



BUILDING HR CAPABILITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE SERVICE DELIVERY- A CASE STUDY ON NGOs IN NORTH-EAST REGION

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Abstract

The concept of sustainability is understood as a firm's ability to achieve its business goals by integrating economic, environmental and social opportunities into its business strategies. It is vital for the firm to survive in the long run. Today, HR is taking a vital position in the organisation, which is now focussed on carrying out value added activities to meet the firm's strategic objectives. There is an increased potentiality to create and build HR capabilities to create a more sustainable forum for the firm to grow and overcome the challenges the firm faces while delivering quality service delivery. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which are the drivers of sustainable economic and social development are now increasingly evolving their business processes and activities, so as to meet their objectives in smarter ways. As NGOs are increasingly exercising their role as efficient provider of services to the needy and assert a pivotal role in defining both the problems and the solutions, the demand for NGO accountability is growing. Since the service delivery process of NGOs is people led, therefore, for its sustenance it is very important that the employees are competent enough for the job. Therefore, it is very much important to build the human resource of the NGOs to make them capable to fit in the role of sustainable service delivery process.

The study involves a case study method where an attempt has been made to investigate on how the human resource capital of the NGOs can be strategically build in order to make them capable in delivering quality services to the people.

Keywords: Sustainability, HR Capabilities, NGO, Business Process, Service Delivery.

Introduction

Historically, sustainability practises were not a core component of business strategy. However, increasing customer and societal demand for economic, environmental and social responsibility have brought sustainability issues to the surface. Today, sustainability is identified as a key differentiator for competitive advantage. Sustainability in simple terms means to integrate the economic, environmental and social opportunities into its business strategies so as to achieve its business goals and increase long term shareholder value. It involves the convergence of economic development, social equity and environmental protection to ensure long term improvement of the society and organizations. The role of sustainability is viewed as building brand value and reputation, ensuring public and stakeholder trust, attracting capital, increasing competitiveness, driving innovation, attracting and retaining talent as well as achieving long term profitability.

Human capital has been identified as a very important resource category for building a competitive advantage (Schuler and Jackson, 2005ⁱ, Barney, 1991ⁱⁱ). In nowadays; managers realize that human capital has become the only way for an organization to achieve competitive edge to adjust to the dynamic business environment. Study of new businesses by Bamford, Dean and McDougall (1996) identified that acquiring competent human resources was critical for a venture's success or failure because HRM practises influence and may determine if a firm does well in developing its products/services it offersⁱⁱⁱ. Therefore, the development of HRM is crucial for the firm to grow in this cut throat competition.

Thus, sustainability has become an emerging phenomenon in HRM practise and research. As the world has entered the 21st century, organizations found themselves in need to develop more sustainable business process models, and the HR function has a key role to play in this sustainable business process^{iv}. In strategic HRM, the understanding of sustainability has been related to that of economic competitiveness and 'sustained competitive advantages', deriving from business strategy over a long time.



Thus, Sustainable HRM is defined from sustainable management perspective as what companies themselves have to do in their environments to have durable access to skilled human resources. This encompasses exploring a causal explanation for mutual exchange relationships between organisations and their environments and developing a general theoretical approach for handling scarce resources^v. Thus, sustainability in HRM involves resolving the constraints by realising maximum human potential with scarce competent resources for long term existence.

At present, Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) are the marshals of development, agents for bringing sustainable economic and social development. As, NGOs increasingly exercise their role as efficient provider of services to the needy and assert a pivotal role in defining both the problems and solutions, the demand for NGO accountability is growing. Therefore, NGOs should depend on both developments of quality manpower and on good service delivery to remain spirited in the eyes of stakeholders. Since the service delivery process of NGOs is people led therefore, for its sustenance it is very important that the employees are competent enough for the job. The employees have to be knowledgeable, understanding, and concerned about the clients', especially beneficiaries' needs^{vi}. It is of outmost importance for the NGOs to pay attention to know how to shape service cultures and integrating appropriate human resource strategies into service delivery process in order to deliver good service quality. Employees play a vital role in delivering services in NGO sector. Since employees are catalyst in service delivery process of NGOs must recognize their role and have to infuse adequate resources for their development^{vii}

In this paper, the NGOs that were chosen for the study are the North East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS) and the Rural Volunteer Centre (RVC) and Prerona NGO in North East Region who are known for commendable services for the people in need. These NGOs have a well-developed client-oriented service cultures because they think employee satisfaction can service delivery and more important client satisfaction. Thus, these three NGOs are taken as our subject of study.

