Chapter 8

Application of Soft Systems Methodology to the Real-World Processes of Human Resource Management

ABSTRACT

Systems approach to human resource management (HRM) regards it as a unified and purposeful system containing interrelated parts. In order to develop HR decisions and practices, the soft systems methodology (SSM), as an approach, causes a better understanding of the system and more meaningful decision making. Various applications of SSM in HRM were reviewed in this chapter, including employee participation, group creativity, HR development, HR maintenance, and knowledge worker productivity. The main discussion of this chapter is that SSM can strongly improve the intersubjective understanding necessary for effective group development and progress. It is especially helpful to challenge paradigms, leading to enhanced group creativity. The issue of current HR development resulting from the lack of any argument on the central role of SSM in this development was another topic. Finally, low knowledge worker productivity through SSM was explained.

INTRODUCTION

Management is primarily aimed at finding solutions to human problems. Human Resource Management (HRM) is a central sub-system that interacts closely and continuously with other sub-systems in an organization. The policies, programs and practices of the HRM sub-system determine the quality of people in all sub-systems. In the modern era of automation and computerization, HRM is considered to be very significant since competent people are needed to work with machine; otherwise, it seems useless. The factors making HRM seems significant include increased size and complexity of organizations, trained professional and knowledge workers, rapid developments in technology, increased number of women in the workforce, increased expectations from employers, revolution in technology of information, and rapid changes in jobs and skills requiring long-term planning of manpower.

The organization is viewed, by the systems approach to management, as a unified, purposeful system containing interrelated parts. The manager, through this approach, regards the organization as a whole and as a part of the larger external environment. Being abstracted from the broader social context, much of the data providing the basis for many HRM decisions is meaningless. Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) identifies the importance of the organizational culture and considers the organizational problems as the result of people's different viewpoints about the same situation. Dealing with the practical human interest, SSM uses the interpretative paradigm assumptions about social context to develop mutual understanding. In fact, SSM is the response to the complexity of everyday problems hardly possible to fit into mathematically expressed general theory of systems (Checkland, 1993). According to Checkland (1993), stakeholders' different views towards the problems and therefore the components of the system caused them more complex. Hence, the SSM identifies the problem owners who play roles in giving the points of view in the system. In this context, it can be said that SSM is useful for HRM.

In order to identify competence requirements in HRM, Brocklesby (1995) used SSM. Utomo and Yulia (2018) also used SSM to formulate human resource development (HRD) strategy/ method. The formulation of HRD strategy for medium and small industries in Laweyan, Surakarta, was the finding after using the method of SSM. This chapter reviews various applications of

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