

From Personnel Management to Human Resource Management: What is New?

Nwachukwu, Lambert Chidi, PhD & Unachukwu, Chukwuemeka Larry, PhD
Department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, College of Management Sciences,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State.
E-mail: nwagodchidi@yahoo.com & larryunachukwu1@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of personnel management into human resource management and goes ahead to discuss what is new about human resource management. In doing this, the paper relies solely on secondary method of data collection which it analyzes using descriptive method of qualitative analysis. The paper argues that despite the apparent similarities between personnel management and human resource management, human resource management is broader, diverse, strategic and commitment-oriented, adopts a unitary rather than pluralist viewpoint, is founded on the belief that people should be treated as assets rather than variable cost and is a management-driven activity. Also, while personnel management responds to changes in organizations, human resource management is prescriptive and concerned with strategies and the initiation and development of new ideas. Thus, human resource management has a long-term perspective that seeks to integrate all the human aspects of the organization into a coherent whole and to establish a high level of organizational goals. The paper therefore, concludes that human resource management is a significant frontier which offers great opportunities to advance the study and understanding of the management of human resources in the workplace today. Accordingly, the paper recommends, among other things, that public and private organizations should embrace human resource management to help them advance the management of human resources in their workplace.

Keywords: Personnel Management, Human Resource Management, Organization, Human Resources, Personnel, Management.

Introduction

Human resources or personnel are a crucial and critical resource to every organization and as such requires utmost attention to guarantee organizational growth and survival. There have been growing recognition of the importance and indispensability of human resources in the attainment of organizational and societal goals. There is no doubting the fact that no organization or nation can achieve success without man as the instrument. Trained and skilled personnel or manpower of any organization or nation are therefore her greatest asset for delivering on the organizations or nation's goals, policies and programmes. This is why Ezeani (2002) argues that the ability of any organization to achieve its goals depends to a large extent, on the caliber, organization and motivation of its employees. Human resources are therefore, the ultimate resource. No matter how good a system is, it will not achieve anything without the appropriate human element.

Over the years, some names have emerged for studying the foregoing field of management. It has traditionally been known as personnel management. In recent times, however, some people call it human resource management. Other terms used to convey similar meaning are: personnel administration, manpower management, labour welfare management, among others (Obikeze, Obi and Abonyi, 2005; Egbo and Okeke, 2009). The debate is still on among management scholars as to what this important field of study should be called. However, as Nmadu (2012) rightly observes, the term personnel management has been in the vocabulary of management students for a very long time while human resource management is a recent phenomenon. For

Armstrong (2009) the term ‘human resource management’ has virtually replaced the term ‘personnel management’ as a description of the process involved in managing people in organizations. So, what is new about human resource management and how is it similar or different from personnel management? This paper will attempt to provide answer to the foregoing question.

Personnel Management

According to Armstrong (1995), the origin of personnel management came through a haphazard process, occurring in an uneven, unplanned, almost random fashion, and owing more to the environmental forces in industry, business and society than to rational, logical or central development. Nevertheless, many scholars are of the view that personnel management is a twentieth century phenomenon (Tyson, 2006; Gospel, 2009; Kaufman, 2010). The consensus among scholars in extant literature is that personnel management functions first emerged in major organizations in the United Kingdom and the United States of America between 1912 – 1915, with the most dramatic diffusion taking place from the 1930s and especially during and after World War II. Many management scholars have argued that personnel management grew out of the industrial welfare management as well as the employment movement associated with the development of scientific management theory which was the management philosophy of the time (Jacoby, 1984; Legge, 1995; Tyson, 2006; Gospel, 2009; Thornthwaite, 2012). As a field within management, personnel management emerged as part of general developments in management which were explored in the classical writings of Fredrick Taylor, Henri Fayol, Luther Gulick, Linda Urwick, Max Weber and other classical theorists (Tyson, 2006; Thornthwaite, 2012). Management scholars therefore, associate the origins of personnel management with the emergence of formalized, standardized and integrated sets of policies and practices for managing people in work organizations. Typical elements of the foregoing include the establishment of a dedicated unit with personnel managers or officers engaged in the discrete function of managing employees, along with the adoption of coordinated approaches to personnel functions such as recruitment, selection, induction, training, promotion and discipline, as well as reporting and appeal mechanisms (Harris, 1982; Legge, 1995; Thornthwaite, 2012).