Objectives

1. To study the areas of HR capabilities which influence the sustainable service delivery in an organisation.
2. To compare these areas of HR capabilities influencing sustainable service delivery in these NGOs.

Research Methodology

The study is based on case study method, This paper is attempted with an exploratory research design and meticulous effort had been put to understand the facets of the HR capabilities in the sustainable service delivery of these NGOs in North Eastern Region while considering to the secondary data available over web sources as well as efforts had been made to get in touch with NGO Project coordinators and employees in person to get an understanding at the personal level.

Introduction of the studied NGOs

1. North-East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS)

NEADS is the brainchild of Mr. GirinChetia, who established this NGO at Bamdhekiakhowa of Jorhat district in 1987 with the help of local communities. The basic purpose of this organisation is to empower the unprivileged people by making them aware about their own rights. NEADS has been working in the areas like Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Agriculture, Art and Culture, Child and Family welfare, Human Rights, Legal Awareness and Aid, Micro Advocacy, Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation, Tribal Affairs, Vocational training, Water Resources, Women's Development and Empowerment. The activities of NEADS are based on donor funding. NEADS has presence in Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Sivasagar and Tinsukia. By its activities it has helped more than 1 lakh people in the operated districts.

Major Activities of NEADS

1. Undertake livelihood projects for the poor and marginalised people.
2. Child care projects in the flood affected areas.
3. Disaster Risk Reduction projects in flood affected areas.



4. Women Rights legal forum to help women in need.
5. Diary development projects.
6. Helping farmers by giving loans with the help of NABARD.
7. Engaging people for Right based activities to make them empowered to know their rights.

Rural Volunteer Centre (RVC)

Shri Rabindranath was instrumental in setting up RVC at Akajan, Dhemaji district in 1993. The region in which RVC works is subject to regular annual devastating floods of the Brahmaputra. RVC works primarily to help the communities affected by the floods to manage to live despite the floods. RVC's work involves the three R's of the rescue, relief and rehabilitation of the affected communities and the scope of work has broadened and deepened as RVC's own understanding of the problems grew, their capacities increased and donor support rose. Its steady annual budget is around 5 million per year. In years which see disastrous floods needing large scale relief and rehabilitation measures, RVC accepts additional grants from donors desirous of supporting the relief work and in such years its annual operations may reach a level of Rs.13-14 millions. RVC has a reach in about 400 villages in the flood prone areas of the Dhemaji and partly Lakhimpur districts, has set up over 900 Self Help Groups (SHGs) and has direct and active links with 160 of them, also works through Gram Bikas Kebangs (Village Development Committees) and also has a large number of disaster mitigation committees in villages.

Seventy-eight volunteers including over twenty-five women work with RVC. The annual payout for honorarium of volunteers is about Rs. 2.5 million.

Main activities of RVC Are

1. Undertakes rescue and relief operations including facilitation of relief camps run at the State expenses, whenever floods occur in the region.
2. Has a well laid out programme of rehabilitating villages damaged by floods.
3. Large involvement in hygienic sanitation programmes for the flood affected areas.
4. Runs a school for children in the region.
5. Recently launched an innovative programme called Amar Bazar (or market) and runs 44 village haat.

Prerona NGO

Prerona, the Spastic Society of Jorhat, situated at Cinnamara on the southern fringes of the Jorhat town, is dedicated to providing education to children with various types of disability and facilitating the rehabilitation of physically challenged persons from all walks of life. Prerona is the Brain child of Sayera Rahman whose second child Zafri Nawaz is afflicted with cerebral palsy. Set up in 1992 on a 12-katha plot of land, the institution is affiliated to Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy, Kolkata (Spastic Society of Eastern India). There is a management committee where most of them are parent or family member of disabled person to run the affairs of Prerona, which extend to a gamut of different areas. Prerona runs a Centre for Special schools and a Respite care service for National trust. In addition to the school, Prerona also conducts rehabilitation Programmes for people with different types of disability. It is approved as SNAP under National Trust for 10 districts of Assam. Its activities are - awareness Programmes, formation of Local Level Committee and activation of LLC at different districts. Registered NGO meetings are being regularly held and aids are also provided. The teachers at Prerona have received training from Indian Institute for cerebral palsy but at present the institution itself runs an RCI approved training program. From a small school service with few children at Ms Rahman 's house, now it has a large set up with Centre for Special Education, Residential facilities, Vocational Centre, manpower development centre, DDRC Etc.

