Human Resources in UNDP, A People Centred Strategy 2008 – 2011: A Critical Review

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to assess human resource management within UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) according to their strategy and practices.

Design/Methodology/Approach - This article reviews UNPD HRM strategy and framework. The paper recommends a framework to help addressing HRM issues within UNDP.

Findings - A HRMFW process model is developed based on UNDP strategies and existing frameworks. The paper provides useful processes and guidelines to both managers and staff who would be responsible for human resources. The proposed framework is further described in details to initiate discussion and analysis on key HRM issues.

Practical Implications – The paper enables executives to transform from HRM to SHRM and helps managers and staffs to better utilize human resources and increase organizational performance.

Originality/Value – The paper proposes a process model to help filling the gap between HR strategies and HR operations at UNDP.

Keywords - Human Resources, Strategic Human Resources Management, UN, UNDP

Paper Type – Conceptual paper

Introduction

UNDP is the United Nation's global development network programme. It campaigns for change through development and utilization of knowledge and resources in order to help people build a better life.

UNDP focuses on Human Rights, Public Administration, Parliamentary Development, Local Governance, Electoral Systems and Processes, Anti-Corruption, Access to Justice and Rule of Law and Access to Information and E-Governance. UNDP employees 7,900 people spread across 166 nations, and deals with over 25,000 non-staff project personnel on service contracts (HR in UNDP, 2008 – 2011).

The mission of UNDP is to help countries accelerate progress on human development, with a particular focus on making the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) a reality by 2015 (HR in UNDP, 2008 – 2011). During the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, 189 nations agreed upon and declared the following Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015 (www.undp.org):

1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2: Achieve universal primary education
3: Promote gender equality and empower women
4: Reduce child mortality
5: Improve maternal health
6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7: Ensure environmental sustainability
8: Develop a global partnership for development

UNDP plays an important role on behalf of the UN system to make the achievement of MDGs a reality by 2015. Several internal and external drives including MDGs, growing complexity of global challenges and the reform of the UN system and the pressure to

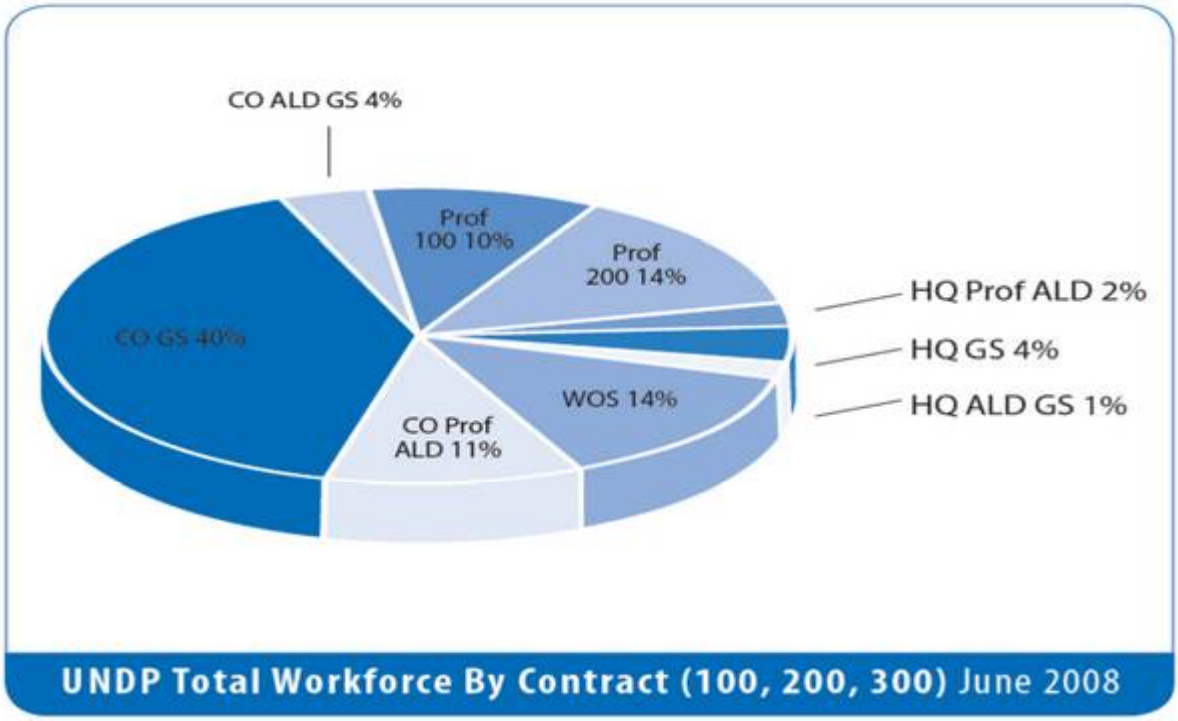
deliver the development results are the reasons for UNDP Strategic Plan 2008 – 20011 which calls on UNDP HR to align itself with the needs of the organization in order to enhance the delivery and effectiveness of work (HR in UNDP, 2008 – 2011).

