

# Measuring HRM Effectiveness as a Challenge to Contemporary HRM Scientists (HRM Context)

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The paper presents the issue of measuring HR effectiveness. Author refers to international human resource management and tries to explain how wide and complicated the phenomenon is. The aim of the paper is to recognize the problem of measuring HRM effectiveness. The method used in the research process is a literature overview. Thus the author managed to recognize the problem of measuring HRM effectiveness, indicate the gap in previous scientific work and specify the author's own field for developing in future. The paper consists of following parts: introduction, theoretical assumptions of the HR effectiveness, results of a literature overview on HRM effectiveness including the international context, conclusions.

**Keywords:** HRM effectiveness, measuring, international human resource management, performance.

## Introduction

The topic of HRM effectiveness often appears in literature and during conferences, where professionals, economists, academic representatives etc. search the best solution for measuring the phenomenon. Today, it is well known that investing in organizations is connected not only with production but also human factor. The fact that expenditures on human resource management are treated as investment outlays emphasizes the meaning of people who are the most valuable resource in organizations. That specific change in thinking about the issue is possible owing to developing methods of measuring effectiveness of human resource

management. There are many approaches dealing with the problem that is of a scientific and practical dimension. Nonetheless, there is still quite difficult to assess the scope of research in this area.

Referring these general deliberations to international human resource management (IHRM) we can see that the problem of measuring the HRM contribution appears as more complicated and difficult to solve. The aim of the paper is to recognize the problem of measuring HRM effectiveness, indicate the gap in previous scientific work and specify the author's own field for developing in future. The paper presents a literature overview on HRM effectiveness issue with particular emphasis on its international context. The author indicates the most important theoretical assumptions of HRM effectiveness and analyses the research that has been done in the area.

The general aim of the paper is to present a question of HRM effectiveness and measuring it at an international level of management as an area for future research. Specific objectives formulated by the author are:

- explaining the idea of HRM effectiveness and presenting a range of methods useful in measuring the phenomenon,
- presenting results of an analysis of publications accessible in popular scientific databases,
- discussing specific features of an international human resource management in HRM effectiveness context,
- indicating topics for further research and giving advice for arrangement in measuring HRM effectiveness.

## **HRM effectiveness – theoretical assumptions**

Authors who deal with HRM effectiveness state that HRM managers are increasingly playing an integral role in strategy implementation (Becker & Huselid, 2006) and are to be regarded as facilitators in formulating strategy that contributes to firm performance (Paauwe, 2004, 2009). Moreover, researchers have advocated that when HRM department is viewed as a strategic partner at the business unit or on firm level, there is a corresponding improvement in performance (Ulrich, 1997; Boxall, 2003; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Lawler, 2005). Discussions on how firm performance is conceptualized and measured (Kellermanns, Walter, Lechner & Floyd, 2005) are little consistent. That is why conclusions are mostly general. One of many statements treats an effectiveness of the HRM function as a broad construct that reflects diverse needs and desires from internal stakeholders such as line managers and employees (Chen, Hsual &

Wai-Kwong Yip, 2011). Successful HRM measurement programs justify HR practices, assign responsibility for HR performance, and focus attention on key HR practices (Ulrich, 1989). Although there are many concepts of methods of measuring the HR function in organizations, managers are still disoriented and do not believe in credibility of them.

Explaining the idea of measuring HRM effectiveness has to be preceded by defining the term of effectiveness. The most popular definition of effectiveness in management presents it as a ratio of effects and cost of it. The relation between these two categories shows that work will be assessed as effective when the result of the quotient exceeds one.

The matter is more complicated because terms like efficiency, efficacy or performance appear in many papers. These ideas are very similar, but their meanings have to be defined exactly.

Organizational performance is a fundamental construct in strategic management. Recently, researchers proposed a framework for organizational performance that includes three dimensions: accounting returns, growth, and stock market performance (Maik Hamann, Schiemann & Guenther, 2013). This term is very popular and some authors perceive it as a dependent variable and use it interchangeably with an effectiveness category (March & Sutton, 1997). There are authors who distinct an effectiveness from performance and treat them as a complementary streams of research. Henri emphasizes that organizational effectiveness represents the outcome of organizational activities while performance measurement consists of an assessment tool to measure effectiveness (Henri, 2004).

Efficiency stands for “relationship between the output in terms of goods, services or other outcomes, and the resources used to create it”. We can say that achieving efficiency is when all resources used during processes bring the output higher than the input, or the input is qualitatively and quantitatively smaller than the output.