Main activities of Prerona NGO are

1. Educational day care centre for special education.
2. Community based rehabilitation programme to visit their homes twice a week or weekly to provide service to children with disability.
3. Carry out awareness programmes like seminars and workshops about disabilities.
4. Offers non-formal training to parents and social workers to enable them to identify such children and help enrol them in the institution.



Research and Findings

Historically, HR functions in an organisation have focussed on improving operating efficiency and administrative effectiveness of the human capital. Today, such improvements are table stakes. HR function is not only limited to improvement in administrative tasks but also integrate with the overall organisational function to support organisational strategic decision making. To have a high impact, the HR organisation must develop advanced capabilities to align HR structure and services with the business needs that facilitate business growth and operational excellence^{viii}. Advanced HR capabilities enable an organisation to execute its business strategies more effectively and also improve the performance of the organisation as a whole.

The greatest contributions by the HR function to sustainability effectiveness were seen in the fields of talent management, training and development, workforce engagement and ethics and governance. Significant contributions made by HR in support of sustainability from these perspectives. Talent management, in sustainability context, means hiring the right people with right kind of mental attitude with their functional expertise. Training and development, the HR's role is considered essential to improve the performance of employees and develop the people to deliver improved service quality. Workforce engagement, which is strongly related to the sustainability of the organisation, can enable an organisation to develop customer satisfaction and business growth. At last, Ethics and governance, covers a high-level HR involvement on the compliance to the governmental laws, norms and regulations. All the three NGOs in our study, are registered NGOs and complies to the governmental rules and regulations to the highest level.

Table 1: HR Capability Building in the Different NGOS

HR Capabilities	NEADS	RVC	Prerona NGO
Talent management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruit employees from the communities where they work. 2. Sociability and flexibility is the basic criteria. 3. Help in community-based services. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruits employees with relevant qualifications. 2. Vacancies filled through personal contacts and peer recommendations. 3. People with positive attitude towards social work. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruit employees with educational background. 2. Dedicated to provide education to children.
Training & Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interactive on the job training. 2. Problem solving in real work situation. 3. Experienced employees mentor new ones. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attitude training an essential part of training. 2. Regular meetings for problem discussion. 3. Supportive technology to deliver service quality. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Receive training from Indian Institute of Cerebral Epilepsy.
Workforce management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make employees more accountable and responsible. 2. Staff handles problems themselves. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regular meetings to improve productivity. 2. Increase internal cooperation and promote team work. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employees visit the home of children with disablement to provide them support. 2. Regular awareness seminars and workshops

From the table, it is observed that all the three NGOs i.e., NEADS, RVC and Prerona NGO have realised that building HR capabilities is very much essential to provide quality services to its customers. They not only recognize the importance of the employees in service delivery but have also developed a series of human resource



strategies to enhance employee satisfaction, productivity, quality and retention. Satisfied employees will perform better resulting in greater beneficiaries' satisfaction, which in-turn will lead to greater sustainability. These NGOs have given special emphasis on recruiting people with requisite positive attitude towards social work, being more accountable and responsible, handling problems with a problem-solving attitude, developing internal communications and discussions, due importance to training and development of employees and also focus on more productivity with increased cooperation and team work.

However, we also see some differences in the strategies among these NGOs in enabling their human resource capabilities for sustainable service delivery. While NEADS find people belonging to the community as the most suitable people for extending their services to the beneficiaries of that particular community, RVC believes in professional skills of employees very important. Again, Prerona NGO tends to hire educators cum social workers who have relevant qualifications to teach students with disabilities. In order to pursue the best employees, organisations act as marketers and use their marketing expertise in competing with other organisations^{ix}. Employees can achieve knowledge and attitude required for good service delivery through training^x. Though all the three NGOs emphasize on training and development of these employees on the functional expertise. RVC emphasizes the attitude training which is not seen in NEADS and Prerona NGO.

Limitations to study

The study has considered only the four functional areas of HR which enable an organisation to provide sustainable service delivery to its customers. There are other areas which on small scale contribute to the sustainability in an organisation which are leadership development, change management, collaboration and teamwork, creating and inculcating values, and health and safety which are not incorporated in this study.

Conclusion

Sustainability is an emerging phenomenon in HRM practise and research. The HR key functionalities need to be developed to make a contribution to sustainable service delivery to ensure maximum customer satisfaction and increased productivity. In this study, we have examined how the three NGOs have developed their HR capabilities to move towards a sustainable service delivery to its beneficiaries. It is very important for management of NGOs to recognize the role of employees in sustainable service delivery and engage in strategies to develop their employees for increased productivity and survive in the long run.

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