Management scholars have identified many factors or reasons for the emergence of personnel management in different western countries in the early twentieth century to include the following: the start of the industrial revolution that led to replacement of cottage industries by large factories; the shift to bureaucratized control; the need for internal labour market strategies to facilitate more efficient employer coordination; the need to control employees as organizations grew in size and complexity; the need for tight labour markets in post-World War II period; widespread adoption of mass production work processes; growth of trade unionism and industrial relations system; growing state regulation of individual employment relationships; reform movements associated with systematic management; emergence of the public service; the need for industrial safety and industrial democracy; influence of developments in management education, etc (Jacoby, 1984; Baron, Dobbin and Jennings, 1986; Wright, 1995; Kaufman, 2008).

The concept of personnel management has been variously defined by scholars in extant literature. However, it is important to point out that scholars are not in disagreement about the exact meaning of personnel management unlike many other concepts in the management sciences. However, it is defined, personnel management definitions always have elements of acquisition and utilization broken down into the particular tasks of recruiting, selecting, deploying, using, assessing, developing and rewarding labour services necessary to achieve the goals of the organization and management (Thomason, 2001). Along these lines, Appleby

(1998) says personnel management is the responsibility of all those who manage people, as well as being a description of the work of those who are employed as specialists. It is the part of management, which is concerned with people at work and with their relationships within an enterprise. It applies not only to industry and commerce but to all fields of management.

The National Institute of Personnel Management (NIPM) (cited in Rastogi, 1995, p. 137) defines personnel management as “that part of the management function which is primarily concerned with the human relationships within an organization. Its objective is the maintenance of those relationships on a basis which, by consideration of the wellbeing of the individual, enables all those engaged in an undertaking to make their personal contribution to the effective working of that undertaking”. Jucious (1998, p. 2), defines it as “that field of management which has to do with planning, organizing, directing and controlling the functions of procuring, developing, maintaining and utilizing a labour force such that: (i) the objectives for which the company is established are attained economically and effectively; (ii) the objectives of all levels of personnel are served to the highest possible degree; (iii) the objectives of the community are duly considered”. For Pigors and Myers (1961, p. 1), personnel management is “a method of developing potentialities of employees so that they get maximum satisfaction out of their work and give their best efforts to the organization”. According to Spates (cited in Prakash, 1995, p. 620), personnel management “is a code of the ways of organizing and treating individuals at work so that they will each get the greatest possible realization of their intrinsic abilities, thus attaining maximum efficiency for themselves and their group, and thereby giving to the enterprise of which they are a part its determining competitive advantage and its optimum results”.

For Ubeku (1975), personnel management can be viewed from two different angles. First, as a function or responsibility of every manager or supervisor who has people under him all of who are working towards the achievement of desired goals. Secondly, as a function in an organization which is performed by a particular department, the personnel department. Sharma, Sadana and Kaur (2011, p. 448), summarizes personnel management in the following words: (i) personnel management is a part of the management process in the organization; (ii) helps the organization in the management of personnel resources with the use of certain principles, practices and techniques; (iii) these principles and techniques are intended to develop potentialities of employees so that they get not only maximum satisfaction out of their work but also they contribute their maximum to achieve the objectives of the organization in most efficient and economical manner; (iv) it is concerned with the human relationships in the organization”. An analysis of the foregoing definitions and many other such definitions in the literature show that personnel management is the art and science of managing human resources so as to secure organizational objectives as well as employees’ satisfaction in an efficient, effective and coordinated manner.

One can see from the foregoing that the main objective of personnel management is the achievement of the goals of the organization through human resources. Specific objectives of personnel management according to Chopra (1989), are: (i) to achieve and maintain good human relationship within an organization; (ii) to enable each person to make his maximum personal contribution to the effective working of the organization; (iii) to ensure respect for human personality and the well-being of the individual; (iv) to ensure maximum individual development of personnel; and (v) to ensure satisfaction of various needs of individuals for achieving their maximum contribution towards organizational goals. It must be pointed out here that personnel management has some features of its own. First, it is concerned with human element in the organization. It deals with people at work. It relates to the basic function of management of getting better results with the cooperation of the people. Second, it is an integral part of management. Every manager, whatever his job or level, has to deal with the people; has

