

Short communication

Human resource management practices in organised fresh fruits and vegetables retail outlets

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Human resource is an important asset in food and grocery retail industry. Many top companies have made human resource (HR) a strategic partner in their operations. Human resources are significant strategic levers and the sources of sustained competitive advantage. Therefore, human resource management (HRM) practices should be central to the organizational strategy (Shahnawaz and Juyal, 2006). People have to be motivated and managed by the use of good HR practices and be given the opportunity to develop and use their skills to create goods and services which can be sold. If the knowledge they are creating cannot be embedded in goods and services that are in demand, then this human capital will have no value to the business (Barney, 1995). In the present study an attempt was made to know the profile of employees in organized fresh fruits and vegetables retail outlets and to study human resource practices in organized fresh fruits and vegetables retail outlets.

The study was conducted in Ludhiana city of Punjab. Ludhiana was selected because it has fruits and vegetables retail outlets of all most all the companies. The main companies in this sector are RPG enterprises,

Aditya Birla Group, Bharti enterprises, Reliance retail and Namdhari seeds. On the basis of willingness to share information eight stores were selected taking two each from More, Spencer, Reliance Fresh and one each of Easy Day and Namdhari Fresh. The front-end employees (salesman) were the respondents under the study. On the basis of their willingness to participate in the survey 50 respondents were selected from these stores. Questionnaire was prepared for collecting information and it was divided into two parts. First part contained questions regarding the profile of the respondents while the second part contained questions related to human resource practices followed in various retail outlets. The data so collected was analysed with the help of frequency distributions and percentages.

The study was conducted to know the profile of employees and HR practices followed in fresh fruits and vegetables retail outlets of Ludhiana. Profile of the employees working in fresh fruits and vegetables retail outlets of Ludhiana was studied on the basis of various parameters like age, gender, education, family income, marital status and background. It was found (Table 1) that all the employees working in organized fresh fruit and vegetable retail outlets was young, slim and smart. They belonged to the age group of 20-30 years, which shows that the youth is preferred for this job. Young employees are most suitable to do this job as they are full of energy and have stamina to stand for the whole day. It was found that 62 percent of employees were men and 38 percent were women. Women employees reported that the job is tough for them. They found this job hectic. When asked about educational qualification 64 percent of the employees reported that they had studied up to senior secondary level only while 36 percent of the employees were graduates. Majority of the employees (58 percent) were married. The family income of the majority of the employees (66 percent)

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Table 1: Distribution (%) of salesmen on the basis of age, gender and education

	More	Namdhari	Reliance	Easy	S	Total
	Day					
Age (years)						
20-25	75.0	25.0	50.0	80.0	25.0	54.0
25-30	25.0	75.0	50.0	20.0	75.0	46.0
Gender						
Male	66.7	100	58.3	60.0	50.0	62.0
Female	33.3	-	41.7	40.0	50.0	38.0
Education						
10+2	66.7	75.0	58.3	80.0	50.0	64.0
Graduate	33.3	25.5	41.7	20.0	50.0	36.0
Background						
Rural	58.7	100	-	20.0	83.3	46.0
Urban	41.6	-	100	80.0	16.7	54.0
Family income (Rs. lakh)						
0.5-1.0	58.3	50.0	25.0	-	-	24.0
1.0-1.5	16.7	-	33.3	60.0	41.7	34.0
1.5-2.0	16.7	25.0	33.3	40.0	41.7	32.0
2.5-3.0	8.3	25.0	8.4	-	16.6	10.0

was between Rs 1.0 - 2.0 lakhs irrespective of their background. It was found that 46 percent of the respondents belonged to rural areas while 54 per cent of the respondents belonged to urban area. It shows that organized retail outlets are providing employment to a large proportion of rural people. Out of the total male employees majority were from rural background while majority of the females were from urban background.

An attempt was made to study the human resource management practices being followed in various stores. The employees were asked about the method of recruitment, basis of selection, training given to them, performance appraisal, salary, grievance handling etc. Some of the practices regarding wage, holidays, working hours etc were studied and compared with the provisions under the Punjab Shops and Establishments Act, 1958.

The employees were enquired about the source from which they came to know about the recruitments taking place in the retail outlets. It was found that only one store that is Namdhari Fresh recruited through advertising in the house journal called Namdhari Farm. In all the other stores the source of recruitment was friends and referrals.

Some recruiters felt interview alone unreliable as applicants can perform well at interview but may not have the qualities or skills required for the job, therefore, the written tests were also conducted to increase the chances of choosing the best applicant. The tests used were aptitude tests, intelligence tests and psychometric tests (to know the personality of a candidate). In Easy Day, both interview and written test were being taken for selection of the employees while in More, Reliance

Table 2: Duration of induction training in fresh fruits and vegetables outlets

Name of the store	Duration of training (days)
Namdhari Fresh	120
Reliance Fresh	30
Spencer	30
Easy Day	30
More	15

Fresh, Namdhari Fresh and Spencer only interview was being conducted. The employees were enquired about the time period (Table 2) for which they received induction training in organized fresh fruit and vegetable retail outlets.

