

HRM in the New World of Agile Government

Yousif El-Ghalayini

Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, where the pace of change is accelerating, governments know that they must re-invent the ways they operate. Governments need to develop partnerships, use innovation, leadership, and above all, employ skilled workforce to face the challenge of managing in uncertainty and become more agile in its operations. Therefore, agile government is the new shape of government for the new millennium where government must be responsive, flexible, creative, and attuned. One of the key elements of agile government is the right human resources. The aim of this practitioners' paper is to explore how human resources management (HRM) can offer tools needed by policymakers to ensure agility in government operations. This includes attracting, recruiting, and developing workforce to meet the ever-changing priorities. Recruitment, performance management, and employee retention among other tools are necessary for public sector to ensure more agility, while developing agile governance and policies.

Keywords: HRM systems, agile, leadership, public sector

The last three decades have witnessed an increasing interest in the field of human resources management (HRM). This is primarily due to the convergence between HRM practices and other fields with similar roots in the human aspect of organizations, such as organizational development and leadership, in addition to the link between HRM and organizational performance (Maurya & Chatterjee, 2018; Guest, 2011). HRM research focuses on employment relationships and staff management and lies at the very core of administrative management. This new approach to worker management goes beyond the narrow and technical focus of traditional personnel management on administrative functions, such as keeping personnel records and managing the employee payroll. HRM research emphasizes the strategic contribution of HRM programs and policies (such as employee work structure, organizational recruitment processes, performance appraisal systems, job design, and employee compensation, relations, development, and team building) to organizational business strategies and highlights HRM outcomes like commitment, motivation, flexibility, and quality of work. This increasing interest in HRM was not limited to private firms, but also was also part of new public management and the wave of public sector reforms (El-Ghalayini, 2017). Therefore, in the new world of agile public sector, HRM offers the basic tools needed by policymakers to ensure government's strategic resilience that deploys human resources efficiently to adapt quickly to positive changes in order to meet the ever-changing priorities (Heilmann, Forsten-Astikainen, & Kultalahti, 2020).

Haneberg (2011) defined agility as the efficiency with which organizations respond to continuous change by consistently adapting and it has been attached to organizational behavior research relating to HRM (Katayama & Bennett, 1999; McIver, Lengnick-Hall, & Lengnick-Hall, 2018; Muduli, 2016; Nijssen & Paauwe, 2012; Qin

Yousif El-Ghalayini, Ph.D., associate professor, Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Yousif El-Ghalayini, Dubai, Zabeel 72227, Convention Tower, Dubai World Trade Center, U.A.E.

& Nembhard, 2010; Sherehiy & Karwowski, 2014; Sumukadas & Sawhney, 2004). Muduli (2016) have discovered the role of training, reward system, involvement, teamwork, and information systems in promoting HRM agility. Therefore, agility is no longer a new concept. On the contrary, it is the new management strategy in the world that dramatically transforms workplaces.

Agility and Organizational Resilience

Agility is also defined as the ability to move rapidly and easily (Heilmann et al., 2020). In the HRM context, it is the ability to adapt and develop people and processes to support individual, strategic, and organizational resilience. It emphasizes how HRM systems support the organization to become more responsive and adaptive so that the traditional focus on command and control is transformed into a more resilient focus on the responsiveness to the clients. According to HRM Trend Institute, the term agile HRM refers to a new approach of managing organizational workforce. Agile HRM main function is to facilitate responsiveness and adaptiveness of activities and structures, designed to offer direct value to the client. In agile institutions, HRM continues to provide employment, development, performance management, and other HRM function but using an agile approach. According to a LinkedIn article by Wayne Tarken, a senior adviser for the Agile HR Consortium, there are three components of agile workforce:

1. The ability to “quickly and easily identify issues that need to be addressed”.
2. The ability to decrease “the time it takes to develop then implement a response”.
3. “Incorporating analytics and design thinking to predict, design then target programs with the highest probability of being successful”.

Incorporating agility into the HRM practices aligns with organizational strategy, with specific focus on HRM functions, including the adoption of new technologies, processes’ modification, work objectives reorganization, to facilitate productivity and competency and continuously develop, empower, motivate, and monitor employees (Ahammad, Glaister, & Gomes, 2020). For instance, the Dubai Government Human Resources Department (DGHR), which is the department responsible of government cadres in the Emirate of Dubai, was established to promote government performance, and enhance the efficiency of its operations and results. In 2018, the newly approved HRM strategy provides Dubai government employees the option to work remotely, as well as an opportunity to apply internally for any vacant positions and be transferred without the need to meet the promotion condition when the employee is deserving. The aim was to HRM with the strategic objectives of Dubai Plan 2021 and form a base of government institutional harmony. The DGHR adopts innovative approaches to optimize HRM and employ the human energies to the fullest, upgrade the government work, and act as a driving force for the public service delivery.

Agile Human Resources Management Systems

HRM systems is concerned with the selections that organizations make from the myriad practices available to structure their HRM systems (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). HRM systems are defined as the specific mix of HRM policies and enacted practices to enable, motivate, and develop workers to share and apply their knowledge and skills fully into their jobs, leading to a more effective organization (Mendy, 2018). Therefore, HRM has predominately targeted practitioners, focusing on effective people management and highlighting the contributions of complementary HRM practices to organizational performance, assuming synergistic effects of these practices when combined into coherent systems (Paauwe & Farndale, 2017).

