



# Human Resource Management/ Development Practices and Organization's Competitive Advantage

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Received 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016, revised 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2016, accepted 25<sup>th</sup> May 2016

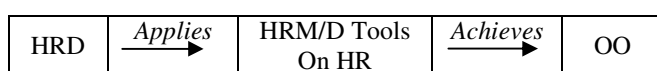
## Abstract

The cut-throat competitive world has made the importance of human resource more crucial than any other resource and thus development of human resource (HR) is key to competitive advantage for any organization. Various surveys highlight that human resource management/ development (HRM/D) practices like performance appraisal (PA), training and development (TD), knowledge management (KM), employee empowerment, employee motivation, career management, etc. applied by human resource department (HRD) are visible in organizations and are also resulting into achievement of various organizational objectives (OO) like employee skill development, employee competence, enhanced performance, organization innovativeness, organization commitment, competitive advantage (CA), higher productivity, organizational growth etc. apart from financial profits and enhanced brand image. The reason behind the study is to find association between various HRM/D tools in practice and the competitive advantage, one of the organizational objectives, gained by the organization. The paper also discusses few HRM/D tools as a factor of CA.

**Keywords:** Human Resource Management/ Development, Human Resource Department, Human Resource, Organizational Objectives, Performance Appraisal, Training and Development, Knowledge Management, Competitive Advantage.

## Introduction

**Aim of the Study:** Recent reports suggest that India is doing well on industry sector. When it is said that the industry is doing well then it may derived that the organizational objectives are achieved. Here three components namely, HRD, HRM/ D tools and OO need to be discussed. When a relationship is to be established among these components then it can presented like:



To achieve OO (employee skill development, employee competence, enhanced performance, organization innovativeness, organization commitment, CA, higher productivity, organizational growth etc.) apart from financial profits and enhanced brand image, HR are developed by using various HRM/D tools (PA, TD, KM, employee empowerment, employee motivation, career management, etc.). These tools are used by the HRD for development of HR. Apart from other HRM/D tools PA, TD and KM plays very important and direct role in developing competence in HR as an individual and in a team. PA provides information regarding the training needs of any HR and then KM supplies appropriate content and procedure for the training of that HR. The applicable technical, managerial and behavioral knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired through KM are provided to the individuals or to the groups under training programme.

Question here arises is whether this relationships really so directly exists. To find the same, the researcher has thoroughly read many journal papers and categorically done the analysis. The researcher has confined the OO only to CA. Thus, the current aim of this study is to find association of various HRM/D tools applied on HR and the CA gained by the organization due to application these HRM/D tools. Here it is imperative to define term competitive advantage. Bobillo et al. defined "competitive advantage" as a "set of capabilities that permanently enable the business to demonstrate better performance than its competitors<sup>1</sup>."

**The Ultimate (Hidden) Aim of this Study:** Developing and improving employability skills in graduates is considered to be an important objective of Higher Education. Industries' common complaint is that the graduates are unemployable. As per a NASSCOM report, industry thinks that up to 75% technical graduates and 85-90% of non-technical graduates are employable. Recently CareerBuilder India conducted a national online survey on more than 400 employers and found that recent graduates lack in skills like Interpersonal, Problem-solving, Creative thinking, Teamwork, Leadership, Oral communication, Research and analysis, Project management, Written communication, Computer and Technical knowledge, Mathematics<sup>2</sup>. Un-employability is a greater problem now. There is mismatch between industry needs and university output.

Now take the two sectors i.e. industry and education in comparison. Industry and educational institution are same on process but differ in output. First take the case of industry. HRD works on development of the HR who produces the quality output. In case of industry the output is either materialistic product and/ or any kind of services. The process including components like HRD, HR and Output remains same in educational institution but the output in case of later is human and not any material. Due to this the characteristics of HR also differs.