to get maximum out of them and has to win their cooperation in getting the task done. Therefore, he must possess human relations skills. Third, personnel management is the responsibility of the management. This responsibility cannot be completely left to the personnel department created within the organization because that department performs only operative functions like recruitment, training, development, etc. Fourth, personnel management is a pervasive function. It is inherent in all organizations. It is a basic management function performed at all levels and in all areas of management such as production management, financial management, etc. Fifth, it is a continuous function which every manager has to perform. It cannot be practiced only one hour each day or one day a week. Personnel management requires a constant alertness and awareness of human relations and their importance in every day operations in the organization (Sharma *et al*, 2011).

It is important to mention here that the personnel function is advisory and consultative. Thus, the personnel managers function in the organization is to give advice to the management about the personnel policies and problems. The personnel manager is a specialist who performs specialized functions. The unit or division of the organization to which he belongs may be called personnel department or personnel unit. The function of personnel management is therefore concerned with human aspect of work done in the organization. The National Institute of Personnel Management (NIPM) (cited in Chopra, 1989), regards the function of personnel management as the task of dealing with human relationships within an organization. The Institute mentions three aspects of personnel management functions, namely: (i) the welfare aspect. It is concerned with working conditions and amenities such as canteens, crèches, housing, personal problems of workers, schools, and recreation; (ii) the labour or personnel aspect. It is concerned with recruitment, placement of employees, remuneration, promotion, incentives, productivity, etc; (iii) the industrial relations aspect. It is concerned with trade union negotiation, settlement of industrial disputes, joint consultation and collective bargaining.

Yoder (cited in Sharma *et al*, 2011), mentions seven functions of personnel management, namely: (i) setting general and specific management policy for organizational relationship and establishing and maintaining a suitable organization for leadership and cooperation; (ii) collective bargaining, contract negotiation, contract administration and grievance handling; (iii) staffing the organization, finding, getting and holding prescribed types and number of workers; (iv) aiding in the self-development of employees at all levels, providing opportunities for personnel development and growth as well as for acquiring requisite skills and experience; (v) developing and maintaining motivation for workers by providing incentives; (vi) reviewing and auditing manpower management in the organization; (vii) industrial relations research, carrying out studies designed to explain employees behaviour and thereby affecting improvements in manpower management. On their part, Strauss and Sayles (1971), divide personnel management functions into ten parts which are: (i) recruitment, selection and placement; (ii) job analysis, job description and job evaluation (iii) compensation and appraisal plans; (iv) employment records; (v) employee benefit programmes; (vi) special services; (vii) training and education programmes; (viii) labour relations; (ix) public relations; (x) personnel planning and evaluation. Some scholars divide the personnel management functions into two categories namely management functions and operative functions. Management functions involves planning, organizing, directing and controlling various activities of the personnel department - operative functions on the other hand includes those functions which are specifically assigned to the personnel department such as employment, development, compensation integrating and maintenance of personnel of the organization (Ubeku, 1975; Sharma *et al*, 2011).

To sum up, personnel management has to do with the recruitment, selection, placement, training, development, maintenance, and utilization of human resources to secure

organizational and social objectives as well as employees' satisfaction. It also includes the supervision, conduct and discipline, motivation, communication and welfare, grievance settlement, and terms of employment of personnel in organizations. It deals with all other auxiliary functions starting from recruitment and ending with retirement. Personnel management is present in all organizations whether or not there is a department by that name. Personnel management functions are comprehensive and cover the entire work career of the employees vis-à-vis the organization. These functions are universal and are useful for all organizations whether in the private sector or in the public sector (Basu, 2012).

Human Resource Management (HRM)

Many HRM scholars believe that tracing the definitive origins of HRM is as elusive an exercise as arriving at its defining characteristics. However, evidence from extant literature shows that HRM has its origins in the United States of America in the 1950s, although it did not gain wide recognition until the early 1980s, and in the United Kingdom in mid to late 1980s (Beardwell and Holden, 1997; Armstrong, 2009; Nmadu, 2012). According to Armstrong (2009, p. 13), the origins of the concept of HRM were first defined by Bakke (1966), who wrote that:

The general type of activity in any function of management ... is to use resources effectively for an organizational objective ... The function which is related to the understanding, maintenance, development, effective employment, and integration of the potential in the resource of 'people' I shall call simply the human resources function.