The People - Centred HR Strategy

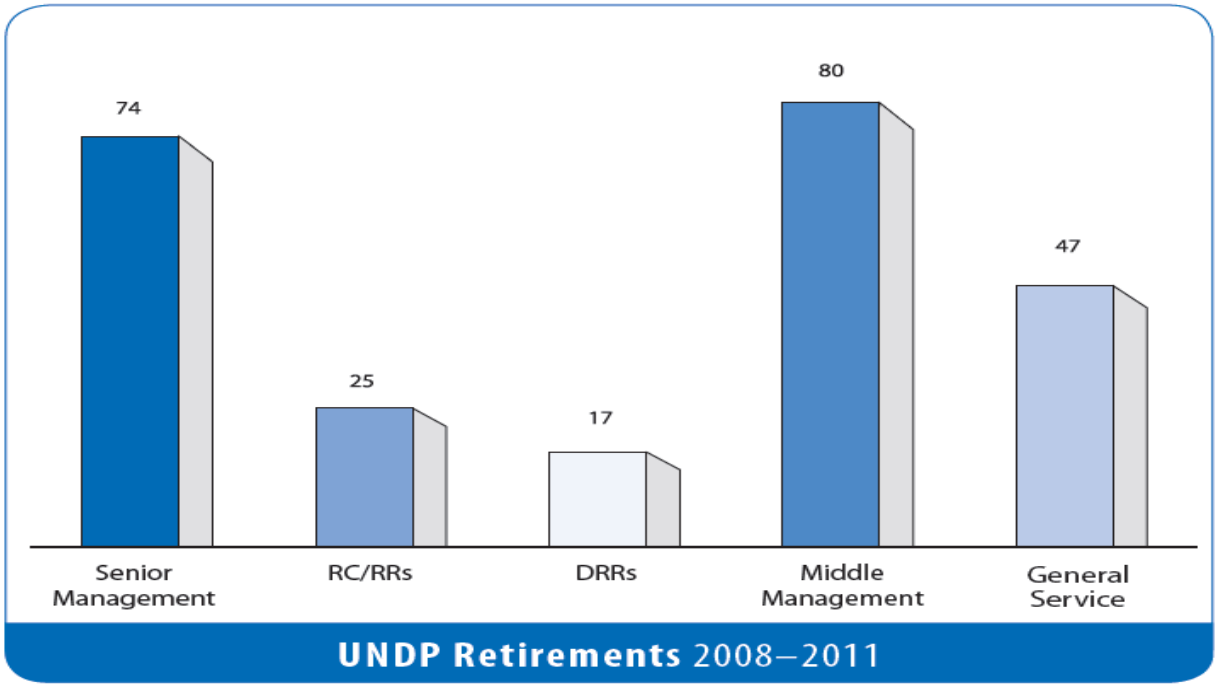
The UNDP Strategy for Managing Human Resources has been elaborated through a process of data analysis, conceptualization and feedback from staff through consultations (including with the Staff Council), surveys and network discussions conducted over the course of several months. It is intended to respond to the lessons learned from the previous HR strategy, including: the need to define a people-centred strategy that is truly owned by the staff and responds to the priorities of the country offices; the need to be bold in our vision but humble in our approach; the need to follow through on the vision as described; the need to provide an accountability framework; and the need to monitor the strategy continuously and make adjustments as required (HR in UNDP, 2008 – 2011). In short this includes lessons learned from the previous HR strategies as well as fulfillment of the needs for mission, vision and organizational goals and needs.

Key Statistics

Charts blow show UNDP total workforce by contract, gender, retirement as well as satisfaction rate.



Source: HR in UNDP, 2008 – 2011



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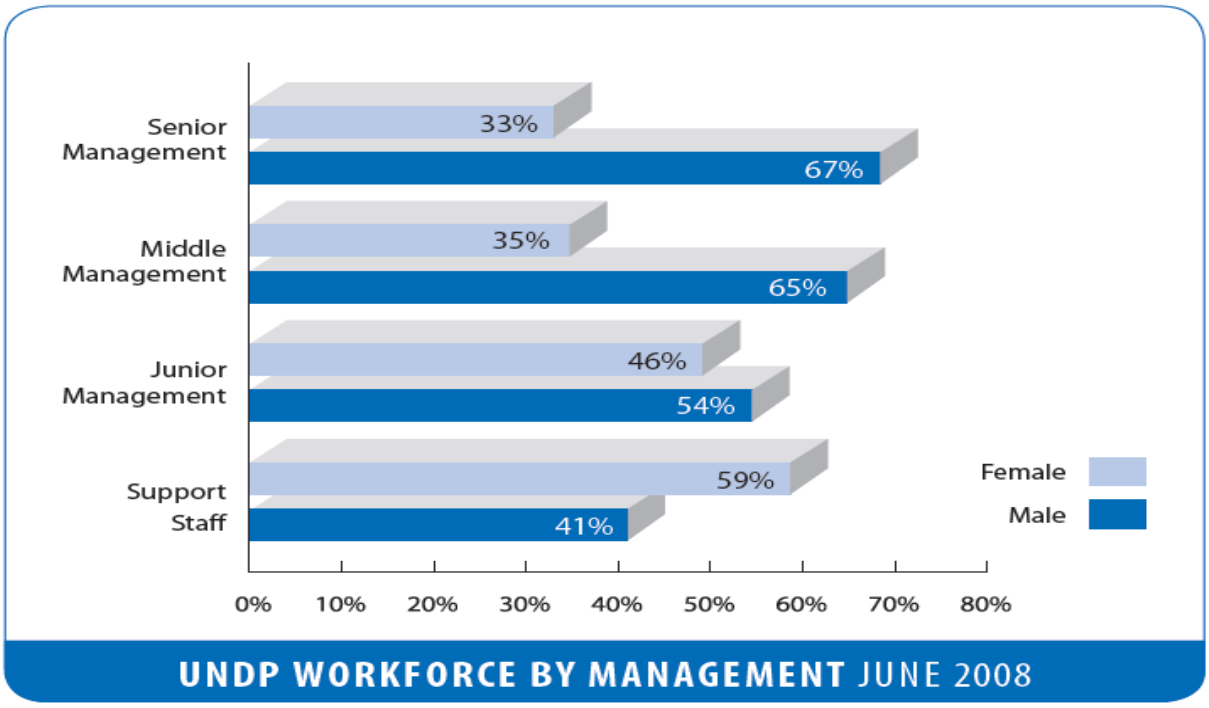

