

# A Simplified Study of Definitions of Human Resource Management

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## **Abstract**

For the purpose of achieving three research objectives: (1) to present definitions of Human Resource Management (HRM) given by various appropriately qualified authors and make a brief descriptive analysis about the definitions; (2) to revisit and review the definition of HRM developed by me in 2009; and (3) to introduce a definition of HRM which is inclusive, this theoretical research paper was written. The desk research strategy was adopted and the study was carried out by the use of two non-scientific methods, i.e., authority to a greater extent and intuition to a lesser extent. 34 definitions directly mentioned and implied from 34 textbooks were presented. The findings of the descriptive analysis of the definitions were that the most of the definitions have similarity and no salient contradictory differences exist in their meanings implying that the nature of the subject of HRM is not controversial but is generally agreeable or nondebatable. Further the descriptive analysis yielded a list of 20 characteristics of HRM. The revisit to the definition of HRM given by the author of this paper in 2009 resulted in an assertion that it is valid at present and the future too. However, in view of the possibility of criticizing the definition owing to lack of inclusion of strategic, partnership, and sustainable perspectives, an inclusive definition was formulated and presented.

**Key Words:** Definition, Human Resource Management, Inclusive Definition

## Introduction

An organization is a formal group of people with a common goal and the lifeblood of an organization is its employees who are right and therefore unique because they are animate, active and living; have the ability to think, feel and react; their value appreciates with the passage of time owing to new learning through education, training, and experience; they have the ability to influence on determining their costs such as pay, incentives, and benefits; they have the ability to organize as unions, teams etc.; their behaviour is complex and may be unpredictable; they have the ability of creativity and innovation, which cannot be found in any other resources; and most importantly they make decisions in respect of all other resources (Opatha, 2009). It is the HRM that deals with effective and efficient utilization of personnel through a set of functions (Opatha, 2015) and indeed it is about managing employees of an organization in order to achieve its objectives. HRM has been a well-recognized profession and a well-established academic discipline being interesting, exciting, and challenging (Opatha, 2019<sup>1</sup>). HRM is one of the most important functional fields of Organizational Management (Opatha, 2021). As a matter of fact, it is an essential course for any Business Administration, Management or Management-related Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree as well (Opatha, 2019<sup>2</sup>). Indeed, it is a compulsory course in most of the Degrees of Doctor of Business Administration being offered by recognized universities in Sri Lanka and abroad. It is in fact that there are Bachelor's Degrees, Master's Degrees, and Doctoral Degrees specializing in HRM. Apart from Degrees there are professional programs in HRM. Consequently, at any time of consideration there are a considerable number of students, employees, and professionals studying HRM.

It is indispensable for the learner to secure a good and right knowledge of the introduction to HRM. Each academic or teacher in HRM is supposed to give an introduction to HRM to his or her students at the outset of teaching a course or a subject, and it needs to be right, adequate, and understandable. It has generally been accepted that a definition of HRM which is clear needs to be given by the teacher to the students to learn in the act of introducing. According to my observations of HRM teaching performed by academics and professionals, some utilize several definitions of HRM and others do not. Based on my understanding obtained by teaching HRM for 35 years to the students at Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral levels in various universities it is a best practice to give at least several definitions made by foreign authors, local authors, and professional institutes. Another best practice is to give an own definition with an adequate analysis to it in addition to a discussion of few definitions given by other experts, scholars, authors or institutes.

