YEAR	TRIPOS	PAPER NO. & TITLE	NAME OF AUTHOR
2013	Engineering Tripos Part IIA	3E5 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	Andreas Richter

1   (a)   Describe the universalistic approach to HR strategy. Provide an example of HR practices that a company pursuing the universalistic approach would employ.   [20%]

- The universalistic approach seeks to identify a set of HR practices that is beneficial for all organizations. This approach has identified two types of bundles: Control strategy & commitment strategy. The commitment strategy appears to be generally beneficial. Practices in the commitment bundle communicate the message that management cares about employees.
- Better students will describe the universalistic approach, explain control and commitment strategies, their effect on employees, and provide an illustrative example of HR practices that could be bundled together within the scope of either a control or commitment strategy.

(b)   Describe the contingency approach to HR strategy. How does it differ from the universalistic approach?   [30%]

- The contingency approach seeks to *match* HR practices with competitive business strategies. Within the contingency approach, a focus is on cost leadership versus differentiation, as well as internal versus external labour orientation. Matching HR practices with competitive business strategies results in four common HR strategies: Bargain Laborer, Free Agent, Loyal Soldier, and Committed Expert. In contrast to the universalistic approach, which aims to identify a set of HR practices that are universally beneficial for organizations, the contingency approach posits that the effectiveness of any given HR practice is contingent upon its fit with business strategy.
- Better students will correctly and thoroughly explain the contingency approach, and correctly and thoroughly describe its difference to the universalistic approach.

(c) Are organizations with HR practices that fit their competitive business strategy always more effective? Illustrate your answer with two examples. [50%]

- In theory, organizations that align their people management practices with their competitive business strategies are more effective. Research similarly supports that – on average – this is the case. However, various exceptions have been discussed in class where organizations successfully deviate from this ideal typology (e.g., the Hovey & Beard company case).
- Better students will more thoroughly discuss this controversial question, and outline both the theoretical perspective and significant exceptions. Better students will provide telling examples that corroborate their analysis.

2 (a) Describe the four approaches to job design. Provide one example for each of the four approaches. Explain their differences. [30%]

- The process of job design focuses on determining what tasks will be grouped together to form employee jobs. The four general approaches to grouping work tasks are: mechanistic, motivational, perceptual, and biological.
- Examples for each of the four approaches have been presented in class & course book.
- These four approaches differ mainly with respect to their goals and means. For instance, the basic goal of the mechanistic approach is to simplify work tasks as much as possible by means of principles from Frederick Taylor's Scientific Management. Conversely, the basic goal of the perceptual approach is safety and accident prevention by means of simplifying the mental demands on workers.
- Better students will correctly describe the four approaches, provide illustrative examples for each, and correctly explain the differences among the four approaches.

(b) How should managers combine autonomy and interdependence in designing jobs? [20%]

- The strategic HRM approach suggests that the best fit for organizations aiming for cost leadership is to reduce autonomy and create sequential interdependence among employees; and the best fit for organizations aiming for differentiation is to increase autonomy and create reciprocal interdependence among employees.

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- Students may discuss the exceptions/boundary conditions of this theoretical approach. For instance, analysis of the Hovey & Beard company case in class suggested that high autonomy may increase employee productivity, even when they work in organizations that aim for cost leadership.
- Better students will correctly describe the strategic HRM approach to job design, as well as discuss its boundary conditions.

(c)   How does competency modelling differ from more traditional forms of job analysis? Is competency modelling superior or inferior?   [20%]

- Whereas traditional job analysis describes jobs in terms of tasks and activities, is scientific, rigorous, and job specific, competency modelling describes competencies needed in a position/company, is more fluid & flexible, and company specific. Competencies may include knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, values, or interests.
- Which method is superior depends on the purpose for which it is being used. Competency modelling is a method suitable for more knowledge-based work; because it is company-specific but not job specific, it may have advantages in more modern organizations where required competencies are complex and multilayer. Conversely, traditional forms of job analysis may be advantageous in more traditional jobs with clearly specified and identifiable activities.
- Better students will correctly describe the differences between competency modelling and more traditional forms of job analysis, as well as discuss the advantages of either for varying organizational contexts.