**Table-1**  
**Relationship Presented for Industry**

|     |                              |                              |                           |                              |
|-----|------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| HRD | Apply HRM/D tools to develop | Knowledgeable HR (employees) | Uses knowledge to produce | Quality Products or Services |
|-----|------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|

For educational institutions the presentation is like:

|     |                              |                             |                           |                         |
|-----|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| HRD | Apply HRM/D tools to develop | Knowledgeable HR (Teachers) | Uses knowledge to develop | Students i.e. Future HR |
|-----|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|

The ultimate aim behind this study is to use the outcome of the study as base for primary research in educational institutions to establish the above mentioned relationship for educational institutions. We can check whether Human Resource Department exists in educational institutions. If it's existing then why the benefit of the department is not visible and if not existing then how the department can be formed in institutions for benefit of human resource i.e. the teachers.

**Human Resource Management:** For better understanding of the study little background of the main topics are discussed one by one. Human Resource Management (HRM) is a crucial function in any organization which utilizes the employees in best possible ways so as to achieve the business goals. Now a day the organizations on globe are confronted with decisive situations where existence and growth depends upon the development of new capabilities. Human resource management integrates and maintains employees in an organization so that purpose can be achieved and goals be met<sup>3</sup>. HRM is entire system of values, policies and practices which focuses on maximizing the performance of people in organizations, with a view to achieving a dynamic balance between the personal interests and concerns of people and their economic added value.

The following five functional areas have been described under HRM which are staffing, reward, employee development, maintenance, and relations<sup>4</sup>. In other words, acquisition, development, motivation and maintenance of human resources

are basic functions around which HRM revolves. Tichy et al. stated that selection, appraisal, rewards and development are core to HRM system<sup>5</sup>. Based on these functions the prime components of HRM are human resource planning, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and benefits, labour relations.

**Human Resource Development:** This human resource development is sub part of Human Resource Management. The components of HRD includes all the HR development functions like performance/ potential appraisals, training and development, career development, knowledge management succession planning etc. Bhattacharyya mentioned that the term Human Resource Development first time was used by Len Nadler including training, education, and development<sup>6</sup>. A HRD is used for assessing, selectively upgrading and appropriately deploying human potentialities for achievement of envisioned goals, which foster human dignity<sup>6</sup>. Werner and DeSimone defined Human Resource Development (HRD) as: "A set of systematic and planned activities designed by an organization to provide its members with the opportunities to learn necessary skills to meet current and future job demands<sup>7</sup>."

**Performance Appraisal:** Rudrabasavaraj took performance appraisal as a systematic, orderly, and objective method of evaluating the current and future usefulness of the workers<sup>8</sup>. Behavior connected to work should be base for the performance. Maximizing the performance of firm is the major concern for an organization. Performance are appraised which is "comparing the employee's present and past performance to his/her performance standards<sup>9</sup>." Grubb pointed that PA is a method of evaluating individual performance and thus finding the way to improve their performance contributing largely to organizational performance<sup>10</sup>. Delery and Doty concluded that there is a good relation between various training and development practices and various measures of firm's performance<sup>11</sup>. HR Department's first HRD tool is performance appraisal which needs to be Potential Appraisal from development point of view. This gives the base for the rest of the two tools namely the training and development and knowledge management.

**Training and Development:** Peteraf defined training and development as a procedure for acquiring or transferring knowledge, skills and abilities required to do a particular activity or job. A widespread TD plan helps in disseminating the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential to attain aim and also to gain CA<sup>12</sup>. Training need to be proactive i.e. organization focus is on developing competencies as per the present and future needs. Training anyhow enhances the organization effectiveness. Apospori et al. concluded that training has substantial influence on organizational performance<sup>13</sup>. Training seems to develop a positive orientation on the part of employees towards their work role and the organization and it seems to improve performance by enhancing employee's skills<sup>14</sup>. Performance appraisal is prerequisite for training as it takes

input from performance appraisal, finds the need and prepares training programme.

**Knowledge Management:** Knowledge management is acquiring and dissemination of knowledge and is a component of training and development and largely of HRD. Knowledge exists within institutions with individuals and through Research and Development activity, comes with new entrants. Soliman and Spooner stated that knowledge is the capability to uphold the synchronized use of assets and competence and helps the organization accomplish its objectives<sup>15</sup>. Knowledge is of two types namely explicit (objective) knowledge which is clearly prepared or defined effortlessly, expressed with no ambiguity, and written and stored in book or database and tacit (subjective) knowledge that is the unexpressed knowledge in a person's mind, which is often hard to explain and transfer. Harman and Brelade defined knowledge management as a process of acquiring and using various resources, generating an atmosphere where information is in reach of individuals and can acquire, share, and use to widen their own knowledge and utilizing the knowledge for the advantage of the firm<sup>16</sup>.