Definitions of HRM are very useful for the students as well as the teachers because of the basic reason that they give intentionally prepared statements with regard to the meaning of HRM. Two functions of a definition are (1) to signpost the logical/discourse structure of the subject/lecture, and (2) to help to maintain comprehension as the discourse progresses (Flowerdew, 1992). A major function of a definition is to clarify a term (Jaroongkhongdach, 2014). A definition of HRM makes the student or the learner clear and distinct about the meaning of the term *HRM* and also it is possible for the learner to get a sort of understanding

with regard to the content and the purpose of HRM. An analysis of the definitions enables the learner to identify and list various characteristics and spheres of the subject of HRM. Further defining HRM is instrumental for developing a right attitude and motivation within the learner. The increased understanding of defining HRM in detail acquired by the lecturer will lead to increase his or her clarifying dimension of lecturing behaviour, which has a significant positive impact on student satisfaction of learning (Opatha, 2020). There is a theoretical gap in analyzing a set of definitions of HRM definitely in Asian context, perhaps globally. Further it is interesting and scholastically curious to engage in a study of defining HRM.

### **Objectives**

Three objectives were set for writing this theoretical research paper. The objectives are:

1. To present definitions of HRM given by various appropriately qualified authors and make a brief descriptive analysis about the definitions.
2. To revisit and review the definition of HRM developed by me in 2009.
3. To introduce a definition of HRM which is inclusive.

### **Method**

This research paper is conceptual and non-traditional. Indeed, this is a research study done by using two non-scientific methods such as authority mainly and intuition to a certain extent. Authority which is a non-scientific method of acquiring knowledge involves seeking answers from authority or experts on a specific subject (Davis and Cosenza, 1985; Nazario-Romero, 2016). The desk research strategy was used and for the purpose of achieving the first objective, a rigorous attempt was made to find the definitions given by highly and appropriately qualified authors in HRM. A descriptive approach was adopted rather than critical and prescriptive approaches. The textbooks on HRM, which were published in English Language and physically available to me, were utilized. Books which were perceived as scholar books were not considered for the study, and a book which was perceived as not a sufficient standard work for study of HRM not covering essential basics was not considered. As far as the textbooks on HRM were concerned there were generalized ones which focus on General HRM and specialized ones which focus on specialized branches of HRM such as International HRM, Strategic HRM, and Contemporary HRM, and specific functional fields of HRM such as Compensation Management and Human Resource Development. For this study, only the textbooks generalizing in HRM were used. It was observed that the concept of HRM has been defined by every appropriately qualified author or authors who wrote recognized textbooks. In order to achieve the second objective, my writing published in 2009 on defining HRM was used. Traditional and contemporary perspectives of HRM were utilized in order to achieve the third objective which leads to an original contribution through this paper to the existing body of knowledge of defining HRM. Exhibit 1 presents the textbooks used for this paper with information that includes author or authors, year of publication, country of publication, availability of direct definition or non-availability of direct definition.

**Exhibit 1. Information about the Textbooks used for this Study**

No.	Author/s	Year	Country of Publication	Availability of Direct Definition	Non-Availability of Direct Definition
1	French	1978	USA	X	
2	Glueck	1979	USA	X	
3	Chruden and Sherman	1980	USA		X
4	Stone and Meltz	1983	Canada		X
5	Beach	1985	USA		X
6	Schuler and Youngblood	1986	USA	X	
7	Heneman III, Schwab, Fossum, and Dyer	1989	USA	X	
8	Graham and Bennett	1992	UK	X	
9	Bernardin and Russell	1993	USA	X	
10	Bratton and Gold	1994	UK	X	
11	Singh, Chhabra, and Taneja	1995	India		X
12	Mamoria	1996	India		X
13	Werther and Davis	1996	USA	X	
14	Harris	1997	USA	X	
15	Mondy, Noe, and Premeaux	1999	USA	X	
16	Pattanayak	2003	India		X
17	Kleiman	2004	USA	X	
18	Fisher, Schoenfeldt, and Shaw	2006	USA	X	
19	Beardwell and Claydon	2007	UK		X
20	Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright	2007	USA	X	
21	Byars and Rue	2008	USA	X	
22	DeNisi and Griffin	2008	USA	X	
23	Opatha	2009	Sri Lanka	X	
24	Cascio	2010	USA	X	
25	Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy	2010	USA		X
26	Ivancevich	2010	USA	X	
27	Mathis and Jackson	2010	USA	X	
28	Torrington, Hall, Taylor, and Atkinson	2011	UK	X	
29	Schwind, Das, Wagar, Fassina, and Bulmash	2013	Canada	X	
30	Armstrong and Taylor	2014	UK	X	
31	Stewart and Brown	2014	USA	X	
32	Bohlander and Snell	2017	USA	X	
33	Aswathappa	2017	India		X
34	Dessler	2017	USA	X	