Effectiveness is explained as the “extent to which the goals of an activity and the link between its expected versus realistic outcomes are determined”. In other words effectiveness measures if and to what extent goals are achieved. The term of effectiveness is wider because outcomes contain outputs, critical products and final results. They are difficult to measure because of their diversity. Therefore we can say that effectiveness is achieved when there is an improvement in fulfilling the goals of a plan (Talebnia & Dehkordi, 2012).

Other definitions of effectiveness provide that:

- effectiveness or usefulness consists of the degree and level of achieving the pre-determined goals (to what extent the efforts have led to realization of intended and predetermined outcomes and goals),

- effectiveness is directly related to predicted goals and individual's satisfaction from the performed efforts,
- effectiveness means whether the obtained results/outputs are in accordance with the expected goals (Safar, 2002).

An analysis of differences between efficiency and effectiveness can be conducted using one of three views on the issue. The first is systemic view that focuses on the inputs when considering efficiency and the outputs when explaining effectiveness. In the organizational view efficiency is the result of analyzing goals through employing resources, performing and managing. It can be improved if an organization uses advanced technology or management. Effectiveness then allows to interpret goals' realization in general. The third orientation deals with quantitative and qualitative factors. It is assumed that quantitative apprehension fits efficiency and qualitative – effectiveness (Talebnia & Dehkordi, 2012).

Many authors state that in the economic and managerial sciences effectiveness uses an analysis of work effects. According to such an approach effectiveness means results of appropriate task completing. The category is perceived in people's expectations and goals fulfilled context (Mesjasz, 2011).

Effectiveness is the concept that has following features:

- management guidelines – concerning an organization's purposes and plans, its structure and decision-making process,
- relatedness – a relation between the plan with problems and conditions,
- appropriateness allowing to decide which project is able to obtain specific goals,
- achieving expected outcomes – finding answers for questions about the outputs and the effect of them in solving specific problem,
- costs and productivity – relationship between costs, inputs and outputs,
- supervision and reporting – remembering that an organization's performance and ability must be accurately established, monitored and reported (Talebnia & Dehkordi, 2012).

These characteristics are universal and general so that can be interpreted in respect of HRM effectiveness as well.

Although there is a tidy knowledge gathered on the topic of effectiveness, many managers, workers and academics agree that HRM effectiveness is the area that has to be developed because of different understanding and defining it (Urbaniak, 2011).

Results of literature studies on HRM effectiveness in the international data bases such as EBSCO and Proquest are very wondering. One of the reasons is the number of papers found in searching a phrases "HRM effectiveness" or "human resource management effectiveness" in abstracts of articles. There were only 23

papers that were analyzed in respect of an international context of deliberations. In general the review of these publication reaffirms that HR effectiveness is a widely discussed issue. Detailed conclusions of the analysis will be discussed in further part of this paper.

One of more interesting issues in the area of HRM effectiveness is how it can be measured. It can be assumed that the set of methods of measuring HRM effectiveness is very large.

Measures of HR effectiveness vary in the proximity to the HR practices context. Dyer and Reeves stated that HR practices influence employees. They suggest that HR practices have the strongest effect on outcomes achieved by employees. Organizational performance is more distant to HR practices. Nevertheless financial and accounting outcomes (ROA, ROI, profitability) are encompassed in the area of measures of HR effectiveness (Colakoglu, 2006).

J. J. Phillips states that today's HR professionals need a balanced set of measures and processes to show the value of the HR contribution. Measuring the return on investment (ROI) is emerging as a promising tool to provide convincing data about the contribution of specific human resources programs and processes (Phillips, Phillips & Stone, 2001). The ROI Methodology is a step-by-step tool for evaluating any HR program, project, or initiative in any organization (Phillips & Zuniga, 2008). A procedure of the method concerns measuring goals obtained on 5 levels that are reaction and planned action, learning, application and implementation, business impact and consequences, return on investment (Phillips, 2007).

