise firm to a great extent is dependent on the effectiveness of human resources, which would ultimately prove to be the driving forces for goal achievement. The entry of MNCs has further highlighted the importance of HR practices in the organized retail sector. Som (2006) has brought out the impact of MNC competition on Indian retail firms. The need for the adoption of innovative HR practices by retail firms to tackle the competition offered by MNCs

has been highlighted. Unless the Indian firms implement innovative HR practices, there will be a threat of all these big corporations tapping the market potential and pushing back the future growth of organized retail in India. The article titled 'New Challenges in Retail Human Resource Management' by Merkel, Jackson & Pick (2010) focuses on the challenges of human resource management in the retail sector. The authors have laid down the need for professional Human Resource Management. They have considered retailing as a highly labour-intensive sector. Hence, not only competent human resources but also sound HR practices are needed for the success of this sector. The future of retailing requires more of a proactive approach of HRM as there is a need to adapt and respond to the environmental challenges.

Chakraborty (2007) has tried to examine the HR practices in organized retail outlets, exploring the evolution and growth of the organized retail sector in India. It further tries to identify newer dimensions in the sector and the issues faced by HR practitioners. A study undertaken by Singh and Mishra (2008) also reveals how the challenges of HR are increasing with the rapid rise in the retail sector. It has been suggested in the study that to meet the requirements of this sector HR professionals must equip themselves to not only attract but also to train, nurture and retain manpower. Their article titled 'Human Resource Management in Retailing' throws light on not only the problems of HR but also suggests measure to overcome these challenges and how these organizations can be made more effective. The organizations that start to recognize the usefulness of their human resources would definitely have an advantage over their competitors (Lakshete, 2011). Bhatla and Pandey (2014) have identified mmanag part-time employees, thin profit margins, reluctance to pay high wages, lack of experienced manpower, job hopping, acute shortage of skilled sales force, cultural and workforce diversity, lack of competent workforce, stressful nature of work, inadequate training, etc. as the major challenges of HR in the retail sector. Khillare and Kamble (2016) in their paper have found skill inadequacy, lack of formal education in retailing, high attrition, and poaching as the major HR problems of this sector.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper focuses on primarily existence of different HR practices in the selected retail outlets. It aims to explore the following objectives in detail:

- To study the HR practices in selected organized retail organizations
- To assess the employees' perception towards HR practices in the retail sector
- To suggest measures to overcome HR related issues/problems in retail.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on non-probability convenience sampling due to paucity of time and resources. Sample size was 100 from the chosen units. The data was collected from the employees working in the retail outlets of Spencers, Big Bazaar, and Reliance Super located in Greater Noida. There were 35 respondents from Reliance Super, 34 from Spencer's and 31 from Big Bazaar. The study has used both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. It was broadly divided into two parts. Part I dealt with the demographic profile of the respondents, while Part II addressed various HR practices. In all there were 15 objective-type multiple-choice questions, based on 5-point rating scale (ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'); 'Strongly Agree' was assigned '5' points while 'Strongly Disagree' was assigned '1' point. Employees were personally interviewed to gather extra information. Secondary data was collected from journals, magazines and different books and web sites related to the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data was analyzed through simple quantitative tools like percentage, average, frequency count, etc. and one-way ANOVA was used to compare the means. The results are presented with the help of tables.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender	N	%
Male	59	59
Female	41	41
Marital Status		
Married	37	37
Unmarried	63	63

Annual Income (in lakh rupees)	N	%
1-2	25	25
2-3	35	35
3-4	22	22
4-5	10	10
>5	8	8
Age (in years)		
20-25	42	42
25-30	26	26
30-35	13	13
35-40	12	12
>40	7	7

As can be seen from the above table, there are 59% male and 41% female respondents. Most of the respondents, i.e., 63% are not married. Maximum respondents lie in the age bracket of 20 to 25 years (42%). 68% of the respondents are in the age bracket of 20 to 20 years. It can be concluded that organized retail is to a great extent a youth-oriented sector. One-fourth respondents have an annual income of 1 to 2 lakh rupees and only 5% respondents have an annual income above Rs. 5 lakh.