## Definitions of HRM

It was observed that the concept of HRM has been defined by every appropriately qualified author or authors who wrote recognized textbooks. First, I will introduce the source, and then present the definition. It should be specifically mentioned here that I have no intention of doing a critical examination of the definitions. By giving due respect to all the authors, only the descriptive approach was applied (neither critical nor prescriptive).

The first textbook I utilized for this study is the one titled *The Personnel Management Process* written by French (1978), a US Professor, who defined HRM (then, used term is Personnel Management) as the recruitment, selection, development, utilization of, and accommodation to human resources by organizations. According to him, the human resources of an organization consist of all individuals who are engaged in organizational activities regardless of their roles. At the time of giving the definition, then term was Personnel Management, not HRM. The definition's content includes three HRM functions, i.e., recruitment, selection, and development, then utilization of employees and accommodation to employees. "Accommodating to human resources" implies (from the Preface given by French who had not directly interpreted it in defining) that a human imperative in a modern organization exists and it is to enhance the quality of organizational life in a psychological and sociological sense.

Glueck (1979), who was a classic authority and a USA Professor in Personnel/HRM, defines in his textbook titled *Foundations of Personnel* that Personnel is that function of all enterprises which provides for effective utilization of human resources to achieve both objectives of the enterprise and the satisfaction and development of the employees. According to the definition, HRM exists in all enterprises and it involves effective utilization of employees to achieve the enterprise's objectives and the employees' satisfaction and development. Thus, HRM is for both the organization and its employees.

Chruden and Sherman (1980) wrote a textbook titled *Personnel Management* and it does not give a particular definition of Personnel Management. However, the title of the textbook contains a subtitle, i.e., *The Utilization of Human Resources*. It indicates that HRM is the utilization of human resources.

Stone and Meltz (1983) in their textbook titled *Personnel Management in Canada* do not give a particular definition of Personnel Management. However, they write that the role of personnel management is to aid the company in using its human resources to accomplish its goals. Hence, it implies that HRM involves the services or assistance given to the company in using its human resources to fulfil its goals. Also, they call labour or industrial relations for personnel management in a unionized organization. In the Canadian context, then HRM of an organization which was unionized was called labour and industrial relations.

The fifth textbook utilized for this study is a textbook titled *Personnel* written by Beach and was published in 1985. He has not given a particular definition of Personnel. However, the title of his textbook has a subtitle, i.e., *The Management of People at Work* implying that HRM is the management of people at work. He prefaces that the management of people is an integral

part of the process of management and it is really the heart of management. Thus, the heart of management is HRM stressing that HRM is a priority field of Business Management.

Schuler and Youngblood wrote a textbook that has the title *Effective Personnel Management* which was published in 1986. They define effective personnel management as the recognition of the importance of a company's work force as vital human resources and the utilization of several functions and activities to ensure that they are used effectively and legally for the benefit of the individual, the organization, and society. This definition is a comprehensive definition that includes characteristics such as (1) the importance of a company's work force is recognized; (2) several functions and activities are utilized; and (3) the functions and activities are to be used in the way that is both effective and legal for the benefit of the employee, the organization, and society. They used both terms, i.e., functions and activities which include planning for human resource needs, staffing the personnel needs of the organization, appraising employee behavior, compensating employee behavior, training and career management, improving the work environment, and establishing and maintaining effective work relationships.