Staffing and Recruitment

Staffing and recruitment remains one of the most crucial HRM functions. Within the old HRM system, staffing and recruitment was centralized and employment based on the notion of lifelong employment with narrow, specific, task-based, and highly routinized jobs and strict seniority based on length of service (Brown, 2004). The changing structure and operations of governments, paralleled with the adoption of NPM, have replaced this traditional model of centralized and bureaucratic practices with new focus on employees' skills and improved workforce readiness and responsiveness to engage the employees and encourage them to promote and enhance their skills, besides taking into consideration diversity and attracting competencies from outside the organization.

In a global CEO survey conducted by KPMG Consulting in 2014, recruiting employees with the appropriate skills ranked second among the main challenges that meet business leaders seeking to achieve organizational growth. Even with investment in new technologies, if organizations could not hire and develop workforce with the essential talents they need, it is unlikely they will be able to remain successful. Agility will help organization to adopt more responsive employment practices that retain the most productive employees, as well as utilize their talents to achieve lasting success (Doughtie, 2015).

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement refers to the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards their organization. When an employee is engaged, he is aware of his responsibility as he is well informed of all new developments, has the ability to express opinion, and acts accordingly. Agile management is a culture that includes every department and employee within the organization. In agile organization, there is no place for bureaucracy or hierarchy, but for a team capable of making decisions and solving problems instead. Employee engagement allows employees to clearly identify their roles and responsibilities, which establishes healthy boundaries. There should not be any information barriers, which also removes any knowledge gaps of environment and clients' needs and expectations. Accenture and the National Association of State Chief Information Officers (NASCIO) surveyed and interviewed a number of state government leaders to describe their experiences with agile and identify the key factors of success under this new managerial approach. State government leaders clearly embraced how agility is centered on people engagement and their willingness to collaborate at every step (NASCIO, 2017).

The New Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS)

Many government organizations have utilized Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems together with internal and external communications, which has contributed largely on developing Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS). HRMIS relies on data analysis and manipulation which minimize the risk associated with speculations that often may lead to unexpected consequences (Akoyo & Muathe, 2017). Additionally, mobile devices' technologies and social networks can sustain more information about job seekers and people with talents and their achievements. HRMIS allows organization to access large amounts of data about potential employees, thus increasing the chances that the organizations would detect the best suitable candidates. HRMIS also needs to take advantage of the new technologies and platforms that will help them to build a more productive and adaptive workplace. For instance, organizations are increasingly turning to data mining to help identify and retain top employees by mining data on the relationships among factors such as university attended, previous work experience, and previous employers.

HRM Planning

Planning HRM implies understanding the fit between HRM systems and organizational strategy. Therefore, planning HRM helps governments to function in the increasingly complicated and uncertain environments, and identify the best organizational-HRM fit (El-Ghalayini, 2017). This organizational-HRM is crucial to identify the skills needed to respond to the changing needs. By identifying the existing competencies and the gaps in skills, governments can determine the skills they need and put employment plans based on determining the appropriate number of people with suitable skills for the appropriate time and place.

Performance Management Systems

Encouraging agility in the workforce requires developing the appropriate motivators via individual performance management systems and rewards. The first step in this process is to set clear organizational goals at the organizational level, and then link the individual employee performance objectives to organizational goals. In a survey on business CEOs in 2006, about 40% of the participants mentioned that linking the organization's strategy to the employee performance objectives contributed to agility in their organizations (Cross, Martin, & Weiss, 2006).

Changing Organizational Culture

Governments face turbulent environments whose main characteristics are high levels of uncertainty and complexity. To survive in such volatile environments, public sector agencies must develop culture of innovation and capabilities to detect environmental changes early and to offer accurate responses. This can be achieved by creating HRM systems that minimize their dependence on rules and regulations and increase their reliance on creativity and collaboration, as well as having innovative and risk-taking workforce. Employees are given some space for constructive failure because the ability of the public sector to rapidly and flexibly respond to disruptions requires the employee's creativity and innovation in particular (Khalili, 2016). It is possible that the employees capable of thinking independently and utilizing their skills to solve problems might be more resourceful and more able to improvise in response to any disruption. The opportunity should be given to the employees to suggest solutions for workplace challenges.

Agile Leadership

Agile leadership cannot be easily articulated. In their book *The Future Workplace Experience: 10 Rules for Mastering Disruption in Recruiting and Engaging Employees*, Meister, Mulcahy, and Gherson (2017) proposed agile leadership in two concepts results orientation and employee engagement. They have also proposed seven criteria for the future agile leader. The first concept is the ability to achieve results, which requires:

- Being transparent: The leaders must communicate regularly with the employees and main transparent relationship.
- A sense of responsibility: The leader acknowledges the different aspects of the self, and being responsible of his acts.
- Taking initiative: The leader looks for new opportunities and motivates others to think, imagine, and work.
- Focusing on the future: A leader must predict the growing complexity of the work environment, then anticipate the future, be ready for the change, and get out of the comfort zone.

The second dimension is the ability to engage the work team, which requires:

- Social intelligence: A leader cultivates teamwork practices that enhance the capabilities of the work team.

- Inclusiveness: which means forming diverse teams representing and including several diverse personalities because a leader makes diversity and inclusiveness a key-value inside the organization.
- Developing others: A leader provides the possibility of individual learning, as well as learning from peers on demand.

All these criteria facilitate making more effective managerial decisions, increase awareness and ability to understand the teams' strengths, and generate sustainable results. Managing those two dimensions of results-oriented leadership and increased interaction is the way to achieve the most substantial change inside the institutions and distinguish the fittest leaders for survival.

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