Despite the foregoing, HRM did not emerge in a fully-fledged form until the 1980s in the 'Matching model' and the 'Harvard framework'. The matching model which was developed by the Michigan School (Fombrun, Tichy & Devanna, 1984), emphasizes the necessity of a 'tight fit' between the human resources strategy of the organization and its business strategy. Its particular attraction is in the fact that HRM assumes a more important position in the formulation of organizational goals and policies. In other words, it holds that HRM and the organizational structure should be managed in a way that is congruent with organizational strategy (hence the name "matching model"). The Harvard framework on the other hand was developed by Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Quinn Mills and Walton (1984), who believed that "today, many pressures are demanding a broader, more comprehensive and more strategic perspective with regard to the organizations' human resources". These pressures according to them have created a need for "a long-term perspective in managing people and consideration of people as potential assets rather than merely a variable cost." Beer and his Harvard colleagues were the first to underline the belief that HRM belong to line managers and therefore, the need for coherence in HRM policies. The Harvard school suggested that HRM had two characteristic features, which are: (i) line managers accept more responsibility for ensuring the alignment of competitive strategy and HRM policies; and (ii) human resource management has the mission of setting policies that govern how HRM activities are developed and implemented in ways that make them more mutually reinforcing.

The definitions of the concept of HRM abound in the literature. HRM has been defined and re-defined by scholars (Nwachukwu and Unachukwu, 2023). According to Beer et al (1984), HRM involves all management decisions and actions that affect the nature of the relationship between the organization and its employees – its human resources. Guest (1987), sees it as a set of policies designed to maximize organizational integration, employee commitment, flexibility and quality of work. For Storey (1995), human resource management is a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an integrated

array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques. Armstrong (2009), defines it as a strategic, integrated and coherent approach to the employment, development and well-being of the people working in organizations. One can see from the foregoing definitions of HRM and many such other definitions in the literature that HRM is concerned with all aspects of how people are employed and managed in organizations. HRM emphasizes that employees are critical to achieving organizational objectives; that human resource practices need to be integrated with the corporate strategy; and that human resource specialists help organizations to meet both efficiency and equity objectives. This is why Caldwell (2004), identified the policy goals for HRM to include managing people as assets that are fundamental to the competitive advantage of the organization; aligning HRM policies with business policies and corporate strategy; and developing a close fit of HRM policies, procedures and systems with one another. The overall purpose of HRM therefore is to ensure that the organization is able to achieve success through people. It must however, be pointed out here that HRM has an ethical dimension which means that it must also be concerned with the rights and needs of people in organizations through the exercise of social responsibility (Armstrong, 2009).

HRM practices have a strong conceptual basis drawn from personnel management, organizational behaviour, industrial relations, and strategic management. It also synthesizes and builds on concepts from traditional and cognate disciplines like economics, psychology, law, sociology, political science, among others. The characteristics of HRM are that it is diverse, strategic and commitment-oriented; adopts a unitary (employees share the same interests as employers) rather than pluralist viewpoint; is founded on the belief that people should be treated as assets and is a management-driven activity. HRM also focuses on organizational values as well as employee-centered outcomes (Guest, 2002; Armstrong, 2009). HRM functions as a system in its fully developed form. This is why Schuler (1992), avers that HRM links, integrates and coheres.

HRM is a product of the human relations movement of the early 20th century when researchers began documenting ways of creating organizational value through the strategic management of the workforce. The function was initially dominated by transactional work, such as payroll and benefits administration, but due to globalization, company consolidation, technological advancement, and further research, HRM now focuses on strategic initiatives like mergers and acquisitions, talent management, succession planning, industrial and labour relations, human capital management, corporate social responsibility, knowledge management, organizational development, performance management, learning and development, reward management, employee relations, employee well-being, health and safety, provision of employee services, ethical considerations, diversity and inclusion, etc. These among other initiatives contribute to the understanding of HRM as a contemporary issue owing to their sustained evolutionary nature (Rotich, 2015).

What is New about HRM?