**Competitive Advantage:** When a distinctive competence is utilized and carried in an industry or to a market then it is called competitive advantage. When customers are offered greater value either in terms of prices or extra benefits, competitive advantage is gained over other players. Adams and Lamont recommended in their study that knowledge management, organizational resources, innovation and differentiation of products, and organization learning improve competitive advantages of businesses<sup>17</sup>. Ma H. has also argued that differentiation on attribute and features which permits any firm to have better customer value than others give rise to competitive advantage<sup>18</sup>. Barney suggested that if any firm's resource is having value, is rare, can't be copied and substituted then it generated continued competitive advantage<sup>19</sup>. Prahalad and Hamel suggested that competitiveness based on resources and capability is more significant than if it is based on market and products aspects<sup>20</sup>. Hofer and Schendel put forward that competitive advantage is a distinctive position that an organization develops over its competitors by employing its resources<sup>21</sup>. Amit and Shoemaker suggested that capabilities provide a firm its continued CA and not its resources<sup>22</sup>. Wright et al. established that when human resource behaviour and firm's goal are in a line then it leads to sustained CA<sup>23</sup>.

After having brief knowledge of Human Resource Management, Human Resource Development, Performance Appraisal, Training and Development, Knowledge Management, Competitive Advantage which are the main ingredient of this paper, let's recall the purpose of carrying out this study.

The hidden aim of this study is to apply the result of the study in educational sector i.e. educational institution while the current purpose of study is to establish the relationship between application of various Human Resource Management/

Development tools on Human Resource and the Competitive Advantage gained by the organization due to application these HRM/D tools in Industry.

## Literature Review

This section first of all discusses on competitive advantage and then talks about the factors which generate the competitive advantage. Various literatures put forward various concepts of competitive advantage.

**Competitive Advantage:** "A distinctive capability becomes a competitive advantage when it is applied in an industry or brought to a market." Besanko et al. stated that a firm's competitive advantage is visualized in terms of economic profit i.e. firms in same market with higher rate than the average, has a CA there<sup>24</sup>. Saloner et al. pointed that "most forms of competitive advantage mean either that a firm can produce some service or product that its customers value than those produced by competitors or that it can produce its service or product at a lower cost than its competitors<sup>25</sup>." There are other factors also apart from products' or services' characteristics of competitive advantage. Hofer and Schendel stated that the distinctive place an organization reaches over other firms in competition is through deploying its resources<sup>21</sup>. It is a point of discussion that whether product or services are key factors for competitive advantage or the resources.

Among various resources the important resource is the human resource. Other researchers treated human resources as the most precious category of resource<sup>26,21</sup>. Firms must develop capabilities through its resources. Grant argued that resource generates capabilities and it turn capabilities provide competitive advantage to any firm<sup>27</sup>.

**Human Resource Management/ Development and Competitive Advantage:** Competitive advantage is gained by various resources. Wernerfelt found the factors of sustaining CA position which are brand, technology, trained workers, business relations, machine, processes and fund<sup>28</sup>. Among these, skilled personnel are the most important source as it provides special benefit. Human resource does what other resources don't which make them distinctive. Development of the primary source of competitive advantage must be the prime activity. Ulrich and Lake pointed out regarding organizational capability that the people not the organizations, think, make decisions, or allocate resources and further found that organizational capability is a critical source of competitive advantage<sup>29</sup>. Tyndall found Human Resource as a source of competitive advantage for an organization while HR Department benefits a company in trying to achieve competitive advantage<sup>30</sup>. The matter related to human resource management and development is crucial. Wang et al. stated that human resource policies and practices may be an especially important source of sustained competitive advantage if the human resources generate sustainable competitive advantage<sup>31</sup>.