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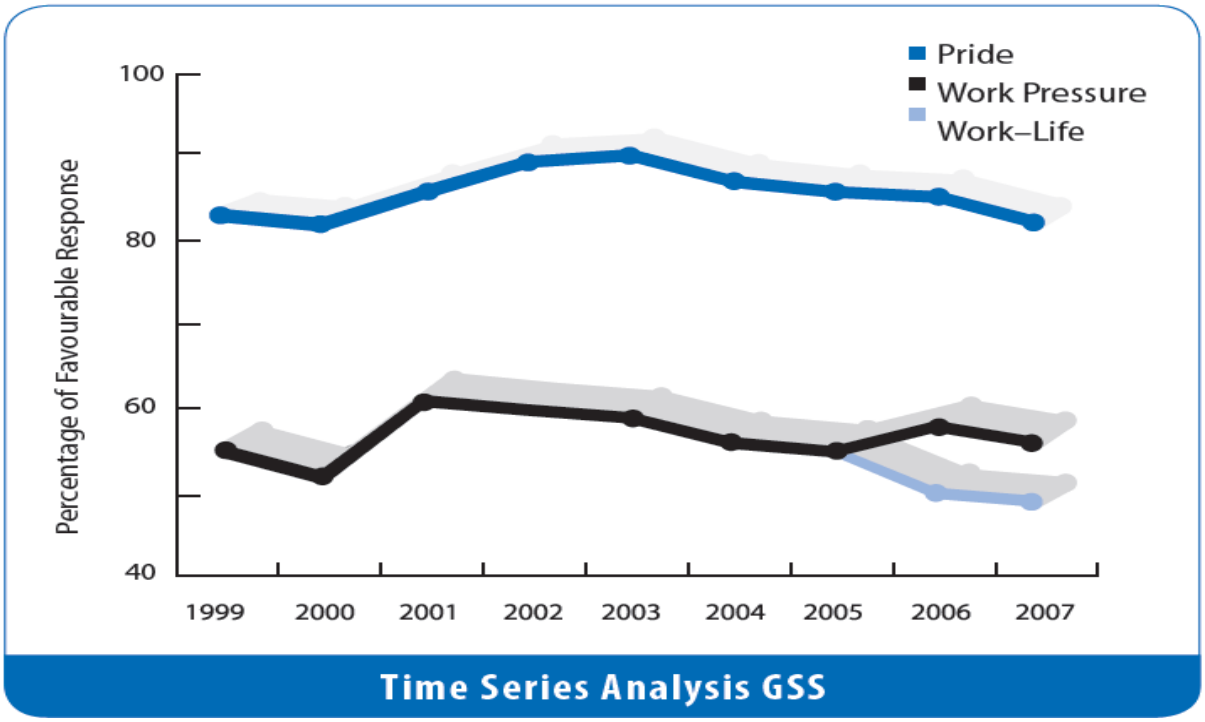


Source: HR in UNDP, 2008 – 2011

According to the above statistics, by 2011, 438 staff members will retire with the majority of 61% male. This gives the opportunity to replace them with women to fulfill the mission of empowering women to higher positions and gender balance. The senior, mid-level and junior management positions are mainly filled with male while majority of staff members are women. Also majority of employees have expressed themselves as being proud of their organization and working for UNDP but they have complained about work pressure especially the work-life standard.

These inputs indicate there is lots of room to do especially on empowering women and overall work satisfaction.

Strategic Plan

While the UNDP Strategic Plan is about achieving development results, this Strategy is about improving the human element that helps us get there. Specifically, the Strategy for Managing Human Resources envisions a UNDP that is more effective, responsive and productive because it invests in its staff and draws on shared values and principles. The Strategy thus affirms the UNDP Strategic Plan and sets out to develop organizational effectiveness in three areas: (HR in UNDP, 2008 – 2011)

Dimension One: Talent Sourcing is about attracting and retaining talented people committed to the values of the organization;

Dimension Two: Staff Capacity is about developing the capacity of staff members to reach their full potential; and

Dimension Three: Enabling Environment is about creating a positive and enabling working environment that motivates staff.

Source: HR in UNDP, 2008 – 2011

Besides the vision and mission and way ahead defined by the MDG, the strategy is also about addressing key issues within the organization. Although UNDP has recruited talented people over the years but there is room for many more. Considering the organization's worldwide operation, world-class high standard activities, vision and mission, global and regional challenges especially challenges in developing countries and regions in war and crisis there will always be room for talented people to be recruited. Comparing UNDP with private enterprises and some other international organizations, UNDP struggles more than others to attract and recruit talented people. UNDP is required to find the reasons behind and address them in accordance. In addition although UNDP employees come from 173 different nations and territories however many of them come from few countries. Perhaps a geographical distribution

balance and empowerment is also needed similar to gender (women) balance and empowerment.

