Human Resource Management Practice: A Ethical-Based Perspective

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Keywords: Ethical Perspective; Human Resource Management Practices.

Abstract. So far, the ethical discussion on human resource management in academic has been carried out from two perspectives: applying Kantism and Utilitarianism to the entire human resources management system; applying the theory of justice and fairness to specific human resource management practices. This article focuses on the latter, namely the specific ethical analysis of human resource management practices. We will review the research on human resources management practice ethics at home and abroad, summarize and comment on it, and provide reference and suggestions for subsequent related research.

Introduction

Human resource management practices are often considered to be factors that have a significant impact on organizational performance by affecting employee behavior. For a long time, people's expectations for human resources management departments are support employees and play an active role in the employment relationship. The reality is that this expectation will be weakened by the organizational level of implementation and organizational power distance.

At the beginning of the 21st century, human resource management research shifted from the issues of occupational health and safety, low wages, and conflict management to ethical analysis of risk avoidance and organizational norms. As proposed by Budd & Scoville [1], the risks in the field of human resources management are high, and if serious ethical analysis is not carried out, serious social and political problems will arise. Although previous studies have explored related issues, the debate on the ethics of human resource management is still trivial. This paper will focus on the micro level of human resource management practice ethics, and summarize and comment on existing research at home and abroad.

Human Resource Management Practice

In the past three decades, scholars have paid close attention to the role of human resource management practices in achieving organizational goals. A large number of studies have recognized the relationship between human resource management practices and organizational performance [2, 3]. Scholars hold different views on the definition of human resource management practices. Lado & Wilson[4] believes that human resource management practices are a unique, interconnected set of activities, functions, and processes that attract, develop, and maintain (or dismiss) human resources. This definition highlights the practice of human resource management by a series of processes, including multiple human resources management activities and functions. Huselid et al. [5] focus on the strategic support role of human resource management practice in the long-term development of the company. He believes that “human resource management practice is a series of policies and activities that are highly consistent within the company and ensure that human resources serve the strategic goals of the enterprise”. In general, we believe that human resource management practices are a set of policies, tools, and systems that affect employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance in order to achieve organizational goals.
Ethical Analysis of Human Resource Management Practice

At present, the role of human resource management in the organization is forward-looking. One of its distinguishing features is the ability to achieve better performance through the capabilities of people in the organization, which are derived from the redefinition of human resource management practices and functions. And redistribution. For a long time, it has been expected that the function of the human resources management department is to provide support to employees and to play an active role in the employment relationship. The reality is that this expectation will be weakened by the implementation of the organization. Therefore, an ethical analysis of human resource management practices is urgently needed. At the beginning of the ethical analysis of human resource management, scholars’ focus was mainly on the difference between the ethical perspective of human resource management and the traditional perspective [6], and challenged the traditional viewpoint.

Mainstream perspective

The mainstream perspective is based on the employees of the United States engaged in fixed work content, from a behavioral perspective, focusing on rationality and individuality. Topics covered include fairness and justice in human resource practices, compliance with regulations and ethics, employee ethical responsibilities, and ethical characteristics of employees and HR managers. Most of the articles are based on specific human resource management practices. The ethical principles related to individuals or processes are narrowly described as: dismissal [7], employee moral character development [8], and the influence of traditional Confucian values on human resource management practices [9]. However, this view is single, with default employee goals automatically aligned with organizational goals, and human resource management as a mechanism of action to achieve organizational goals [10]. This practice often overlooks the position of employees, and the interests of inconsistent goals or conflicts have not been properly considered.

Critical perspective

In the 1990s, it was a "reverse" period of academic research on human resource management. As a response to "empiricism," the critical perspective began to develop—widely rooted in labor process analysis or Marxist political views—think of human resources. Viewpoints (such as competitive advantage, empowerment, and trust) are just exaggerated rhetoric, designed to cover up power and control the reality of concentration [11]. The critical view is that human resource management is exaggerated and manipulated, and it is a management tool that controls employees. Human resource management practices are not a way for employees to fully play and contribute in an organization, but a way for employees to make more sacrifices to meet organizational needs and interfere with employee life [12]. Skeptical scholars believe that the "soft" human resource management based on people is actually a disguised "hard" human resource management with a focus on production.

Ethical perspective

So far, only a few researchers have tried to apply ethical theory directly to human resource management practices. For example, Miller [13] provides a human resource management system based on a procedural fair framework. He believes that ethical human resource management can be achieved by applying the principles of fairness and equality. Legge believes that the evaluation of a particular form of human resource management that is “hard” or “soft” should depend on the ethical principles that are opposed to it, rather than on the unit [14]. Silva & Opatha (2015) proposes a concept of ethical orientation of human resource management, that is, in order to cultivate an ethical workforce in the organization, the functions of human resource management (acquiring, developing, retaining, and motivating) create, improve, and maintain the ethical level of employees[15].
Limitations and Future Research Directions

Limitations

There is no doubt that the inclusion of ethical considerations in human resource management practices is limited. From a realistic point of view, a micro-level ethical analysis of an employee's individual behavior or a certain practice within the organization may not only neglect the interests of other stakeholders, but also bring the human resources management department into a dilemma. In view of this, some scholars have suggested that companies should develop a list of recognized and ethical principles (principles that cannot be denied from any angle), such as individuals or organizations must respect the views of others and have no right to interfere with the freedom of others. But from another perspective, this approach has its own limitations. Managers are worried that using these principles to determine whether human resource management activities are ethical or not is likely to constrain the human resources management department, which in turn leads to inefficient management.

Future research directions

On the whole, the human resources management practice research from the ethical perspective has made some progress. But there is still room for further research and improvement. Most of the literature is concentrated in the fields of ethics, philosophy and sociology, and the research focuses on the macro, lack of detailed discussion in the field of organizational behavior and psychology, especially the lack of empirical analysis of the human ethics management practice ethics. There are still many areas to be explored in the future of ethical research on human resource management practices.

The ethical behavior of employees will affect the performance of the company for a long time. Employees are faced with ethical choices many times, and they identify right and wrong in the process of choice. Therefore, to explore the mechanism of action between ethical decision-making and ethical/non-ethical behavior not only helps to improve the ethical perspective of human resource management practices, but also helps to provide entry points for ethical employees.

References