What is new about HRM and how is it similar or different from personnel management? Obviously, HRM has its roots in personnel management. Accordingly, personnel management and HRM are similar in many important respects, and these areas of congruence account for the bewildering cocktail of arguments about them among scholars. Both personnel management and HRM aim at recruiting and bringing out the best from the worker and accordingly meeting organizational goals. This similarity might have informed Byars and Rue (2000), argument that HRM is a modern term for what has traditionally been referred to as personnel management. In the same vein, Armstrong (2009), writes that what is now described as HRM is in practice often synonymous with what used to be described as personnel management. Torrington and Hall (1991), see the nature and degree of difference between

personnel management and HRM as remaining “largely matters of opinion rather than fact, and the similarities are much greater than the differences”. In the early days of HRM, it was suggested by Armstrong (1987, p. 30) that:

HRM is regarded by some personnel managers as just a set of initials or old wine in new bottles. It could indeed be no more and no less than another name for personnel management, but as usually perceived, at least it has the virtue of emphasizing the virtue of treating people as a key resource, the management of which is the direct concern of top management as part of the strategic planning processes of the enterprise. Although there is nothing new in the idea, insufficient attention has been paid to it in many organizations.

Armstrong (cited in Egbo and Okeke, 2009), has advanced the following similarities between personnel management and HRM:

- i. Both personnel management and HRM strategies flow from business strategy.
- ii. Both personnel management and HRM recognize that line managers are responsible for managing people.
- iii. Both personnel management and HRM share identical values with regard to ‘respect for the individual’, balancing organizational and individual needs, and developing people to achieve their maxi-level of competence, both for their own satisfaction and to facilitate the achievement of organizational objectives.
- iv. Both personnel management and HRM recognize that one of their most essential functions is that of matching people to over-changing organizational requirements – placing and developing the right people in and for the right jobs.
- v. Both personnel management and HRM adopt the same range of selection, competency analysis, performance management, training, management development and reward management.
- vi. Both personnel management and ‘soft’ version of HRM attach importance to the processes of communication and participation within an employee relation system.

The foregoing might have informed Mullins (1999), assertion that no clear distinction exists between personnel management and HRM. According to him, “HRM is the elevation of personnel management to a more strategic level”.

Despite the foregoing, many scholars (Miller, 1987; Guest, 1987; Legge, 1989; Torrington & Hall, 1991; Nmadu, 2012), regard HRM as being substantially different from personnel management. Guest (1987), suggests three ways in which HRM has been used to distinguish it from personnel management:

- i. Simply by re-titling personnel management to capture the new fashion;
- ii. By re-conceptualizing and re-organizing personnel roles, and the work of personnel departments; and
- iii. By presenting it as distinctively different and offering a new approach for management.

Compared with personnel management, Guest (1987), writes that HRM is concerned with a long-term rather than a short-term perspective; the psychological contract based on commitment rather than compliance; self-control rather than external controls; a unitarian rather than a pluralist perspective; an organic rather than a bureaucratic structure; integration with line management rather than specialist or professional roles; and maximum utilization rather than cost-minimization. Similarly, Legge (1989), identifies the following three features that distinguishes HRM from personnel management.

- i. Personnel management is aimed primarily at non-managers, whereas HRM is less clearly focused but is certainly more concerned with management staff.
- ii. HRM is much more of an integrated line management activity, whereas personnel management seeks to influence line management.
- iii. HRM emphasizes the importance of senior management being involved in the management of culture, whereas personnel management has always been rather suspicious of organizational development and related unitarist, social-psychologically oriented ideas.

For Olowu and Adamolekun (2002), HRM is similar to the more conventional concept of personnel management, but it differs from it in three important ways. First, human resource management emphasizes unlike personnel management, on the strategic role of personnel in managing organizational change. Organizational development is no longer a discrete activity, separate from personnel management but is now a component of HRM. The second difference is that HRM integrates human resource considerations to overall organizational strategy. HRM involves line managers and is no longer an exclusive responsibility of the personnel management department. This is because HRM makes the important assumption that it is the quality and development of human resources that gives any organization its competitive edge, whether in the public or private sector. Finally, instead of the pre-occupation of personnel management with the administration of personnel rules for performing the threefold functions of personnel utilization, motivation, and protection, human resource management focuses on securing employee commitment to organizational goals through a consensual development of an organizational culture, devolved responsibility, and empowerment. This commitment to the individual employee permeates the whole organization's style and, in some countries, has led to a sharp de-emphasis of collective bargaining activities, which are central to the field of personnel management.