Besides the ROI approach by Phillips there are many other methods that help to measure HR effectiveness. These are as follows:

- Human Capital Metrics – a set of econometric indexes which measure the effectiveness of human capital investments. They are divided into a few groups: metrics connected with human resources' movements (VSI – voluntary substitution index, OI – outsourcing index, MRI – manager's rotation index, OSRI – operation's staff rotation index, MAI<sub>1</sub> and MAI<sub>2</sub> – managerial appointments index, PRI – positive rotation index), revenue metrics (HCROI – human capital return on investment, HCVA – human capital value added, HCRI – human capital revenue index, TC – turnover cost index, TIF – training investment factor). They base on financial data registered according to accountancy standards which are not compatible with HRM cost and income categories (Stępień, 2001),
- HR balanced scorecard – based on the concept of R. Kaplan and D. Norton. The method educates and sets results of HRM processes in organizations. Therefore it demands preparing a set of human capital metrics that allow to show that human resources management has a strategic impact on an enterprise if its

politics, processes and activity are effective. The analysis concerns four elements that are: a capability of HR department in creating values, work system based on effectiveness, external correspondence with a strategy of the company and human resources management efficiency (Becker, Huselid & Ulrich, 2002).

- Management by objectives (MBO) – perhaps the oldest approach to a problem of measuring HR performance. It deals with developing specific objectives and evaluating performance by human resources professionals. Popular measures of objectives are: staff turnover, absenteeism, job satisfaction, employee health, etc. (Phillips, 2009)
- HR case studies method – examines the success of individual HRM programs, policies, practices and report the results of these to selected audiences. The method has a potential to bring many interesting solutions of problems which appears in the organization, but implemented as the only one is not sufficient for measuring HR effectiveness (Phillips, Stone & Phillips, 2003),
- HR auditing – an investigative, analytical, and comparative process that attempts to reflect the effectiveness of the HR function. It benefits from a variety of methods to conduct audits including interviews, surveys, observations and others. Typical categories of HR auditing are department mission, organization, personnel, labour relations and other functions of HRM (Phillips, 1999),
- HR cost monitoring – deals with costs of HR department that are compared with established cost standards or with costs bore by similar organizations in the HR area. Examples of cost sorts are: cost per employee (percent of payroll and company budget), cost of work stoppages, cost per grievance, accident costs, total compensation costs etc. (Phillips, Stone, Phillips, 2003),
- HR reputation – underlines an importance of HR function in effectiveness of an organization and customer satisfaction context. The assessment of HR reputation includes measures such as: open communication, high-performance standards, rewards to employees based on performance, effective use of employee skills and abilities, encouragement of employee participation in work decisions, advancement opportunities, etc. (Phillips, 1999),
- HR accounting – attempt to treat employees as organization's assets and to measure improvements or changes in their value using standard accounting principles. It should be noticed that the accountancy standards do not allow calculate precisely enough HR contribution. In addition there are many controversies surrounding questions about people being assets, costs that should be capitalized and methods of establishing a value form employees with the eventual allocation of such value to expense (Phillips, 1999),

- HR benchmarking – comparing an organization's HRM with others. Main HRM issues considered as benchmarks are: a number of employees, absenteeism index, productivity, training costs, number of training day per trainer, costs of recruitment per employee, time of recruitment, costs of health service per employee, procedures, rules and guidelines realised by HRM department (Bramham, 2004).
- HR profit centers – requires a shift from the traditional view of the HR department as an cost center accumulating expenses to a perspective of HR being an investment area that can achieve a bottom-line contribution and, in some cases, operate as a profit center (Phillips, 1999).

The question of measuring HRM effectiveness can be assessed as a difficult and not possible to solve using one best method. As well as in other kind of research measuring HRM effectiveness needs a well-thought-out set of methods that allows to get information, analyze it, propose and use conclusions in decision making process. The selection of methods requires not only a grounded knowledge and skills but also experience. Whereas many scientists make an effort towards widening some kind of know-how to measure HR effectiveness, many professionals do not use or believe in scientific frames of the issue.

## International level of measuring HRM effectiveness

International human resource management is relatively young sub-discipline in HRM. Since international corporations have broadened their enterprises the problem of managing people has also intensified. Literature studies allow to indicate several issues that are very critical in the IHRM area. They concern following problems:

- increase in employees' mobility due to the fast internationalization of economy and globalization of competition,
- stronger awareness of the fact that quality of human resources is a strategic factor,
- financial and social results of lower effectiveness or not working out by expatriates (Pocztowski, 2002).

The last issue is a clear example of connection between international dimension of HRM and measuring its effectiveness.

There are many differences between HRM performed on the national level and international dimension of the function. Differences are visible in each particular process of human resource management from HR planning to employees' dismissals and leaving. An example of research in the area is diagnosis of human resource



development in Polish and foreign companies. The author identifies advantages of international organizations over Polish ones that are connected with following issues:

- having formalized personal strategy,
- conducting opinion research among employees,
- budgeting processes for all the year in advance to save funds for their realization,
- having periodic appraisal systems and using them for decision-making processes in the HR development area (Suchodolski, 2011).