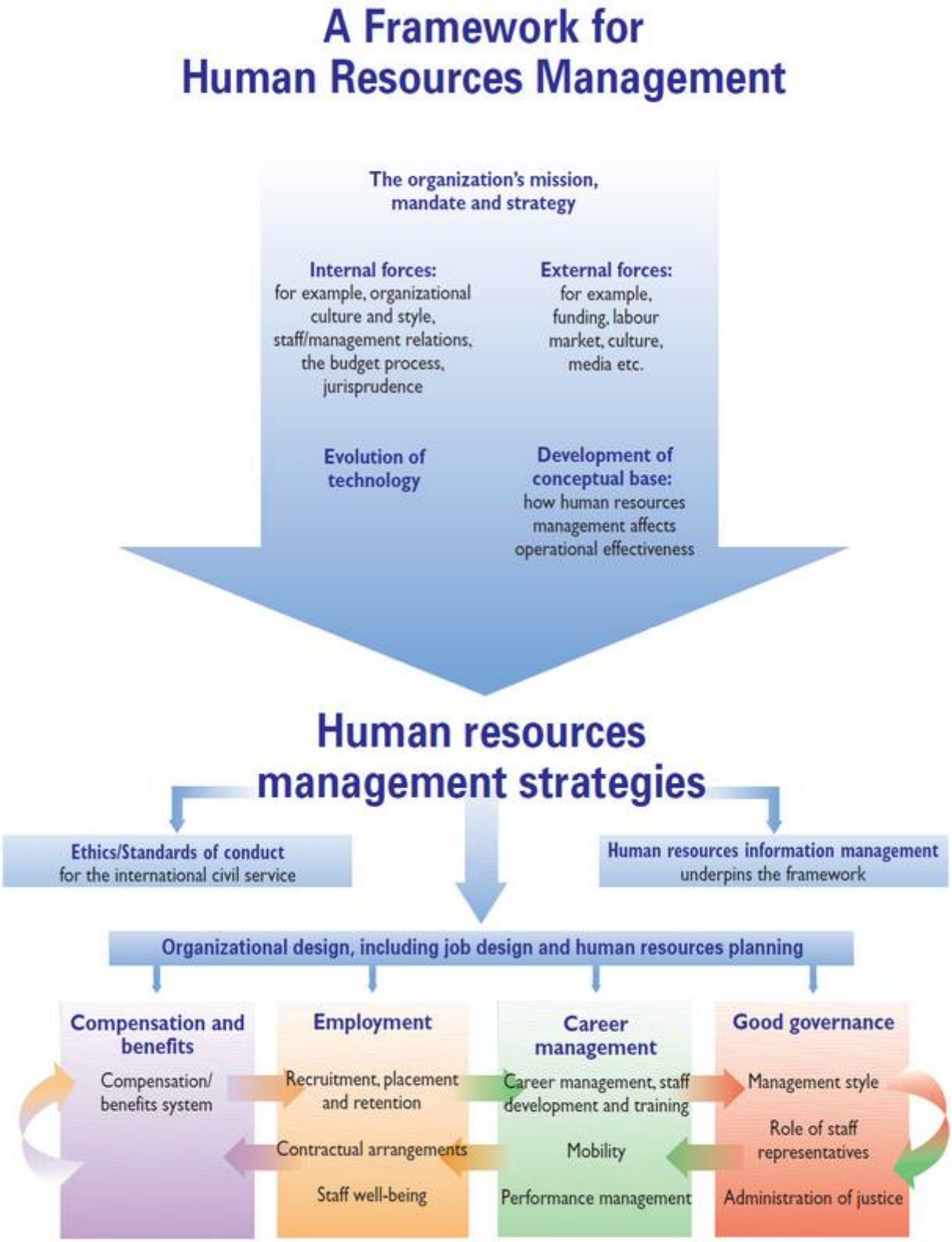
When an organization is lacking talented players the organization is required to invest and do more on personnel development and trainings. Although UNDP is working on development and training however it is not enough to fulfill the organization's need and target performance level.

Lastly, environment is always a key element, learning from the experience UNDP puts loads of efforts to create a better and attractive environment. With all the efforts most employees complain from work pressure and work-life condition especially those who work in developing countries and crisis regions and face ongoing dangers situations on daily basis.

Framework

The International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) has developed a HR framework. The purpose of the Framework is to enable the organizations of the United Nations common system to manage their human resources effectively (A framework for HRM, ICSC, 2001). An overriding concern of human resources managers in the common system is to link human resources management with organizational goals, taking into account the external and internal forces relevant to human resources management. The framework has six major components, some of which have a number of sub-components. The Framework provides the organizations with a holistic conceptual base from which to take action in one or more areas of human resources management reform. As such, it can be used to form the basis of the organizations' future work on human resources policies and procedures (A framework for HRM, ICSC, 2001).

The framework is also to serve UNDP's people-centred strategy and its three dimensional plan and goals.



Source: A Framework for HRM, ICSC, 2001

The Problem

UN / UNDP have variety of 25 tools and instruments to measure and monitor Public Administration Performance of Countries. But it doesn't mean that the organization runs perfectly without problems. In fact the organization struggle dealing with loads of challenges and issues that affect its performance and capabilities especially in developing countries.

As far as the problem is concerned there is need for:

- Recruitment of new and highly competent employees
- Improvement of staff capacity through development and training
- Recruitment of more women and empowering women
- Recruitment distribution based on more geographical balance
- Reduction of work pressure
- Improvement of employee work-life
- Improvement of employee satisfaction

In analyzing the problems we should also consider several internal and external factors that play important role. These factors might bring along opportunities or threat which could be filtered and observed or avoided.

The internal and external factors affecting performance are as follow:

- Ongoing changes / dynamic environment
- Individual / human behavior and culture
- Competency limitation
- Development and trainings limitation
- Stakeholders influence
- Host nations influence
- Globalization

What is the root of problem?

The vision and mission is clear, the strategies are well defined, the framework with its components, sub-components and underlying principle and linkages is also defined, loads of standard operating procedures (SOPs) is in place to guide activities. Then what is the root of problem? There is gap between policy and practice, HR is more of a HRM rather than SHRM and the framework does not fill in the gap nor provide the necessary mechanism for SHRM. UNDP HR officers and staffs spend most of their time dealing with SOPs, staff administration and day-to-day operational activities. This situation increases the cost of HR operation and organization as whole while minimizes the output. There is a need for strategic shift to SHRM and development of a mechanism to implement it.

The Solution

In order to address UNDP HR issues some experts have suggested outsourcing day-to-day HR activities however that might not fit within UNDP context and the UN system resulting in some other problems and consequences. The other method is to centralize entire HR activities and implement centralized HRMIS (HRM Information System) and transform HRM to SHRM. This also might not fit within the organizational goal and context as UNDP people-centred strategy is based on decentralization, regionalization and truly owned system by the people and staff spread in hundreds of operations and nations around the world.

In the view of above this article suggests the transfer of day-to-day HR activities to the Line Managers to conduct personnel administration activities and free-up HR personnel to focus more on strategic tasks. This would enable the transformation from HRM to SHRM whilst satisfying the organizational needs and context within the UN system.