Table 2: Analysis of Responses

S.No.	HRM Parameters	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Sufficiency of manpower (MPP)	0	56	20	13	11
2	Transparency in recruitment & selection process (RS)	10	35	22	21	12
3	Induction to enable employees to understand organization & working better (IND)	7	22	31	25	15

S.No.	HRM Parameters	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4	Opportunities for training & development (TD)	12	28	22	25	13
5	Fairness in performance appraisal system (PA)	7	15	33	32	13
6	Motivation & encouragement (ME)	11	36	33	13	7
7	Satisfaction with working conditions (WC)	21	31	28	13	7
8	Recognition of employees (REC)	16	28	23	21	12
9	Utilization of skills & abilities (SA)	17	5	31	12	35
10	Sufficient opportunities for career development (CD)	6	14	38	23	19
11	Satisfactory compensation structure (CS)	10	18	42	21	9
12	Provision for bonus & incentives (BI)	11	31	29	21	7
13	Congenial relations among superiors & subordinates (RSS)	7	12	48	23	10
14	Autonomy to do the job (AUT)	3	13	47	25	12
15	Overall happiness from HR practices (HRP)	13	32	17	29	9

It can be inferred from Table 2 that respondents have shown maximum agreement towards availability of adequate strength of manpower (56%), followed by satisfaction with working conditions (52%), motivation & encouragement (47%), Transparency in recruitment and selection (45%),

recognition (44%), bonus and incentives (42%) and opportunities for training & development (40%).

They have reflected their disagreement mainly in the areas of utilization of skills & abilities (47%), fairness in performance appraisal (45%), opportunities for career development (42%) and induction to enable employees to understand organization & working better (40%). Surprisingly, 48% respondents have given neutral response towards 'congenial relations among superiors and subordinates'. Similarly, a very high level of neutrality was observed in the case of satisfaction from compensation structure (42%) and autonomy to do the job (47%).

As far as overall happiness from the HR practices is concerned, 45% respondents have agreeable or positive perception while 38% respondents have disagreeable or negative perception.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MPP	100	1	5	3.41	1.055
RS	100	1	5	3.79	.988
IND	100	1	5	2.98	.953
TD	100	1	5	3.23	.962
PA	100	1	5	2.94	1.033
ME	100	1	5	3.17	.995
WC	100	1	5	3.31	1.098
REC	100	1	5	3.43	.820
SA	100	1	5	2.41	1.055
CD	100	1	5	2.76	1.147
CS	100	1	5	2.98	.932
BI	100	1	5	3.31	.873
RSS	100	1	5	3.41	1.055
AUT	100	1	5	3.17	.995
HRP	100	1	5	3.36	.916
Valid N (listwise)	100				

From the above table it can be inferred that the mean score of agreeability towards the 14 parameters of HR practices and overall HR practices, in most of the cases, is more than '3' on a scale of '1' to '5'. Maximum mean score is in the case of 'Transparency in recruitment &

selection process' (3.79), followed by 'Recognition of employees' (3.43), while 'Relationship between superiors and subordinates' and 'Manpower Planning' were both at 3.41. The mean score of agreeability towards the overall HR practices is also greater than 3, which depicts that respondents have favourable inclination towards the HR practices of the selected retail outlets. A few areas like 'Utilization of skills and abilities', 'Opportunities for career development', 'Fairness in performance appraisal system', 'Induction process', and, finally, 'Compensation structure' have not been rated so favourably and hence the mean score of these parameters were 2.41, 2.76, 2.94, 2.90 and 2.98, respectively. All these scores are less than '3', and hence can be considered as the areas where employees are not so happy and seek improvement.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of HRP in Selected Retail Outlets

Retail Outlets	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Big Bazaar (B)	3.45	31	.888
Reliance Super (R)	3.34	35	.938
Spencers (S)	3.29	34	.938
Total	3.36	100	.916

It is clear from table 4, that mean score of 'Overall happiness from HR practices (HRP)' in all the three selected outlets is more than 3, but more or less same in all the three (3.45, 3.34 & 3.29). It again brings out the same inference that employees in general are positive and agreeable towards the Human Resource practices of the selected organizations.