The seventh textbook used for this study is a textbook published in 1989 and was written by four authors namely Heneman 111, Schwab, Fossum, and Dyer. The title of the textbook was *Personnel/Human Resource Management* in which HRM has been defined as a set of functions or activities that are designed to influence the effectiveness of an organization's employees. According to them HRM aims at influencing the effectiveness of employees in the organization. As per the definition, a set of functions or activities exist in an organization and they are aimed at influencing the effectiveness of employees of the organization. Attraction, performance, retention, attendance, satisfaction, and other are considered as personnel/human resource outcomes and they are achieved by personnel/human resource activities.

Graham and Bennett (1992) who are UK authors wrote a textbook titled *Human Resource Management*. In the textbook (seventh edition) there are two parts, part 1 for Industrial Psychology and part 2 for Personnel Management. They define Personnel Management as that part of management which deals with people at work as regards: (a) utilization, (b) motivation, and (c) protection. According to the definition, *Utilization* includes recruitment, selection, transfer, promotion, separation, appraisal, training and development; *Motivation* includes job design, remuneration, fringe benefits, consultation, participation, negotiation and justice; and *Protection* includes working conditions, welfare services, safety, and implementing appropriate legislation. This definition emphasizes the psychological basis of HRM.

Bernadin and Russell (1993) developed a textbook titled *Human Resource Management: An Experiential Approach* in which it has been written that the human resources of an organization consist of all people who perform its activities, and all decisions which affect the workforce concern the organization's HRM function. Accordingly, HRM involves making decisions with regard to the organization's workforce. It is implied that the decisions which

affect the workforce need to be implemented in order to experience the meeting of specific organizational business needs.

Bratton and Gold (1994) are two UK authors and they developed a textbook with the title *Human Resource Management: Theory and Practice*. They write that although the notion of HRM has been subject to considerable debate, no accepted definition of HRM is available. Also, they emphasize that a definition of the subject matter of HRM is needed in order to analyse and understand HRM policies and practices. They define HRM as: That part of the management process that specializes in the management of people in work organizations. According to them, HRM has an emphasis on that, employees are the primary resource for gaining sustainable competitive advantage, that human resource activities need to be integrated with the corporate strategy, and that human resource specialists help organizational controllers to meet both efficiency and equity objectives. The defining given by Bratton and Gold indicates that HRM is strategically oriented.

Singh, Chhabra, and Taneja (1995) are Indian authors who wrote a textbook titled *Personnel Management and Industrial Relations*. They did not give a particular definition of HRM. They present several definitions given by other authors. However, their writing indicates that HRM or Personnel Management is an established part of management which is concerned with the human resources of an organization and its objective is the maintenance of better human relations in the organization by the development, application and evaluation of policies, procedures and programmes relating to human resources to optimize their contribution towards the realization of organization objectives. Thus, HRM involves developing, applying, and evaluating human resources policies, procedures, and programmes to maintain better human relations in the organization.

Mamoria (1996) is an Indian Professor who wrote a comprehensive textbook the title of which is *Personnel Management*. He presented various definitions of Personnel Management and did not present a definition which is his own. However, he gave a detailed account of various definitions. On the basis of the various definitions two characteristics were presented by him and they are (1) Personnel Management is concerned with managing people at work; and (2) It is concerned with employees, both as individuals and groups.

Werther and Davis (1996) wrote a classic textbook (their first edition in 1981) titled *Human Resources and Personnel Management*. Their definition is: the study of how employers obtain, develop, utilize, evaluate, maintain, and retain the right numbers and types of workers. They have used the term workers for human resources which were defined by them as the people who are ready, willing, and able to contribute to organizational goals. According to Werther and Davis's definition of HRM, HRM is a discipline that studies how employees are obtained, developed, utilized, evaluated, maintained, and retained by the employers.