We should take into account that such change might cause bigger problems including: widening the gap between practice and strategy, wrong HR practices by the line

managers that lack HR experience and wrong strategic practices by less experienced HR managers. Therefore it is recommended to:

1. Train Line Managers on day-to-day HR activities and administering personnel
2. Train HR Managers on effective SHRM
3. Develop and implement SHRM Transition Framework

In line with the strategic shift this paper concentrates on most challenging part of "transitional framework process". The article is aimed to develop a HRMFW Process Model that can be adapted and maintained throughout the transition period and even beyond and post transition.

I would also like to add that the recommended HRMFW Process Model is rather an additional tool and instrument to the existing ones.

The Processes

There will be six primary processes with a number of sub-processes under each. The processes are divided into three levels of Strategic Processes (Senior HR Managers), Mix-Level Processes (Mid-Level HR Managers) and Operational Processes (Line Managers). Each level of process is color coded as "light blue" for higher strategic processes, "gray" for the mix-level processes and finally "light brown" for the lower operational processes.

Below table is a high level overview of human resources management framework (HRMFW) process model.

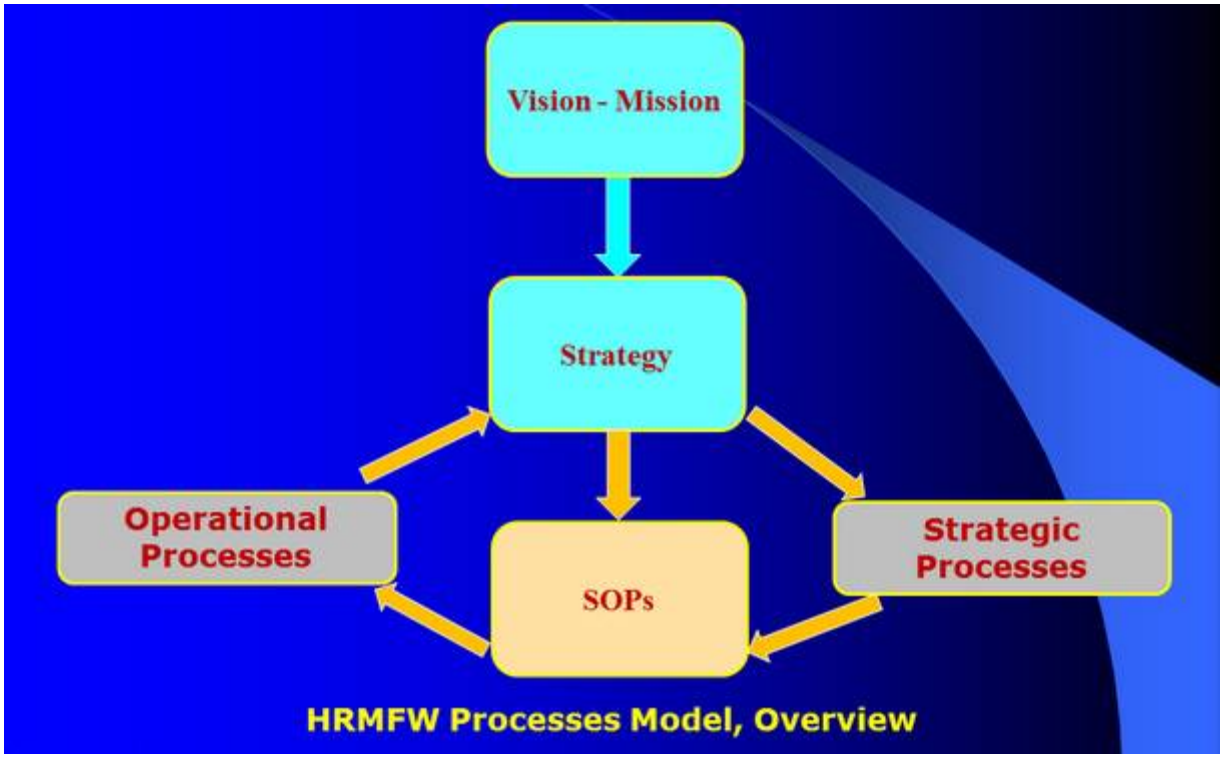


Table 1: Overview of HRMFW Process Model

As we can see the vision & mission feed the strategy and strategy feeds operation process. In order to maintain continues relation and fill the gap between policy and practice this paper recommends a bidirectional model where operational staff respond back feeding the components and processes above creating a circle of HR improvement process.