Level of Perception towards HR Practices

On the basis of the ranking assigned by the respondents, the scoring was done to assess the level of perception of the employees towards HR practices.

Min. score	15*
Max. score	75*

*Total number of statements in the questionnaire being 15, rated on a scale of 5

The range of employees' perception towards HR practices was defined as below:

Table 5(a): Range for level of perception

Good	55-75
Average	35-54
Below Average	15-34

Table 5(b): Level of Perception

Level of Perception	% of respondents
Good	32
Average	48
Below Average	20

On the basis of the above table it can be deduced that the level of perception of the respondents towards HR practices ranges from good to average. 32% respondents have good perception towards the HR practices, 48% have average perception, while 20% consider that the HR practices in their concern are poor and hence they have poor perception towards HR practices. From the above table we can also deduce that only 20% respondents have below average perception, signifying that with a few modification the HR issues can be rectified in the organizations. In general, the prevailing HR practices are within the acceptable range of the respondents.

Comparison of means using ANOVA for all the parameters of HR practices & overall Happiness from the HR practices with respect to the three selected retail outlets

Table 6: ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
MPP * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	1.041	2	.521	.463	.631
	Within Groups		109.149	97	1.125		
	Total		110.190	99			

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
RS * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	.650	2	.325	.329	.721
	Within Groups		95.940	97	.989		
	Total		96.590	99			
IND * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	1.616	2	.808	.887	.415
	Within Groups		88.344	97	.911		
	Total		89.960	99			
TD * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.550	2	1.275	1.387	.255
	Within Groups		89.160	97	.919		
	Total		91.710	99			
PA * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.994	2	1.497	1.415	.248
	Within Groups		102.646	97	1.058		
	Total		105.640	99			
ME * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	4.655	2	2.327	4.616	.005
	Within Groups		93.455	97	.963		
	Total		98.110	99			
WC * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.496	2	1.248	1.036	.359
	Within Groups		116.894	97	1.205		
	Total		119.390	99			
REC * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.086	2	1.043	1.571	.213
	Within Groups		64.424	97	.664		
	Total		66.510	99			
SA * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	1.041	2	.521	.463	.631
	Within Groups		109.149	97	1.125		
	Total		110.190	99			

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CD * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	.997	2	.498	.374	.689
	Within Groups		129.243	97	1.332		
	Total		130.240	99			
CS * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	1.539	2	.769	.884	.416
	Within Groups		84.421	97	.870		
	Total		85.960	99			
BI * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	3.040	2	1.520	2.038	.136
	Within Groups		72.350	97	.746		
	Total		75.390	99			
RSS * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	1.041	2	.521	.463	.631
	Within Groups		109.149	97	1.125		
	Total		110.190	99			
AUT * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	4.655	2	2.327	5.416	.025
	Within Groups		93.455	97	.963		
	Total		98.110	99			
HRP * RO	Between Groups	(Combined)	.418	2	.209	.245	.783
	Within Groups		82.622	97	.852		
	Total		83.040	99			

From the above ANOVA table it can be deduced that there is no significant difference in the means of most of the parameters of HR practices across the three retail outlets. It signifies that more or less the agreeability of respondents towards the HR practices is the same since the p values are greater than .05 (level of significance being 5%). The exception is seen in two cases. In case of Motivation and Encouragement' we find that p value (.005) is less than the level of significance (.05), hence we infer that there is a difference in the mean values of 'Motivation & Encouragement'

across the three outlets. It further highlights that there is difference in the practices followed to motivate and encourage the employees and that is why the respondents' opinions differ. Same is the case of Autonomy where the p value is .025, which is less than .05 and again we can infer that there is difference in the opinions of the respondents with respect to autonomy to do the job across the three outlets.