Harris (1997) wrote a textbook that carries *Human Resource Management: A Practical Approach* as the title. He defines HRM as the programs, policies, and practices for managing an

organization's workforce. According to the definition, HRM has programs, policies, and practices which are used to manage the workforce of an organization.

A textbook that has the title *Human Resource Management* was written by three USA authors, namely Mondy, Noe, and Premeaux (1999). The relevant definition given by them for HRM is: the utilization of human resources to achieve organizational objectives. This definition is a simple one and according to them, HRM is a dynamic discipline.

Pattanayak (2003) is an Indian Professor and his textbook has the title *Human Resource Management* in which several definitions of HRM made by foreign authors have been given. His writing does not present a direct definition of HRM given by him but it implies that HRM encompasses those activities designed to provide, motivate and coordinate the human resources of an organization. According to him, human resources represent the largest investment of an organization.

Kleiman (2004) defines HRM as the organizational function that consists of practices that help the organization deal effectively with its people during the various phases of the employment cycle. His textbook has the title *Human Resource Management: A Managerial Tool for Competitive Advantage*. The title shows directly that HRM is a managerial tool for competitive advantage. According to Kleiman, the employment cycle has three phases such as preselection, selection, and postselection. In his view of HRM selection is considered an essential practice of HRM and based on it the employment cycle was developed.

The textbook written by Fisher, Schoenfeldt, and Shaw (2006) carries the title *Human Resource Management*. According to them HRM involves all management decisions and practices that directly affect or influence the people, or human resources, who work for the organization. Thus, there are management decisions and practices under HRM influencing employees of the organization.

Beardwell and Claydon (2007) presented definitions of HRM in their book titled *Human Resource Management: A Contemporary Approach*. They do not give their own definition but they summarize that there is no universally agreed definition of HRM and definitions can refer to people management activities in the broadest sense or in the specific meanings of high-commitment management or a strategic approach to people management. It indicates that HRM refers to the management of people.

Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright (2007) discussed the definition of HRM under introduction in their book titled *Human Resource Management*. Their definition of HRM is that HRM refers to the policies, practices, and systems that influence employees' behavior, attitudes, and performance. Thus, HRM has policies, practices, and systems they have an influence on behavior, attitudes, and performance of employees. Behavior, attitudes, and performance of employees seem to be the ends in their definition and policies, practices, and systems are means to get the ends or ways. In their 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the book the same definition remains implying that it is a confirmed definition by the same authors.



Byars and Rue (2008) in their textbook titled *Human Resource Management* define HRM as activities designed to provide for and coordinate the human resources of an organization. According to the both authors human resources of an organization represent one of its largest investments, and HRM includes activities done for the purposes of providing HR and coordinating HR.

DeNisi and Griffin (2008) in their textbook with the title *Human Resource Management* present a definition of HRM. According to the both authors, HRM refers to the comprehensive set of managerial activities and tasks concerned with developing and maintaining a qualified workforce-human resources-in ways that contribute to organizational effectiveness. It presents that there is a comprehensive set of activities which lead to develop and maintain a qualified workforce in the way that contributes to organizational effectiveness.

Opatha (2009), the author of this paper gives a definition of HRM: "HRM is the efficient and effective utilization of human resources to achieve goals of an organization." In his analysis of the definition given in the textbook titled *Human Resource Management: Personnel*, it is mentioned that an organization is an economic and social entity composed of a group of people who interact with each other for the purpose of achieving a common goal; goals are desired targets to be achieved in future (increasing net assets of owners, enhancing employee development and satisfaction, maximizing customer satisfaction, achieving cooperate growth etc.); human resources are employees who work for the considered organization; efficient utilization is optimum use of employees by eradicating (or minimizing) wastage; and effective utilization is use of HR for organizational effectiveness, which is the extent to which goals of the organization have been realized. Though this definition is simple, it is a general definition that can be used for managing people at work. It has been confirmed and re-confirmed by subsequent writings in different studies of the author.