It was found that duration of training varies from company to company. The maximum duration of training was in case of Namdhari Fresh, which was, 120 days followed by Spencer and Reliance Fresh, 30 days in each, followed by More which gives training for 15 days. It was seen that Easy Day provided training to its employees only for 4 days. The variation in training period is as per the policies of the stores. In Easy Day training period was just of four days because here daily training to the employees was given. In Namdhari Fresh and More training was being given after regular intervals but this interval was not fixed. Training was given for a period of 2-3 months in Namdhari Fresh at Namdhari Farm and for 1-2 hours in more. In Reliance Fresh, there was one time training and that was induction training. In Easy Day, training was a continuous process that is training was given on daily basis.

Performance appraisal practices in the stores under study were enquired about. It was found that the interval for performance appraisal varies from company to company. In Easy Day and Namdhari Fresh appraisal was done after every 6 months. In Spencer and Reliance Fresh appraisal was done after one year, while in more, there was no appraisal. In all the outlets except more appraisal was being done on the basis of quality, productivity, job knowledge, reliability, availability and performance. Performance appraisal data was used for giving increment in wages.

In Reliance Fresh, Spencer and Easy Day, it was the immediate supervisor who did the appraisal and in Namdhari Fresh rating committee did appraisal. The members of the rating committee were HR manager, store manager and senior supervisor. All the employees in every outlet felt that appraisal was genuine except that in one outlet as no appraisal was being done over there. They were satisfied by the basis on which the appraisal was being done in the retail outlets and had no complaints regarding the same. It was also observed from the responses of the respondents that the appraisal being done was unbiased.

Table 3: Average Salary of the salesmen in fresh fruits and vegetables outlets

Store (Company)	Average Salary (Rs. per month)
I	3500
II	4000
III	4000
IV	4000
V	4500

Per month salary of the employees working in the selected stores varies from Rs 3500 to Rs 4500. Minimum Wage set by the Labour Departments of Punjab state for the frontline employees (salesmen) shops and establishments is Rs 3800 per month. According to it except one store, all the other selected outlets were giving wages as per the law.

In all the selected stores deduction from salary was made in the form of Provident fund contribution of the employee. But in case of one store deduction from salary of employees was also made for any shrinkage in fruits or vegetables. The employees resent this deduction, which is due to no fault of their own. Also it is against the legal provisions.

It was observed that in almost all the outlets the employees worked for 6 days a week, but not necessarily from Monday to Saturday. The day on which the employees got off was not the same for all; it was different so as to maintain the required number of human resource in a store.

It can be seen from Table 4, that in all the stores except Reliance Fresh employees work for more than 48 hours a week, or nine hours a day. Thus it can be concluded

Table 4: Working hours per week in each store

Name of the store	Working hours per week
More	54
Namdhari Fresh	66
Reliance Fresh	48
Easy Day	54
Spencer	54

from the results that only Reliance Fresh follows the terms and regulations of the Act by making its employees work for 48 hours a week, while in case of other retail stores the time for which an employee works is more than the stipulated time mentioned under the provision of the Act. It was observed that no employee worked overtime in any of the outlets except in one store where they were made to work overtime even on weekly off days and that too without any extra pay.

It was found from the responses of the employees that in case of Reliance Fresh, the employees were given a half an hour break after working for four and a half hours. In Namdhari Fresh, the employees had freedom to take a break of half an hour whenever they wanted

but in more and Spencer the employees started working at 9:30 am in the morning and were given break of half an hour only when they were free i.e. irrespective of the number of hours they had worked. In Easyday the employees were given break of one hour in total i.e. half an hour for lunch in the afternoon and another half an hour was divided into two halves i.e. 15 minutes tea break each in morning and evening. It was concluded that in Namdhari Fresh too much relaxation was given to the employees regarding rest interval.

It was observed that in all the selected retail outlets, there was provision of six holidays but employees were made to work and were paid remuneration at double the rate of their normal wages.

It was found that in Easy Day, Namdhari Fresh and Spencer employees were allowed to have 30 earned leaves in a year with pay. In Reliance Fresh and More employees were allowed to have 21 earned leaves in a year. But as reported by the respondents of more, they had the provision of 21 leaves, but they didn't get any such earned leave even for a single day.

It was found that in Easy Day, Spencer, and Namdhari Fresh one-month prior notice was required to be given to employee before termination. In Reliance Fresh 3 months prior notice was required, while in more employees were informed just 15 days prior to their termination and that also, if they were confirmed employees. In case the employee was not a confirmed employee, he/she could be terminated without any prior intimation. Thus it can be concluded that more was not following the provision given under Act as far as the termination of employees was concerned.

It can be concluded that most of the employees working in these stores were young, male and belonged to rural area. The major source of recruitment was friends and referrals. No advertisement for recruitment was done by these stores. All the employees were given induction training before joining. There was performance appraisal of employees except in few stores. All the employees were getting timely wages i.e. certain time period was fixed for payment of wages. Deduction from salary was in the form of provident fund in all the stores and there were some other deductions in one of the stores under study. The results revealed that out of all the stores under study only one store was not following some of the mandatory HR practices.

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