It can be assumed that international human resource management (IHRM) effectiveness consists of many particular measures. If there is known that effectiveness concerns goals accomplishment, there is also evident that one of its element is an effectiveness of employees working for international companies. Buchelt states that the issue is very important. Therefore, international dimension of an analysis of work effectiveness requires including three variables: characteristics of an organization, mission of the business units and expatriates (Buchelt, 2011).

Complexity and vastness of HRM effectiveness have been presented in the former part of the paper. Nevertheless considering the main topic of the article there must be a reference of international context added. Therefore the author of the paper did a review of foreign literature. The list of articles to analyze was generated in response to query: "HR effectiveness", "HRM effectiveness" or "human resource management effectiveness" in abstracts of articles. Searching of the articles was conducted using two scientific data bases: Ebsco and Proquest.

As it was said formerly searching brought about 23 items. They were analyzed and results of the study were inserted in the table. Particular columns of it contained:

- bibliographical address of papers (authors, journal title, date, etc.),
- subject, hypotheses and main conclusions of an article,
- methods of research,
- information about international context (if it was or not considered),
- challenges for HRM scientists (concerning future research).

The analysis of 23 papers allowed to formulate some conclusions in terms of subject, research method, challenges and international context (Table 1).

The most frequent subject of the articles was the area of strategic human resource management (8 papers). Other popular themes discussed by authors were organizational performance, HRM effectiveness on the specific job-level, perception of HRM in organizations and HR competencies. The topic of electronic support for HRM processes is also an interesting one. An important conclusion is



the fact that only a few articles contained more detailed description of methods of measuring HRM effectiveness. The methods used by respondents to assess HRM effectiveness were HR auditing, HR balanced scorecard and HR indicators (e.g. turnover). Comparing this result with the set of methods described in the former point of the paper, it is evident that most of methods is not applied by organizations. The authors of publications analyzed in terms of this paper conducted research using mostly a survey (13). In four papers there was a case study method used and three articles contained results of literature review. Other papers presented specific research methods like a content analysis or an interview.

**Table 1. Results of a literature review**

	Authors	Subject	International context	Research method	Challenges to HRM scientist
1	Wheeler; Halbesleben, Harris, 2012	perception of HRM	NO	Survey	A need of aggregation and larger sampling frames to establish a company's HRM effectiveness. Requirement of objective and free of common method bias way to examine HRM effectiveness.
2	Yusoff, Abdullah, Baharom, 2010	Strategic HRM	YES	Survey	Expanding the theoretical model considering influence of HR competencies, line involvement in HRM on HRM effectiveness, – relationship between HRM effectiveness and organizational performance
3	Wheeler, Harris, Harvey, 2010	Interpersonal relationships, perception of HRM	NO	Survey	Exploring how the high-performing work systems implied by commitment-based SHRM models differentially predict the two dimensions of job embeddedness. Analyzing employee job embeddedness in relation to meso- and macro-level organizational outcomes.

	Authors	Subject	International context	Research method	Challenges to HRM scientist
					Examining organizational and group level factors that influence employee attachment. Implementing a longitudinal approach in research.
4	Dan-Shang, Chi-Lih Shyu, 2009	Organizational performance, innovations	NO	Survey	Broadening research on bigger samples. Conducting research in other sectors (not only manufacturing). Conducting research in medium and small enterprises. Enriching the scope of measurement of organizational performance. Doing research in a longer time period (3 years could be insufficient). Using unlinear models to analyze the phenomenon of HRM effectiveness.
5	Bondarouk, Ruél, Heijden, 2009	Career development, e-HRM	NO	Interview	Research done in one sector in one country is very seriously limited. Extending research in time.
6	Dan-Shang, Chi-Lih Shyu, 2008	Strategic HRM	NO	Survey	Identifying and confirming the robustness of strategic fit issue in further studies.
7	Prins, Henderickx, 2007	Job analysis	NO	-	-
8	Huub, Bondarouk, Van der Velde, 2007	e-HRM	NO	Survey	Expanding research among more than one organization. Including context variables (age, sex, job type) in the research model.

