



Benefits of Human Resource Professionals in Churches: Ethics for Effective HR Development Programs

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Abstract

Human resource development demands professional skills and knowledge – a cornerstone of every church’s growth. This article presents three practical approaches from Zech (2010) for implementing a human resource development program in a church. It offers three actionable recommendations for implementing human resource development in churches: using appropriate methods, employing suitable evaluators, and managing role conflicts. The final section suggests five biblical principles of human resources development ethics, providing a practical guide for church leaders: honesty, respecting others, knowing your yes and no, investing wisely in others, and fairness. This article is valuable for organizations and churches seeking to implement effective human resource strategies. It equips leaders with the knowledge and tools to make strategic decisions for their organization’s leadership development programs, empowering them to foster growth and productivity within their church community.

Keywords: church leadership, lay leadership development, church growth, Christian leadership ethics, ecclesia resource management.

Introduction

Leadership plays a pivotal role in ensuring growth and productivity in a church by preparing the workforce for their assigned tasks (Ivancevich et al., 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Being ethically sensitive sets a foundation for moral judgment (Jagger, 2011). Thus, when emerging leaders receive practical lessons on ethics, their moral lifestyle can be free of questions. “Becoming an exemplary leader requires fully comprehending the deeply held values, beliefs, standards, ethics, and ideals that drive you. You must freely and honestly choose those principles you will use to guide your decisions and actions” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 48). In essence, the developed leader must have certain traits at the end of the program to lead others in the right direction by

being morally sensitive. “Moral sensitivity is the ability to identify the salient aspects of a moral dilemma” (Jagger, 2011, p. 15).

To integrate leadership and faith, churches must adhere to biblical principles that guide them to remain ethical. The unique approach of incorporating biblical principles in human resource development (HRD) programs is a hallmark of church leadership. Information from the Bible about ethics shows how churches can incorporate these principles in their HRD programs (*Holy Bible: New King James Version*, 1982, Prov. 19:1-6; Matt. 5:33-37, 7:12; Acts 20:35; Lev. 25:14; note that this version of the Bible is used throughout this study). What are the benefits of HRD and human resource professionals in a church? This article presents three approaches from Zech (2010) to discuss implementing an HRD program in a church: using appropriate methods, employing suitable evaluators, and managing role conflicts. The final approach suggests five biblical principles that should be taught in a church’s HRD program as ethical guides for church leaders: honesty, respecting others, making promises carefully, investing wisely in others, and fairness.

Why Human Resource Development?

The distinction between human resources and HRD lies in recruiting resources and improving the resources for organizational growth (Gilley et al., 2002; Swanson, 2001). Per Gilley et al. (2002), employees of an organization form its Human Resources. It is not easy to measure the value of human resources because of the lack of traditional measures and standards. Still, organizational leaders and managers can depend on the cost of replacing valuable employees to determine the importance of human resources (Gilley et al., 2002). The cost relates to the financial burden of developing employees to meet the organization’s needs. “HRD uses interventions like executive coaching, system redesign, team building, training of expertise, action research, and valuing diversity as means to a performance goal, not as a goal in itself” (Swanson, 2001, p. 1).

Zech (2010) encouraged accountability in church leadership with the proposal of performance management that comes in three steps: define, evaluate/communicate, and improve/reward. Zech further suggested three approaches to defining performance: “know what drives the performance of lay ministers, choose useful performance criteria, and determine the level of performance expected” (p. 19). To evaluate and communicate appropriately, Zech gave five guidelines: “use an appropriate method, use appropriate evaluator (s), accept role conflict, avoid evaluation errors, and give useful feedback” (p. 19). Four guidelines to reward people are “work on weaknesses discovered, terminate when necessary, decide if you should integrate the system into a pay philosophy, and reward good performance” (Zech, 2010, p. 19). The following paragraphs shed more light on using appropriate methods, employing suitable evaluators, and managing role conflicts (Zech, 2010).

Using Appropriate Methods

It can be guaranteed that every organization may face some challenges at some point. Still, managers are there to ensure rational decision making (Ivancevich et al., 2018). The adequacy of any organization depends on the aptitudes, resourcefulness, and physical qualities of employees (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006). How leaders can understand and impact others in a multicultural setting is very crucial due to changing demographics and globalization (Yukl, 2013).

