

Impact Of Unions, HRM And Government Interventions On Workers' Rights And Safety

Posted on November 2, 2018

Any successful and effective organization considers humans as its most valuable asset. Human resources are more important than other resources, like machinery, equipment, materials, and money, as in the absence of a competent and skilled workforce, the organization would be incapable of utilizing the other resources effectively.

No person can negate the above-mentioned statement. Human rights for safety and protection are necessary for the physical and mental well-being of the workforce and for the provision of self, family, community, and the country as a whole. When an issue arises affecting a wide variety of people, they unite to achieve a common goal, and that is what happened at the beginning of the 20th century. After thousands of deaths and injuries in mines and factories, citizens came together to fight for their basic right of survival in the workplace. Following the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, the Department of Labor was established in 1913. However, prior to that, there were numerous unofficial labour unions protesting for better working conditions.

Human Resource Management also emerged in the early 20th century but did not have an effective role in the work field till later. Human resources management, unions, and government interventions all serve the central purpose of protecting the rights of the people working. However, all three approaches deal with the issues in a distinct manner. It is the responsibility of the worker unions to ensure that all the workers are treated equally. Moreover, the responsibility for worker equality also falls on the human resources management staff, the legal services, the social services and even the citizens of the state.

The labour unions were created in the 1900s by skilled workmen, like machinists, ironworkers, miners, etc. Each profession had its own union representing other members in the same work field, presenting issues involving that specific line of work. Labour Unions were frowned upon by employers and businessmen. Strikes were illegal, and employers had the power to fire and discriminate against employees who were taking part in them. At times, the owners would pay a fraction of what other employees were getting paid, and that was still legal. The lack of organization among the workers, along with the suppressive measures of the employers, acted as impediments to improving the working environment.

However, the 1911 incident of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire acted as a turning point for the worker unions. Only when it became clear that working conditions were not safe. So, the government stepped in and passed a few safety laws and regulations. First aid stations, guards, and fire exits were only then required in the workplace.

Roles of the Unions and the Human Resources Management

The union movement has strong beliefs and espouses universal values, such as living wages, working with dignity, and achievement through collective action. Throughout history, the worker unions have played a vital role in transforming the work conditions for the labourers. The unions have struggled to create work environments that are safe and have been the staunch advocates of introducing legislation and laws to be enforced and monitored by the entities of public health, like the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). (International Labour Organization, 1981)

In the past two decades, the number of unions and their members has declined due to the feelings of the younger generations towards them. The generation of today does not value the importance of labour unions and their role in bringing people together for their mutual benefits and mutual protection. Nowadays, workers do not have to deal with hazardous conditions and deaths in the workplace. However, there are other issues, like raising the minimum wage and equal and better benefits. Labour unions went on strikes, protested, got fired, and sometimes were paid less just to grant a few rights protecting the workers around the country. (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, n.d.)

With regards to the human resource management, it is the process of recruiting, selecting, provision of adequate induction, orientation, and training, developing the skills, assessing the employees and appraising them, motivating them through certain strategies like benefits and compensation and the maintenance of the safety and health of the employees.

The duties of HRM are not merely limited to the hiring of qualified candidates for a particular position but also include the provision of a good quality of working life. HRM makes sure that the company's employees are satisfied with the workload and the salary and addresses distinctive worker interests. Human resources management is trusted enough by employers to make important decisions other than hiring and firing. The ultimate goal of the HRM is the satisfaction of the employer as well as the employees. If someone is not happy working with a certain company, then her production level is low. Whereas, if she is satisfied with her working conditions, hours, wages, and benefits, then she will invest her time and energy in something worthwhile. It is crucial that employees are well informed of the labour situation in the organization. It keeps them busy, and the HRM can focus on additional strategies and measures to enhance the trust of the employees in the management. It proves imperative in maximizing the commitment of the workers to the organizational goals. The HRM should actively listen to the concerns and issues of the workers and properly recognize and reward their achievements in order to have a successful business running with both employees' and employer's satisfaction. HRM, just like the labour unions, serves to achieve the well-being of the workers but approaches it differently. HRM works from the inside to accomplish the contentment of the employees and the employers. However, certain practices in the workplace requiring the participation of the workers only prove effective in the presence of a union.

The Protection of the Workers in Modern America

The government passes laws to enhance the living conditions of its citizens. The civil liberties and rights are considered in the light of the links between the individual and the state. Sometimes, the government waits for protests and strikes to make a move and pass a law in favour of the citizens. Throughout our history, in some cases, the government operated a bit too slowly; as mentioned before, the Department of Labor was established only after a disaster happened, and lots of lives were lost. Since then, Federal laws have been passed to protect workers, prevent accidents, and set minimum wage. An example of these laws is the Fair Labor Standards Act. It served to establish the maximum number of hours that children can perform labour and restricted the kind of work that can be performed by children. In today's America, the law ensures that every worker is paid wages in accordance with the minimum wage set by the government. (National Labor Relations Board, n.d.)

On the same note, the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) played a vital role in minimizing the dangers and risks associated with workplaces in the United States. The U.S. Congress established the Act to regulate the threats and hazards posed by the workplace. Similarly, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was introduced to eliminate discrimination based on religion, race, gender, and ethnicity. Moreover, the Pay Fairness Act introduced new and enhanced penalties for people who do not pay women and men equally for the same kind of job.

The labour unions, HRM, and federal laws were established to protect the employees from the employers, and now there are also laws protecting the employers from their employees. Workers' rights and well-being are the practices that society has constructed over time, and their implications may vary over time in line with socioeconomic and institutionalization conditions. Some of the issues in the workplace in the past century are different than the ones today, but some are still the same, like minimum wage. Employees today are protected in some aspects but still are not well supported. Nonetheless, labour unions, public health organizations, labour laws, the management structure of the companies and human resources management all play their roles in ensuring the health and safety of the workers. All of them function through community or social networks or by assisting the workers in making appropriate life choices and thus enhancing the cultural, environmental and socioeconomic environments. Therefore, it is true that the workers in the modern workplaces of America are well protected and well supported.

References

International Labour Organization. (1981). Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155). <https://www.ilo.org/resource/c155-occupational-safety-and-health-convention-1981>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (n.d.). Workers' rights. <https://www.osha.gov/workers>

National Labor Relations Board. (n.d.). National Labor Relations Act.

<https://www.nlr.gov/guidance/key-reference-materials/national-labor-relations-act>