	Authors	Subject	International context	Research method	Challenges to HRM scientist
9	Gibb, 2007	Perception of HRM	NO	Survey	Further research on stereotype thinking about HRM departments and professionals.
10	Bargerstock, 2000	HR auditing	NO	Case study	Developing tools for HRM auditing
11	Yusliza, 2012	HR competencies	NO	Survey	Expanding research in the group of HRM professionals in foreign enterprises.
12	Sunghoon, Wright, 2011	Strategic HRM, High commitment work systems	YES	Literature review	Developing cross-contextual variation of HRM–firm performance relations in future research.
13	Zupan, Kase, 2007	HR competences	NO	Case study (interview, documents' analysis)	Conducting research in more than one organization. Developing the issue of creating and sharing knowledge thanks to HR processes.
14	Nehles, Riemsdijk, Kok, Looise, 2006	HRM on the first line managers level	YES	Case study	Taking company characteristics into account in order to understand the differences in the perceptions of FLMs in the different business units.
15	Chew, Sharma, 2005	Organizational culture, performance	YES	Content analysis	Considering external conditions such as an oil or economic crisis. Conducting research in more countries, especially in Asian ones. Considering potential costs and benefits of technical and strategic HRM effectiveness to individual employees and the broader economic and social system.

	Authors	Subject	International context	Research method	Challenges to HRM scientist
16	Ming-Ten Tsai, Li-Min, Hsieh, 2005	Model of HR effectiveness in a specific industry	NO	Literature review Interview	Constructing a more complete measurement model using other methods. Supplementing or extending the context and dimensions of the study model. Increasing sample size. Considering that HRM effectiveness should be strengthened to improve corporate core capability.
17	Richard, Johnson, 2004	High Performance Work Practices	NO	Survey	Considering strategic context in HRM effectiveness analysis.
18	Way, Thacker, 2001	Strategic HRM	NO	Survey	More detailed analysis in the HRM areas (e.g. selection, etc.).
19	Kane, Crawford, Grant, 1999	Strategic HRM	YES	Survey	Analyzing causes of barriers to effective HRM. Research in countries in a different situation (economic condition and so on).
20	Templer, Cattaneo, 1995	Strategic HRM	NO	Literature review	Using proposed model to project research on HRM effectiveness.
21	Guest, Peccei, 1994	Strategic HRM	NO	Survey	Continuing research in order to replicate the present results and identify other factors that will predict HRM effectiveness. Including more quantitative measures of effectiveness.
22	Burrington, 1987	Change management	NO	Survey	Expanding research on improving HRM effectiveness in various organizations.

	Authors	Subject	International context	Research method	Challenges to HRM scientist
23	Feliniak, Kołodziejczyk-Olczak, 2005	HR balanced scorecard	NO	Case study	Implementing HR balanced scorecard in other than remunerations HR processes

Source: Own elaboration.

International context of research was in 5 out of 23 papers. Therefore the lack of international issues of HRM effectiveness reveals one of challenges for contemporary HRM scientists. Despite many limitation of the literature study conducted in terms of this paper, it is very interesting that measuring HRM effectiveness in international organizations (corporations) is not treated as a subject of research by more authors.

At the end of this short report it is necessary to depict other challenges for those who deal with HRM. Most of them result from limitations of the research conducted by publications' authors. The most interesting issues which should be presented here are:

- need for aggregation and larger sampling frames to establish a company's HRM effectiveness,
- requirement of objective and free of common method bias way to examine HRM effectiveness,
- linking the measurement of HR effectiveness with organizational performance on the level of specific organizational outcomes,
- a longitudinal approach to research HR effectiveness,
- conducting research in bigger samples, other sectors and medium and small enterprises,
- expanding research towards international level.

The list of challenges shows that contemporary scientists should make an effort to test already existing methods of measuring HR effectiveness instead of creating new theoretical models.

## Conclusions

The paper presents main theoretical assumption of HRM effectiveness and results of the foreign literature review. The most important finding concerns the paradox which deals with: on the one hand – the long time and big amount of publications on organizational effectiveness with acknowledgement of HRM

function or processes and on the other hand – scarce literature concerning the HRM effectiveness. The second conclusion is connected with the phenomenon of different approaches and definitions of the term “effectiveness” and its affiliations to “performance” or “efficiency”. The literature study conducted by the author is rather meager but it can be developed in future by extending the queries in scientific databases and using more than Ebsco and Proquest. Even though the limitations to the study are obvious, valuable recommendations for HRM scientists can be suggested. The list of challenges for them contains many difficult tasks but the integrating element of them is the fact that researchers should persevere in improving their studies for example using more and dedicated for measuring HRM effectiveness methods. They should test various approaches and give managers concrete recommendations. In addition, the communication between scientists and professionals should be more opened and based on both side awareness of the possibility to benefit from examining HRM effectiveness in organizations.

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