HRD in every organization aims to benefit the organization after investing in employees (Swanson, 2001). Hatcher (2002) elaborated on the values HRD leaders need to set the foundation of corporate social responsibility and ethical dyadic; *ethical dyadic* refers to the ethical relationship between two parties – in this case, the HRD leader and the employee. At a minimum, HRD leaders must be committed to training and learning, have passion and care for the organization, pay attention to quality, be considerate of environmental stakeholder elements, and pay attention to technology and its impact on the organization. The clergy and lay leaders' work-life balance can be managed with HRD strategies to ensure they are not overused at work and do not have time for themselves and their families.

Team building, executive coaching, and system redesign are some examples of HRD interventions (Swanson, 2001). The role of HRD professionals in the church is to work with top management to implement structures. Swanson (2001) contended an HRD program that addresses performance goals can be valuable because it closes every gap. Swanson also emphasized that connecting needs with benefits can see the value of HRD. Thus, "HRD programs are valuable only to the extent that they are connected to specific organizational performance requirements" (Swanson, 2001, p. 19). Where the church identifies a weakness in human resources, that area of need must be controlled with a HRD strategy.

To ensure employee well-being, churches must give special attention to HRD; human resources drives everything in organizations, although the value cannot be directly measured. When employee development tasks are added to pastors who do not necessarily have the skills, the least they can do is provide leadership seminars. HRD professionals can decipher wisdom through expertise and consultation with sources to lead the organization towards a meaningful goal in uncertainties; they can incorporate adult learning into everyday work duties to ease the burden on employees. HRD experts also understand individual differences and can factor in work and family life when strategically planning for the organization.

Employing Suitable Evaluators

Considering the starting point of an employer–employee relationship, effectiveness begins during recruitment. First impressions count so much that leaders must set the right tone (Goldsmith et al., 2012). Recruiters and managers can start new employees with either a good or bad impression of the organization. Goldsmith et al. (2012) wrote,

The talent in your organization will grow and thrive only when you establish a clear set of high standards, display a strong belief that those standards can be achieved, and then demonstrate your actions that you practice what you preach. (p. 109)

Because of individual differences and educational backgrounds, not necessarily level of education but area of study, people differ a lot. To communicate a vision to employees, the employer must begin at a common ground where understanding and interest can be established (Ivancevich et al., 2018). According to Johnson (2020), decision makers require practical wisdom for ethical leadership. Thus, every decision a leader makes impacts the group, not just the leader.

Failure to assign HRD roles to qualified practitioners can be an organization's weakness. Giving HRD roles to non-HRD professionals may be financially beneficial, but that would only harm the organization regarding employee development and well-being. According to Quinn and Strickland (2016), work does not only mean what we do for a paycheck but everything creatures do with God's creation. Argyris (1997) asserted that leaders go beyond fixing organizational problems by questioning the values, beliefs, and assumptions behind what they do (double-loop learning). Leadership identifies, implements, and shares an organization's vision with followers. Thus, an appropriate evaluator may not necessarily mean a paid staff. In a church setting, most workers are volunteers, but because people are volunteering, it does not mean placing them where they do not belong.

Not every procedure will work when challenged by a crisis, and leaders still need to find alternatives (Ivancevich et al., 2018). Ivancevich et al. (2018) emphasized that one component of a judicious decision-making process is preparing for the unexpected; that is how leaders are empowered to accept undesirable results. Sometimes, leaders would have to be out of scope (Stefaniak et al., 2012). Hence, those who make choices for their organizations cannot continuously depend on standard trade processes under pressure and restricted time. Still, Ivancevich et al. (2018) asserted that organizations should not discount the need to set goals to guide leadership decisions. The need to employ HRD professionals in churches is natural because, according to Mohamed and Sathyamoorthy (2014), leaders can make errors by failing to assess essential factors.

Leaders can indulge in toxic decision-making without the needed skills because of members' negative attitudes (Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2004).

Managing Role Conflict

Kitching (2008) emphasized that small organizations, to cut costs, choose to handle HR matters with internal staff who are not HR experts. Failure to assign HRD roles to qualified practitioners can be an organization's weakness. While this may be financially beneficial, it may also harm the organization in employee development and well-being. According to Swamy and Ramesh (2011), managers may face different ambiguous problems and tricky ethical dilemmas when stakeholders increase in diversity, number, and activists. Likewise, Ivancevich et al. (2018) emphasized that managers confront ethical dilemmas because of power and politics. Thus, organizations need leaders who can address employee pressure and burnout.