Indeed, HRM is seen by many scholars (Fombrun, Tichy and Devanna, 1984; Storey, 1995; Mullins, 1999; Tyson, 2006; Armstrong, 2009), and practitioners in the field as a more innovative and strategic view of workplace management than personnel management. The techniques of HRM are such that they force the managers of an organization to express their goals with specificity so that they can be understood and undertaken by the workforce and accordingly provide the resources needed for them to successfully accomplish their assignments. HRM techniques, when properly practiced, are expressive of the goals and operating practices of the entire organization. Also, HRM is seen by many to have a key role in risk reduction within organizations unlike personnel management. HRM is therefore broader in scope and more encompassing than personnel management, which is often used in a more restricted sense to describe activities that are necessary in the recruiting of a workforce, providing its members with payroll and benefits, and administering their work-life needs (Egbo & Okeke, 2009). Torrington and Hall (1991), and Miller (1987), align with the foregoing views in their description of personnel management and HRM respectively. Torrington and Hall describe personnel management as "a series of activities which first enable working people and their employing organizations to agree about the objectives and nature of their working relationship and ensure that the agreement is fulfilled. On the other hand, Miller (1987, p. 102), describes HRM as relating to "those decisions and actions which concern the management of employees at all levels in the organization and which are related to the implementation of strategies directed towards creating and sustaining competitive advantage".

Another issue that is new about HRM vis-à-vis personnel management is in the area of the concern of both concepts. Mullins (1999, p. 680), bears this out more clearly when he identifies personnel management as focusing on the workforce, unlike HRM, which he says is resource-centered. In Mullins words, "personnel management is 'work-centered', directed mainly at the

organization’s employee. HRM is ‘resource-centered’, directed mainly at management needs for human resources to be provided and deployed”. Thus, while personnel management views a worker as an economic man who works for money or salary, HRM treats the worker as a human being having economic, social and psychological needs. The table below helps to illuminate the areas of difference between personnel management and HRM.

Table 1: Areas of Difference between Personnel Management and HRM

S/N	Personnel Management	HRM
1	Reactive, servicing role.	Proactive, innovative role.
2	Emphasis on implementation of procedures.	Emphasis on strategy.
3	Specialist department.	General management activities.
4	Focus on employees needs in their own right.	Focus on employee requirements in the light of business needs.
5	Presumption of union-management conflicts.	Conflicts dealt with by team leaders within their teams.
6	Preference for collective bargaining of pay and conditions.	Management-led planning of people resources and employment conditions.
7	Emphasis on settling pay more in terms of the organization’s internal market.	Emphasis on competitive pay and conditions to stay ahead of competitors.
8	Serving other departments/units.	Contributing ‘added value’ to business.
9	Supporting change.	Stimulating change.
10	Challenging business goals in light of effects on employees.	Total commitment to business goals.
11	Less flexible approach to staff deployment.	Completely flexible approach to staff deployment.

Source: Cole (2002:8).

Conclusion

This paper examined the evolution of personnel management into HRM and accordingly discusses what is new about HRM. It is very obvious that despite their seeming similarities, HRM is broader or more holistic, diverse, strategic and commitment-oriented, adopts a unitary rather than pluralist viewpoint, is founded on the belief that people should be treated as assets rather than variable cost and is a management-driven activity. Also, while personnel management responds to changes in organizations, HRM is prescriptive and concerned with strategies, the initiation of new activities and the development of fresh ideas. Thus, HRM has a long-term perspective that seeks to integrate all the human aspects of the organization into a coherent whole and to establish a high level of organizational goals. HRM is therefore, a significant frontier which offers great opportunity to advance the study and understanding of the management of human resources in the workplace today.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, this paper makes the following recommendations:

- i. Public and private organizations should embrace HRM to help them advance the management of human resources in their workplace.
- ii. HRM should be seen and embraced by scholars and practitioners as a significant frontier for advancing the study and understanding of the management of human resources in the organization today.
- iii. Management scholars should engage in more research to improve and enrich the study of HRM and by extension the management of human resources in the workplace.

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