Human resource management addresses the matter related to competitive advantage of a firm. HRM/ D aims at developing competitive advantage by applying its various tools in development of its HR. Jassim concluded that the organizations putting emphasis on human resources have made a difference in the performance and these human resources provide essential ingredient for organizational competitive advantage<sup>32</sup>. Durkovic opined that high quality workers i.e. human resources are the carrier of sustained competitive advantage thus human resource development is the most important process requirement<sup>33</sup>. Due to the importance of human resource they must be maintained systematically. Mugeru concluded that human resource management system is a prospective source of continued CA<sup>34</sup>.

HRM tools if results competencies then competitive advantage is achieved. Minbaeva stated that continued CA can also be gained if human resource management applications can develop firm specific competencies and create firm's knowledge<sup>35</sup>. Competitive advantage no doubt can be achieved through application of various HRM tools. Werbel and DeMarie argued that practices of PA, compensation, selection, training and development etc collectively can be used to communicate workers about different skills and behaviours necessary for creating and sustaining a competitive advantage<sup>36</sup>. Human resource being the most important factor for organizational performance so must get proper financial support. Teo et al. Investment in human resources with an approach of enhancing human capital is optimistically related to organizational performance<sup>37</sup>. Bhattacharjee and Bhattacharjee derived that competitive advantage emanates from the present workforce and the way they are managed and thus investment in human capital is worth for competitive advantage<sup>38</sup>. Human resource has distinct characteristic which make them important factor of competitive advantage of organization. Rahnam and Mamun opined that competent and innovative human resource are unimitable and thus are a unique resource of competitive advantage<sup>39</sup>. Among all resources human resource possesses special characteristic which separate them from others. Kazlauskaitė opined that pool of unique, valuable, and inimitable human resource in any organization in combination with effective people management practices is base for acquiring and sustaining of competitive advantage<sup>40</sup>.

HR practices need to be around firm's objectives. Wright concluded that firms utilizing HR practices which draw out behaviour in line with firms goals creates human capital pool advantage more than their competitors<sup>41</sup>. Further, Strategies being crucial becomes base for selecting HRM tools. Schuler and MacMillan showed that HRM practices developed as per the strategies help the firm and also others like suppliers, customers etc leading to competitive advantage<sup>42</sup>. HR practices need to be distinctive to retain the human resource. Chopra and Chopra highlighted that for sustainable competitive advantage, companies need to offer their human resource, a bundle of unique HR practices with specific benefits which can check both the push and pull factors<sup>43</sup>. The aim of organization should

be to motivate the human resource. Mathur stated that employee behavior, employee engagement and employee commitment creates highly motivated human resource which in turn results into sustainable competitive advantage for any organization<sup>44</sup>.

**Performance Management, Training and Development and Competitive Advantage:** Many HRM practices along with performance appraisal result into betterment of organization. Velmurugan and Akhilesh argued that learning and development, performance appraisal along with other HRM practices when linked with other factors bring organizational success and sustainability<sup>45</sup>. Among many HR Management tools, performance appraisal is important as is done with various objectives like promotion, transfer, training etc. Lately, this performance appraisal or management results into organizational competitive advantage. Mathapati opined that HR strategies and practices stimulating organizational capability to manage and stimulate creative and innovative thoughts which lead to performance management generate competitive advantage<sup>46</sup>. Various literatures have shown the relationship between two HRM practices i.e. performance appraisal and training with competitive advantage. Talukder and Khan concluded that apart from other factors, training and performance management were significantly positively related to competitive advantage<sup>47</sup>. Performance appraisal serves a special purpose with respect to training. Obisi suggested that continuous evaluation and audit of the performance of employees gives idea regarding the training needs and lately help organizations to win competitive advantage<sup>48</sup>. Beh and Loo found that HRM best practices like performance appraisal, training and development along with other enhance firm performance and highly committed and capable human resource leads to competitive advantage<sup>49</sup>. Berber confirmed that human resources are important and critical factor for gaining competitive advantage and thus a human capital pool should be developed by various HR practices like appraisal, training<sup>50</sup>.