Cascio (2010) wrote a textbook titled *Managing Human Resources* and he does not give a particular definition of HRM though his writing is comprehensive. He gives a definition with regard to HRM system in the Glossary: an overall approach to management, comprising staffing, retention, development, adjustment, and managing change. This definition focuses on HRM activities or areas. His summary of the first Chapter indicates that HRM is the management of people.

Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy (2010) in their textbook titled *Managing Human Resources* does not present a definition of HRM though they give a definition of HR (this has been given in the first section). One of their previous editions of the same (4<sup>th</sup>, 2006) too does not present a definition of HRM. However, it indicates that HRM is managing HR.

Ivancevich (2010) in the book titled *Human Resource Management* defines HRM as the effective management of people at work. Further he defines that HRM is the function performed in organizations that facilitates the most effective use of people (employees) to achieve organizational and individual goals. According to this definition, HRM is a function

that is performed in the organization and it facilitates the most effective use of employees. The use of employees is done in order to achieve organizational goals as well as individual goals.

Mathis and Jackson (2011) in their textbook titled *Human Resource Management* presents a definition of HRM that is: HRM is designing management systems to ensure that human talent is used effectively and efficiently to accomplish organizational goals. In the definition management systems mean HRM systems with regard to HR functions. This definition stresses that human talent is to be used in the way that is effective and in the way that is efficient. Also, here the word *human talent* means valuable employees.

Torrington, Hall, Taylor, and Atkinson (2011) are British academics who wrote a comprehensive textbook on HRM with the title *Human Resource Management*. They summarize that HRM is fundamental to all management activity and it is possible to identify two distinct definitions of the term 'human resource management', i.e., the first describes a body of management activities, and second signifies a particular approach to carrying out those activities. Though there is no direct mentioning about what management activities include exactly. However, it is possible to mention here that they should be general HRM functions or activities.

Schwind, Das, Wagar, Fassina, and Bulmash (2013), who are Canadian authors, present a distinct definition of HRM in their book titled *Canadian Human Resource Management*. The definition is: the leadership and management of people within an organization using systems, methods, processes, and procedures that enable employees to achieve their own goals that in turn enhance the employee's positive contribution to the organization and its goals. Further they stress that HRM is not an end in itself; it is a means of helping the organization to archive its primary organizational objectives. According to them, ignoring employee goals in the system may result in declining worker performance and their leaving the organization. Here employee goals have been defined by them as goals to assist employees to achieve personal goals that will enhance their contribution to the organization.

Armstrong and Taylor (2014) being British authors wrote a very comprehensive textbook title of which is *Amstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management* and according to its 13<sup>th</sup> edition, HRM is concerned with all aspects of how people are employed and managed in organizations; and it can be defined as a strategic, integrated, and coherent approach to the employment, development and well-being of the people working in organizations. Thus, HRM includes all aspects of employing people and managing them in organizations.

Stewart and Brown (2014) wrote a special textbook that carries the title as *Human Resource Management: Linking Strategy to Practice*. Their first edition of the book was published in 2009. They give a definition of HRM, i.e., the field of study and practice that focuses on people in organizations. According to them, HRM is a field of study as well as a practice. HRM focuses on people who are in the organizations.

Bohlander and Snell (2017) in their textbook titled *Principles of Human Resource Management* define HRM as the process of managing human talent to achieve an organization's objectives. They further write that successful organizations are particularly adept at bringing together different kinds of people to achieve a common purpose and this is the essence of HRM. Thus, HRM brings together different employees to achieve a common purpose which is the purpose of the organization being considered.

Aswathappa (2017), who is an Indian academic, defines that simply HRM refers to the application of management principles to management of people in an organization. Further, in the summary of the first Chapter of his book titled *Human Resource Management*, HRM is a management function that helps managers plan, recruit, select, train, develop, remunerate and maintain members for an organization. Here members mean employees of a particular organization.