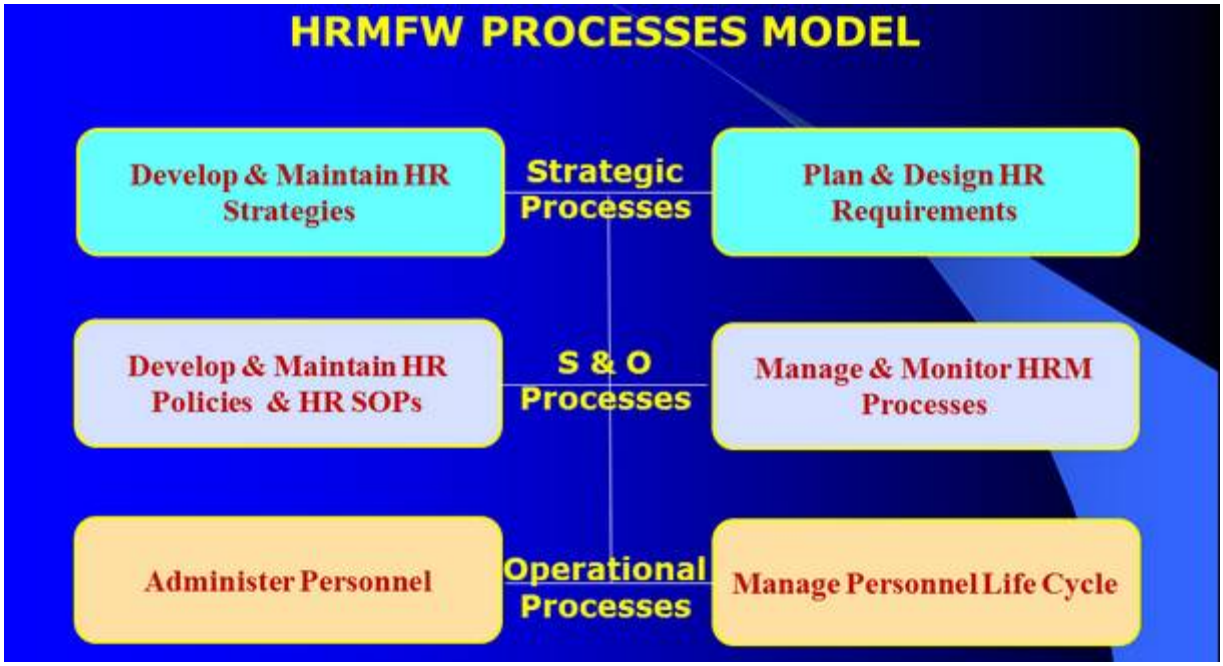


Table 2: HRMFW Process Model

The Human Resources Management can be split as operational and strategic HRM. For example, strategy focuses on HR system as a whole while operation deals with individual tasks such as training. SHRM is concerned of overall performance of the system.

Strategic HRM is a general approach to the management of human resources in accordance to the organization's vision, mission and the key internal and external factors. Strategy is concerned with overall long-term issues including structure, quality, culture, ethics, values and resources.

Operational HRM is concerned about individual activities. Operational HRM is more of tactical approaches for example position opening, recruitment, training, wages and supervision and etc.

The challenge is to align and maintain operational activities with the HRM strategies. For this the author recommends the above HRMFW process model which contains core components and processes of strategic and operational HR that are linked all along the processes in a bidirectional way.

The HRMFW consists of six levels of processes. The top level of "develop and maintain HR strategies and plan and design requirements" as strategic level (color coded in light blue). The lower level of "administer personnel and manage personnel life cycle" as operational level (color coded in light brown). The mid-level "develop and maintain HR policies and HR SOPs and manage and monitor HRM processes" as mix-level processes (color coded in gray). Each level is the responsibility of their respective managers and in sequence of senior HR managers, mid-level HR managers and line managers. The mix-level processes play critical role in filling the gap between policy and practice and interfacing and linking the higher and lower HR processes.

Below we will separately discuss each process and their relevant sub-processes.

Table 3: Develop & Maintain HR Strategies & its Sub-Processes

There are several processes / steps within the "develop and maintain HR strategies". First step is to monitor and asses existing strategies, it is required to see whether the running strategy fulfills organizational aims and objectives. The analyzing alternative strategies is recommended to see whether there are more suitable, effective and beneficial strategies. And finally based on findings from the previous steps, HR strategies are approved for implementation and maintenance involving both higher and mid-level HR managers and teams. Line managers are not involved in these strategic HR activities.

Table 4: Plan & Design HR Requirements & its Sub-Processes

The "plan and design HR Requirements" is a strategic level process with three strategic sub-processes. Strategic decisions such as reorganization, downsizing, expansion and or establishment of a new unit and operation requires strategic process of "evaluating

personnel requirements" as part of planning HR requirements. Due to external and internal limitations and in order to ensure quality outcome it is recommended to conduct "fulfillment feasibility analysis" as 2nd sub-process. And finally "plan manpower" as the 3rd sub-process. Planning Manpower addresses short and long term financial requirements and personnel budgeting activities. It also addresses the issues around personnel development & training and organizational structure. In addition, planning manpower is a strategic sub-process that consists of three mix-level sub-processes meaning its outcome is directly influenced by strategic as well as operational level processes. Again these are strategic and mix-level processes involving HR officers; however line managers might also feed the mix-level sub-processes with their inputs.