(d)   For which purposes can organisations use competency modelling? Illustrate your answer with examples.   [30%]

- Multiple uses of competency modelling can be outlined here, including recruitment and employee selection, training and development, performance evaluation, and the design of compensation packages.
- Better students will discuss multiple purposes and provide illustrative examples.

3   (a)   Describe idealistic and realistic messaging in the context of recruiting. Provide one example for each.   [20%]

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- Idealistic messaging refers to the recruiting practice of communicating only positive information to potential employees. Realistic messaging refers to the recruiting practice of communicating both good and bad features of jobs to potential employees.
- Better students will correctly describe idealistic and realistic messaging, and provide an illustrative example for each.

(b)   A company may have an internal or an external labour orientation. Describe the problems that may occur if idealistic and realistic messaging do not fit with a company's labour orientation.   [40%]

- If realistic messaging is applied to external labour orientation, the consequences are likely incurred recruiting costs (misfit 1).
- If idealistic messaging is applied to internal labour orientation, consequences can be more severe (misfit 2). Increased turnover may be the consequence. In this case, students may expand on the importance of a realistic job preview to prevent employee turnover.
- Students may further discuss the ethical implications associated with idealistic messaging irrespective of organizations' labour orientation.
- Better students will thoroughly elaborate on the two types of misfit.

(c)   Personality inventories are suitable tools for personnel selection. Discuss.   [40%]

- A proper discussion of this statement involves (at least) a discussion of the following components:
  - o   Which personality tool (e.g., Big 5, MBTI) is referred to? Personality tools vary in validity, and hence in their suitability for personnel selection. For instance, the Big 5 is a much more valid inventory than the MBTI (which tends to rather measure preferences than personality, but is frequently referred to as a personality inventory).
  - o   Even the most valid personality tool may only add incrementally towards a personnel selection decision. Thus, basing employee decisions solely on personality tools means abusing the instruments - personality inventories are not powerful enough for this.
  - o   Further criteria to assess personality tools (e.g., reliability, utility, legality/fairness, and acceptability) should be considered before a

decision is being made to use personality tools for employee selection. These criteria vary across personality inventories.
- Better students will critically and carefully discuss the different components of the above statement.

4 (a) Describe the different components of proactive training needs assessment. Provide examples for each component. [40%]

- Proactive training needs assessment involves (1) organization analysis (e.g., policies, rewards, attitudes & actions of management), (2) person analysis (e.g., is training necessary, who needs training, are trainees ready), and (3) task analysis (e.g., competency modelling, cognitive task analysis, team task analysis).
- Better students will thoroughly describe the different components, and provide illustrative examples of each.

(b) Describe three different training methods and discuss their advantages and disadvantages. [30%]

- Methods presented in class include presentation, discussion, case studies, discovery, role play, simulation, and behaviour modelling.
- Advantages and disadvantages discussed in class include suitability for different training objectives (e.g., change in knowledge, skill, attitudes), costs, and likelihood of transfer.
- Better students will correctly describe three different training methods and present a balanced and correct discussion of their advantages and disadvantages.

(c) Describe the Solomon design as a means to evaluate a particular training programme. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this design? [30%]

- The Solomon design is a four group, randomized experimental design with pre- and post-measurement of the desired training behaviour (the dependent variable).
- It is superior to many other designs, because it allows to disentangle the effects of:
    o Testing threat (effect of pre-testing)
    o Treatment (training)

- The problems of this design are mainly related to feasibility issues in organizations. For instance, it will be hard to collect data from a "control group" that is not allowed to participate itself in a training; similarly, application of this design requires a large sample in order to have sufficient participants in each experimental condition.
- Better students will describe the design correctly, and outline various advantages and disadvantages.

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