Dessler (2017) in his fifteenth edition of the textbook titled *Human Resource Management* gave a definition of HRM. The definition is: the process of acquiring, training, appraising, and compensating employees, and of attending to their labor relations, health and safety, and fairness concern. Further HRM has people or personnel aspects of management. Indian version of his book with Varkkey (2018) presents the same definition of HRM.

A careful examination of the definitions mentioned above reveals that most of the definitions have similarity. Indeed, there are no considerable differences in the meanings of the definitions given by many authors. Basically, HRM is the application of certain activities or functions for managing employees in an organization to achieve its goals.

Refer to Exhibit 2. It presents characteristics derived from the definitions studied. In this context a characteristic refers to a feature that is belonging typically to the definition.

#### **Exhibit 2. Characteristics derived from the Definitions**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Author/s</b>	<b>Characteristic/s</b>
1	French	Accommodating to human resources (a human imperative in a modern organization exists and it is to enhance the quality of organizational life in a psychological and sociological sense).
2	Glueck	HRM exists in all enterprises and it involves effective utilization of employees to achieve the enterprise's objectives and the employees' satisfaction and development.
3	Chruden and Sherman	The utilization of human resources (from the title of the textbook).
4	Stone and Meltz	The services or assistance given to the company in using its human resources to fulfil its goals.

5	Beach	The management of people at work (from the title of the textbook).
6	Schuler and Youngblood	(1) the importance of a company's work force is recognized; (2) several functions and activities are utilized; (3) the functions and activities are to be used in the way that is both effective and legal for the benefit of the employee, the organization, and society.
7	Heneman III, Schwab, Fossum, and Dyer	A set of functions or activities exist in an organization and they are aimed at influencing the effectiveness of employees of the organization.
8	Graham and Bennett	It emphasizes the psychological basis of HRM.
9	Bernardin and Russell	Making decisions with regard to the organization's workforce in order to experience the meeting of specific organizational business needs.
10	Bratton and Gold	HRM is strategically oriented.
11	Singh, Chhabra, and Taneja	An established part of management which is concerned with the human resources of an organization.
12	Mamoria	It is concerned with employees, both as individuals and groups.
13	Werther and Davis	A discipline that studies how employees are obtained, developed, utilized, evaluated, maintained, and retained by the employers.
14	Harris	HRM has programs, policies, and practices which are used to manage the workforce of an organization.
15	Mondy, Noe, and Premeaux	HRM is a dynamic discipline.
16	Pattanayak	It implies that HRM encompasses those activities designed to provide, motivate and coordinate the human resources of an organization.
17	Kleiman	HRM is a managerial tool for competitive advantage. It exists an employment cycle that has three phases such as preselection, selection, and postselection.
18	Fisher, Schoenfeldt, and Shaw	Management decisions and practices influencing employees of the organization.
19	Beardwell and Claydon	People management activities and strategic approach.
20	Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright	Policies, practices, and systems (means) influencing on behavior, attitudes, and performance of employees (the ends).
21	Byars and Rue	Activities done for the purposes of providing HR and coordinating HR.

22	DeNisi and Griffin	A comprehensive set of activities which lead to develop and maintain a qualified workforce in ways that contribute to organizational effectiveness.
23	Opatha	Human resources are unique and their efficient and effective utilization to achieve goals of an organization.
24	Cascio	An overall approach to management, comprising staffing, retention, development, adjustment, and managing change.
25	Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy	Managing HR.
26	Ivancevich	It facilitates the most effective use of employees in order to achieve organizational goals as well as individual goals.
27	Mathis and Jackson	Designing management systems to ensure that human talent is used effectively and efficiently to accomplish organizational goals.
28	Torrington, Hall, Taylor, and Atkinson	HRM is fundamental to all management activity; a body of management activities; and a particular approach to carrying out those activities.
29	Schwind, Das, Wagar, Fassina, and Bulmash	Using systems, methods, processes, and procedures that enable employees to achieve their own goals that in turn enhance the employee's positive contribution to the organization and its goals.
30	Armstrong and Taylor	All aspects of employing people and managing them in organizations.
31	Stewart and Brown	The field of study and practice that focuses on people in organizations.
32	Bohlander and Snell	Bringing together different employees to achieve a common purpose.
33	Aswathappa	A management function helping managers plan, recruit, select, train, develop, remunerate and maintain members for an organization.
34	Dessler	The process of acquiring, training, appraising, and compensating employees, and of attending to their labor relations, health and safety, and fairness concern.