Alison et al. (2021) asserted that many employees were worried about their health and well-being during COVID-19 because they spent time learning new technologies to complete their work while at the same time having to adjust to changes in work procedures. Selecting qualified practitioners who can strategically design programs to release stress caused by the changing nature of work cannot be discounted. Churches can demonstrate their roles as transformative agents to the world by exhibiting biblical principles like honesty, respect for others, making promises carefully, investing wisely in others, and fairness.

Honesty

The Bible discourages bearing false witness and speaking lies – “A false witness will not go unpunished, and *he who* speaks lies will not escape. Many entreat the favor of the nobility, and every man *is* a friend to one who gives gifts” (Prov. 19:5-6) – but it encourages integrity – “Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool” (Prov. 19:1). HRD programs should educate leaders to be role models of integrity.

Koshal and Patterson (2008) wrote role modeling means a leader can signal to others what their leader perceives as necessary by becoming the best example in every situation and walking the talk. Additionally, honesty can pertain to how leaders can sacrifice for others. Sacrificing for others means a leader gives time and resources to benefit others, for example, accepting a low salary to serve others (Koshal & Patterson, 2008). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) asserted servant leaders who take selfless and sacrificial roles attract followers who become psychologically drawn through respect and loyalty. Thus, when those leading are honest, others show interest.

Respecting Others

The act of regarding others confirms what the Bible teaches: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). Koshal and Patterson (2008) posited that treating employees with respect means a leader sees and regards everybody as equal and essential, takes time to listen to others (open-door policy), and handles employee correction and criticism in a manner that builds up rather than destroys individuals. Church HRD programs should emphasize the need for leaders to incorporate others in decision making by soliciting input and accepting criticisms from others.

Making Promises Carefully

Matthew 5:33-37 teaches that it is not good to swear falsely; “Again you have heard that it was said to the old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord’” (v. 33). Rather, “let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matt. 5:37). It entails applying wisdom in making decisions. According to Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), wisdom can be measured by five key elements: awareness of current events, anticipation of consequences, keen perception, staying informed, and foresight. Hence, HRD programs must employ strategies that equip church leaders to apply wisdom.

Investing Wisely in Others

The Bible’s account of the first-century church in the book of Acts recounts how the elders of the church were instructed to take care of the weak; “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). Koshal and Patterson (2008) advised investing in others involves meeting and developing their needs. Thus, organizations must reward people for their services, create a productive working environment, guide workers to identify personal and professional goals and provide training. Stead (2005) argued that the responsive nature of mentoring relationships, combined with additional peer support, effectively addresses leadership needs, cultivates leadership skills, and strengthens networks (p. 182). In discussions related to leadership development, Stead (2005) draws upon the work of prominent scholars like Clutterbuck (2011) and Dey (2001), who suggest that organizations have the potential to nurture widespread leadership through a strategically selective approach to mentoring. Therefore, Church Human Resource Development (HRD) programs should incorporate diverse training methodologies that align with the individual aspirations and professional goals of their members. This comprehensive approach enhances the effectiveness of leadership initiatives and promotes a more inclusive and supportive developmental environment.

Fairness

Leviticus 25:14 underscores the importance of fairness and refraining from exploiting others. Demonstrating fairness involves recognizing and appreciating employees' efforts by implementing supportive measures and systems, using verbal and written communication to acknowledge their contributions, and organizing social gatherings and events for them (Koshal & Patterson, 2008). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) stated that empathetic leadership encompasses emotional support and guidance. A leader should adeptly navigate challenging situations and setbacks without succumbing to emotional exhaustion. Displaying empathy involves proactively addressing the needs of others, offering support during emotional difficulties, and assisting others in managing their emotions (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006).

Summary

The current text delved into the importance of ethical leadership and HRD within a church context. It emphasized the integration of biblical principles into HRD programs and the role of leaders in fostering organizational growth and productivity. Furthermore, it discussed the distinction between human resources and HRD, underscoring the value of investing in employees for organizational success. The text also explored the approaches and guidelines for implementing a church's HRD program, highlighting appropriate methods, the engagement of suitable evaluators, and the management of role conflicts. Additionally, it touched upon the values and considerations necessary for effective HRD leadership. This article contributes to the existing HRD literature and can benefit churches seeking to implement human resource strategies. However, it is essential to note that strategies for church HRD extend beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, readers and researchers must explore additional literature and biblical references to stay current.

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