As far as 'Happiness from overall HR practices (HRP)' is concerned, the calculated p value .783 is greater than the level of significance .05, and hence we can say that the respondents generally are agreeable towards the overall HR practices across the chosen retail organizations.

FINDINGS

It is observed from the study that the selected retail companies have been actively engaged in manpower planning and making sufficient efforts to estimate and fulfill manpower gaps. They also consider that ample opportunities for training & development are given to the employees, they have also exhibited considerable satisfaction with working conditions and believe that their efforts are recognized and duly appreciated and they are also happy with the provisions for bonus and incentives offered to them from time to time, But at the same time they are not very satisfied with the compensation structure. It might be because of low proportion of fixed salary component and high proportion of variable salary component (merit-based incentives). A favourable opinion has also been found towards existence of cordial relationship between superiors and subordinates and the set of working conditions prevailing at their workplace. The study also found that most of the employees of organized retail organizations acknowledge the presence of a healthy work environment in terms of motivation and encouragement, but at the same time there is difference in the mean scores across the chosen outlets (p value less than .05). The same trend has also been observed in the case of autonomy (p=0.025). Here also the general mean score is higher than the average (3.17), but there is significant difference in the mean scores across the retail outlets.

Slightly unfavourable responses have been observed in terms of 'Utilization of skills and abilities', 'Induction to enable employees to understand organization & working better', 'Fairness in performance appraisal system', 'Sufficient opportunities for career development', and 'satisfaction towards compensation structure', where the employees' agreeability has been found to be slightly less than the average score.

A majority of the employees have a strong feeling that their skills and abilities are not optimally utilised in their on-the-job responsibilities. The nature of work assigned to them may not be commensurate with their professional qualifications and specialized skill sets. The respondents also felt that the performance appraisal systems were not fair and equitable, and opportunities for career development were scarce. It was also found that induction programmes could be more effectively organized in order to help the employees understand the work environment better.

In spite of these shortcomings, the respondents in general have opined favourably towards 'happiness from overall human resource practices'.

CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Evidently, there are many issues in creating the perfect HR environment and there is no panacea to overcome all the challenges. Firms' proactive and timely identification of warning signals and handling them could be the only solution to successfully address this problem. The retail business environment across the globe as well as in India is being heavily impacted by the currents and cross-currents of a new-age globalized order of consumption and consumer behaviour. As a result of this, many new nerve centres of human resource management have emerged, and these newly emerging nerve centres that have a direct bearing on the success or failure of retail organizations. These nerve centres include HR activities like recruitment and selection of employees, customer retention and protection and promotion of the retail brand image. Retailers operating in India need to devise innovative people practices to successfully lead and manage their voluminous workforce in a fiercely competitive business environment. They also need to spruce up their people practices in order to upgrade the skill sets of their employees and to retain them for a longer period of time. Employee motivation is fast becoming an area that demands constant attention from the management's end. This is particularly true in the case of the retail business. Retail organizations need to focus their intensive efforts on ensuring that the skills of the employees do not remain unutilized or under-utilized, as that may lead to employee frustration setting in and ultimately to high attrition.

A proper, structured and well-defined orientation programme should be conducted to equip employees with updated know-how. The career paths of the employees with respect to the retail sector should be precisely

carved out and ample opportunities of growth should be incorporated in career development. Its manpower-intensive nature and unique requirements have resulted in human resource considerations taking on paramount importance for the sustainable growth of the sector. In the given scenario it becomes all the more important for the managers to pay utmost attention to their human resources and inculcate the best possible employee engagement practices so that their fullest potential can be utilized in making this sector a success.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE WORK

The study was confined to a small sample size of 100 only, that too concentrated in a small geographical area. Although data collection and data analysis have been done impeccably, a lot is yet to be desired. The study may be conducted on a larger data size so that its results can be generalized. Moreover, if a cross-sectional study is undertaken across India, the results would have a far-reaching impact.

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