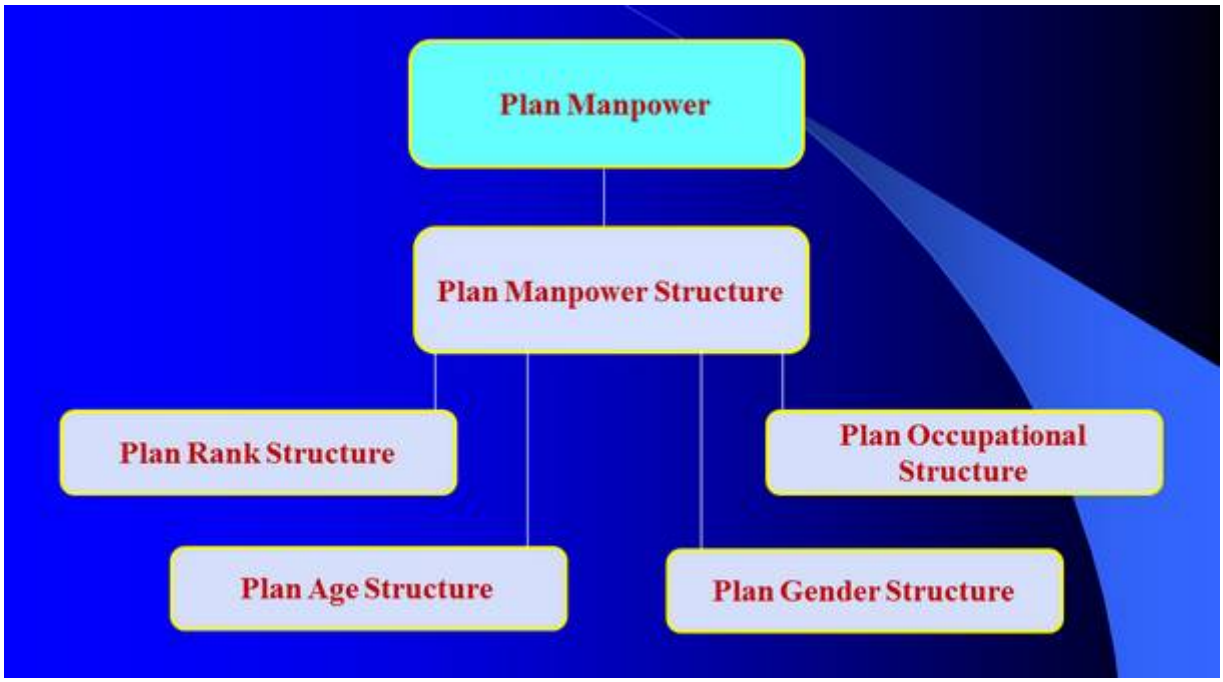


Table 5: Plan Manpower Structure & its Sub-Processes

Under the strategic direction and guidelines from "plan HR requirements" and with the inputs from mix-level processes including "gender, age, occupation and rank" the

manpower structure is defined and decided under the "plan manpower" strategic process.

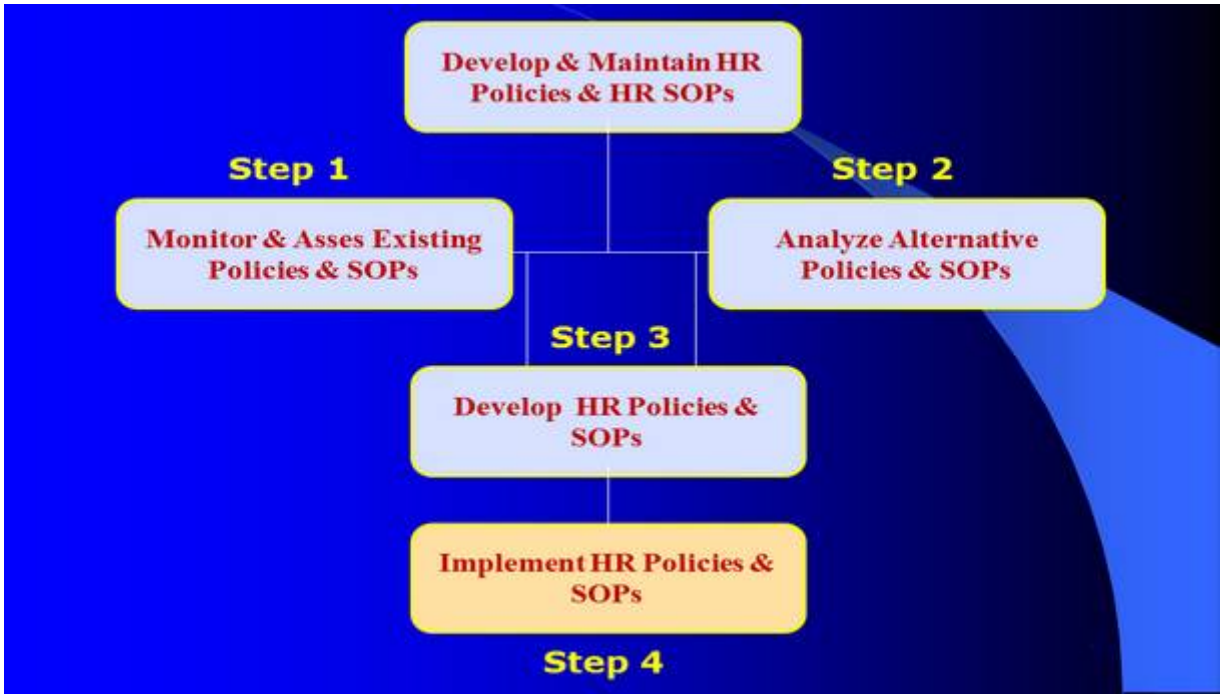


Table 6: Develop & Maintain HR Policies & HR Processes

Once strategies defined and developed and requirements analyzed and planned, policies and SOPs will be developed. The "develop & maintain HR policies & HR SOPs" is a mix-level process receiving guidelines from the above components and loads of inputs from the lower processes. In total there are three sub-processes / steps to fulfill. And finally the products will implement at the lower process under the direction of line managers.

Developing and maintaining SOPs is a key to a successful HR and SHRM practices. These Standard Operating Procedures are detailed version of organizational goals and strategies. They are carefully developed and monitored for a successful implementation

and maintenance of HR strategies. SOPs should be accountable for constant replies and feedbacks to the higher processes to ensure healthier HR system.