Training is key HRM practice for sustainable competitiveness. Commey recommended that recruiting, training and developing the right caliber human resource will become more loyal to the company and thus will be vital to sustainable competitive advantage<sup>51</sup>. To make human resource competitive its enhancement is very critical. Vucetic found that for maintenance of competitive advantage high quality training to employees is very much required<sup>52</sup>. Training needs to be purposeful. Sum in his study found that when training and firm's business strategies are integrated then the impact of training on the firm's competitiveness increases<sup>53</sup>. Training has its relation with chief ingredient i.e. knowledge which is required for all activities in organization. Saha and Gregar concluded that formal training practices lead to development of explicit knowledge leading to new tacit knowledge which becomes the source of sustained competitive advantage<sup>54</sup>. Learning organization uses training for enhancing knowledge in organization. Vemic concluded that learning organization with knowledge management a function of training and development,

directly determines the competitive advantage of any firms. In learning organization flow of knowledge must be continuous<sup>55</sup>.

**Knowledge Management and Competitive Advantage:** Wong and Aspinwall stated that the base of firm's competitiveness has moved from its tangible resources to knowledge<sup>56</sup>. Nonaka and Takeuchi classified knowledge as tacit and explicit knowledge<sup>57</sup>. Zack argued that ability for learning and creating new knowledge give rise to competitive advantage<sup>58</sup>.

Training leads to enhance knowledge and use of this knowledge makes any organization sustainable. Chuang found positive relationship among various knowledge management resources and organizational competitive advantage<sup>59</sup>. Rahimli maintained that association of knowledge management and firm's competitive advantage is highly positive<sup>60</sup>. Meihami and Meihami found a significant association of knowledge management and competitive advantage<sup>61</sup>. If such relationship exists so then a systematic approach is required. Englis found overall impact of knowledge management systems in creating sustainable competitive advantage in firms<sup>62</sup>.

Nguyen opined that the two critical knowledge management i.e. of cultural and technological plays a distinctive and important role in gaining a firm's competitive advantage<sup>63</sup>. Any organization to be competitive needs continuous effort on knowledge management. Gilani et al. stated that generation and sharing of new knowledge and later merging this into the organizational knowledge for crisis and problem solving results into competitive advantage<sup>64</sup>. Continuous knowledge management means people collectively are learning. Chikati and Mpofu opined that knowledge management in organization means that organization is learning organization and this type of organization strategically gain competitive advantage over rivals<sup>65</sup>.

Kamya et al. Verified that firms will achieve higher levels of competitive advantage if acquisition, dissemination and responsiveness to knowledge is collectively practiced<sup>66</sup>. Hana concluded that innovations are a important source of a competitive advantage while during innovation process innovation, knowledge is an essential element<sup>67</sup>.

Tacit knowledge and human resource are synonyms. F-Jardon and Gonzalez stated that along with structural capital, human capital a knowledge-based element is the key strategic resource and source of sustainable competitive advantage<sup>68</sup>. To be competitive something is required which can't be copied. Alwis and Hartmann found that tacit knowledge leads to innovative practice and are difficult for competitors to imitate thus through this, companies gain competitive advantage<sup>69</sup>.

Knowledge management if get inculcated in any organization then it takes cultural form. Lubit suggested that through the cultural and organizational capabilities development required for exceptional KM, continued competitive advantage is

gained<sup>70</sup>. Management of knowledge must reach and confine to the staff of the organization. Argote and Ingram stated that the firm gain competitive advantage by knowledge management in two ways: facilitating internal knowledge transfer and blocking external knowledge spillover<sup>71</sup>. Overall effort of all the staff contributes to knowledge management. Farrukh and Waheed concluded that learning organization learns through its members individually and collectively i.e. knowledge management, to create competitive advantage<sup>72</sup>.

**Other HRM/ D Tools and Competitive Advantage:** Better resource should be procured which serves two purposes – others don't get and organization gets benefit of it. Shrimali found that competitive advantage can be obtained when companies can attract and hire top talent<sup>73</sup>. Human resource works better when their morale is high. Al-Rfou and Trawneh demonstrated that there is considerable association of job motivation and competitive advantage; thus, human resources need to be motivated<sup>74</sup>. In a long run human resource must be saved from pull or push factor which leads to staff turnover. Greenwood put forward that there is a association of organizational career management and productivity in Jamaican financial organizations<sup>75</sup>.