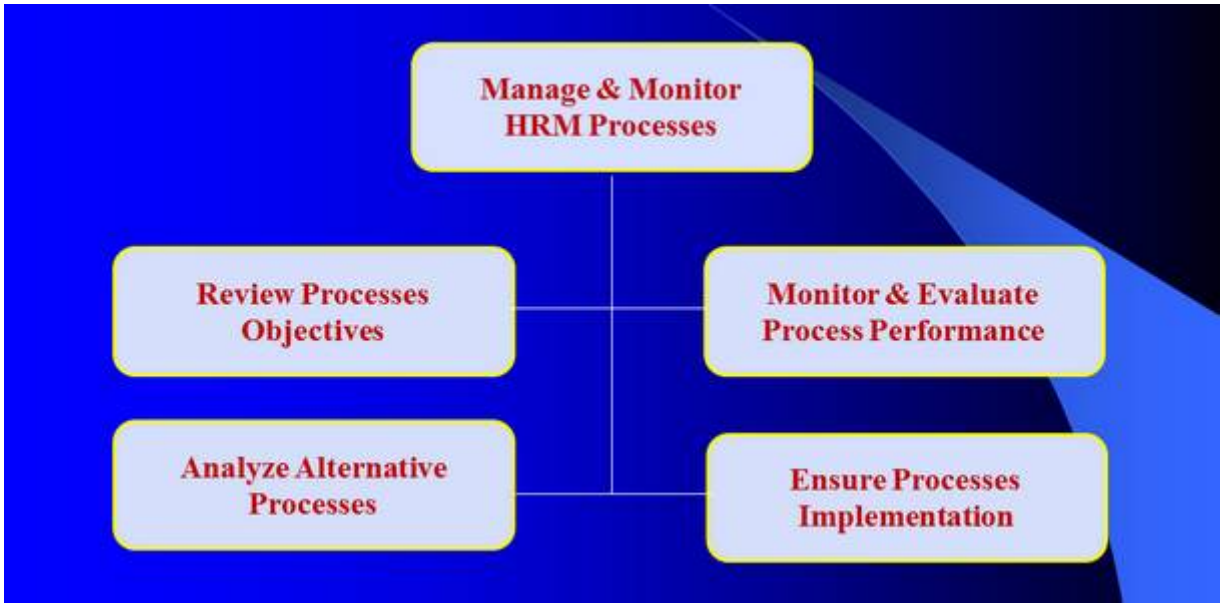


Table 7: Manage & Monitor HRM Processes

Manage and monitor HRM processes is the 4th (mix-level) process within the HRMFW process model. Managing HRM Processes is a continuous function and a controlling process. It is responsible for safeguarding the accuracy, accountability, quality and effectiveness of all strategic and operational processes within the HR system. Therefore the healthier the processes the healthier the HR system will be. These are interfacing processes under the responsibility of mid-level HR officers.

Table 8: Administer Personnel

"Administering personnel" is the operational level process. It consists of at least ten routine operational sub-processes. These daily operational activities are planned to fall under line managers activities. However line managers shall receive full support form the mix-lever HR processes and officers to fulfill their HR responsibilities. The biggest support they should receive is through well written SOPs as well as eHR (electronic HR) that provide necessary guidelines and means to deliver the deliverables in accordance to the HR strategy. In addition line managers and their teams should

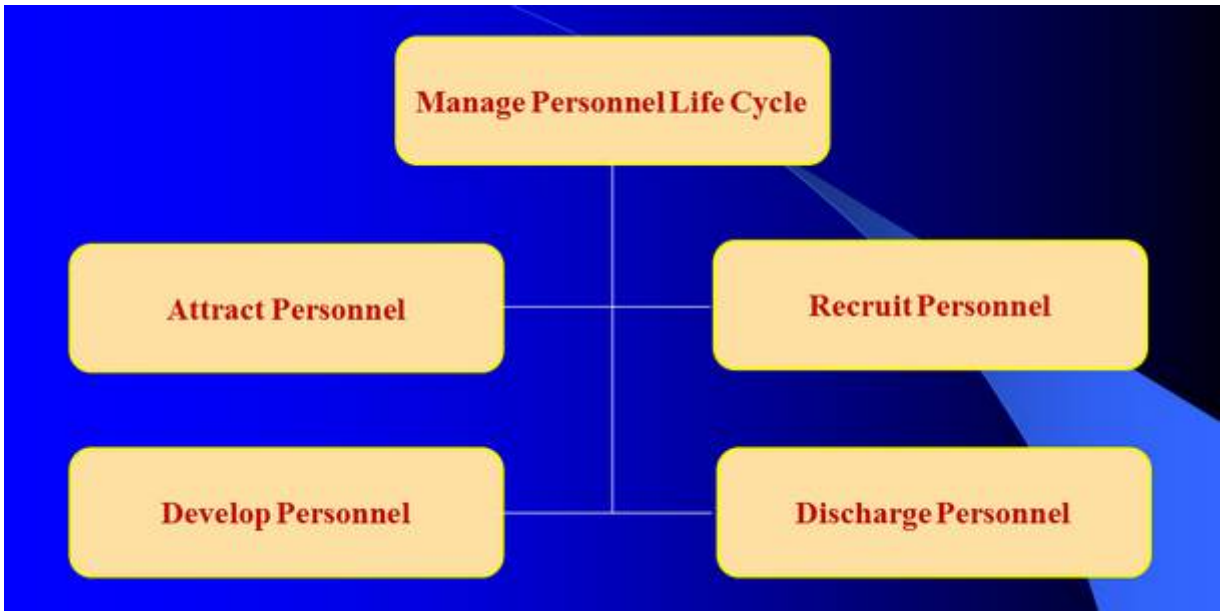


Table 9: Manage Personnel Life Cycle

"Managing Personnel Life Cycle" is also the operational component and the last process within the HRMFW process model. As far as this process is concerned it also requires sets of SOPs to provide necessary guidelines to line managers and their teams to deliver the deliverables in accordance to the HR strategy.

All operational SOPs are recommended to be developed, maintained and monitored by the mix-level process officers.

Summary and Conclusion

Every organization manages the present but the intelligent ones learn from past to create a better future. With the brilliant people-centred HR strategy UNDP is for sure one of them. UNDP has a mandate to focus on MDGs, human development, advocacy, policy, technical support and promoting UN coordination across the system and external environment. To do so UNDP has considered necessary measures to align its HR system with its organizational needs. UNDP strategic plan sets out to develop organizational effectiveness in three areas: talent sourcing, staff capacity and enabling environment. With all those wonderful efforts UNDP still lacks a modern SHRM. HR managers spend most of their time and energy on resolving day-to-day operational activities and personnel administration which results in wider gap between policy and practice and strategy and operation. To resolve these key issues and transform from HRM to SHRM, this report suggested three initial steps with a detailed HRMFW Process Model to be considered. The decentralization approach of the model is a great advantage that allows UNDP to conduct phase or stage based implementation and testing of the suggested HRMFW model. For example UNDP can implement and test the model in one or more HQs and only go for organizational-wide implementation if the results were successful. Finally, the suggest solution is not just a thought but a practical framework process formulated to address the issues while best suits UNDP mission and strategies.

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