**Review enabled the researcher in developing the following understanding:** i. The HRM/ D practices in industry to gain CA is visible but still holistic approach is required. ii. Competitive advantage will be gained only when the right combination of HRM/ D practices is applied practices is achieved. iii. The right combination of HRM/ D practices to gain CA will vary from organizational to organization. iv. There can't be a universal best HR practices to gain CA. Even so much of empirical work has not been able to define such set. v. The way HR is treated is heart of gaining CA. vi. There is increasing trend of aligning HRM/ D practices with organization goals and strategies to gain CA.

## Methodology

In this study various research papers published in well-known journals were categorically analyzed. Papers related to the area of HRM/D and its various tools more specifically performance appraisal, training and development, knowledge management were categorized and studied in detail. Those papers were selected which were establishing relationship between or among the HRM/ D practices and competitive advantage in any ways. The contents are presented in a systematic way maintaining the relationship between/ among the HRM/ D and its various practices or tools. This paper is adequately reflecting purpose of the study.

## Results

A profound study of existing literature available facilitated the investigator to discover latest elements and genuine input to the academic body. The finding is that Human Resource

Management/ Development practices in industry are increasing to gain CA using HR as key ingredient.

Some reasons of gaining CA by the organizations include: i. Organizations are focusing on CA and trying to find ways to gain it. ii. Organizations are finding importance of HRD in developing human as human capital. iii. Organizations are finding positive relationship between HRM/ D practices and CA. iv. Organizations are thinking performance appraisal as ingredient for CA and prerequisite for training. v. Organizations are applying training and development as a tool for CA. vi. Organizations started believing in knowledge management especially of tacit knowledge. vii. Organizations are also utilizing motivation, talent management, career management etc. for gaining CA.

**Additional important results are:** i. Previous findings shows the influence of various HR practices if applied in conjunction will positively contribute towards CA. ii. The application of HRM/ D practices is impactful when firm core believes in resource-based view. iii. The better impact of HR practices can be seen when organizations start thinking HR as key ingredient to CA as the human resource can't be imitated. iv. Organizations when focus not just on human as resource but the capabilities through HR then better results are achieved in terms of CA. v. HRM/ D practices bring CA more when organizational goals and strategies are in a line. vi. Human resource responsible for CA needs to be offered a unique set of bundle of benefits.

## Conclusion

In this challenging world to gain competitive advantage, among the various resources, organizations are considering human resource as prime resource as the same can't be imitated. Organizations are financing and must finance to develop human capital keeping resource based view as central theme. To develop and secure the human resource, A systematic human resource department in organization is developing and securing the human resource This department by applying various tools especially performance appraisal, training and development and knowledge management achieves competitive advantage provided the practices are aligned with organization objectives and strategies. A affirmative association between performance appraisal, training and development and knowledge management with competitive advantage of organization is found. Performance appraisal provides input for training and development and the content required for training and development is managed by the knowledge management. Apart from this human resource need to be compensated with unique set of bundle of benefits so that this valuable resource stay in organization. In connection to the hidden aim of this study, the application of the above mentioned HRM/ D tools can be verified in educational sector and by application, CA can be achieved there.

**Suggestions:** In this study an endeavour has been made to find or verify the benefit of HRM/ D practices here competitive advantage of the organization. The results assist managers working in various sectors/ areas in believing the application of HRM/ D practices in gaining Competitive advantage. i. Employees ought to be utilized as resource of sustainable competitive advantage. ii. Human resource department must be a separately entity as specialized, continuous and dynamic effort is required for sustainable competitive advantage. iii. HRM/ D practices must be aligned with organization objectives while developing human resource. iv. Bundling of HR practices namely performance appraisal, training and development along with knowledge management will facilitate the attainment of one of the organizational objectives i.e. competitive advantage. v. Organization must focus on tacit knowledge as a factor for competitive advantage.

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