It is now possible to give a list of characteristics or features of HRM based on the characteristics mentioned in Exhibit 2. It should be noted that duplications of the same characteristics were avoided, and some characteristics were modified so as to make them more understandable or lucid. Also, the characteristics in the list were not given in the order mentioned in Exhibit 2.

1. HRM is a field of study. Hence it is an academic discipline.
2. HRM is a practice. It is an accepted way of application.
3. It occurs within an organization.
4. It focuses on managing people.
5. It deals with managing people at work or employees who make up an organization.
6. It includes a set of functions and activities (subfunctions under each function) to be performed in order to utilize human resources for the purpose of accomplishing goals or primary objectives of an organization.
7. It has functions which are to be performed to obtain, develop, reward, maintain, and retain unique employees.
8. It deals with efficient and effective utilization of human resources to ensure that organizational goals are achieved.
9. It is concerned with human relationships within an organization.
10. It has policies, procedures, practices and systems influencing employees.
11. It was traditionally termed as Personnel or Personnel Management.
12. It is an established management function or a field of Management or Business Administration.
13. It is the human side of Business Administration as it deals with all aspects of employees including psychological and social aspects too.
14. It brings together different employees to achieve a common purpose.
15. It generally attempts to serve for the organization where it is practiced, employees working for it, and society at large.
16. It is a dynamic discipline as it has to be adjusted owing to changes.
17. It is strategically oriented. It is a managerial driver of competitive advantage.
18. It exists in all organizations.
19. It affects attitudes, behaviours and performance of employees through human resources policies, practices, and systems.
20. It is fundamental to all management functions.

### **Revisiting the Definition of HRM by Opatha**

I presented a definition of Personnel Management in 1995 in the first Sinhala medium comprehensive textbook titled SEWAMANDALA KALAMANAKARANAYA (Personnel Management), and later the same was published in the first Sri Lankan English medium comprehensive textbook of HRM written by me in 2009 with the title *Human Resource Management: Personnel*. As given in the two sources the definition is: *Human Resource Management is the efficient and effective utilization of human resources to achieve goals of an organization*. By taking each word of the definition, descriptions and explanations were given in the textbook. Accordingly, an organization is an economic and social entity composed of people who interact with each other for the purpose of achieving a common goal. “An organization” can be applicable to any type of organizations which are operating in the world. Goals refer to desired targets to be achieved in future and they may include increasing net assets of owners, enhancing employee development and satisfaction, maximizing customer satisfaction, achieving cooperative growth, increasing market share, fulfilling social

responsibility, achieving financial stability, and increasing quality of the product. It was mentioned in the analysis of the definition (Opatha, 2009) that an organization may establish one or several or all of these goals or other ones not mentioned here. The word 'goals' can include any goal which is established by an organization. Hence all the possible goals are covered in the word 'goals' of the definition. They may be even sustainability, greening, relationship and satisfaction of suppliers, compliance with Government and related agencies' laws and regulations.

The term "Human Resources (HR)" of the definition refers to employees who work for the organization being concerned. Also, it was clearly mentioned that it is not an exaggeration that HR is the most significant resource compared with other resources such as financial, physical resources etc. Further it was explained that the overwhelming significance of HR is due to its unique characteristics which are (1) it is animate, active and living; (2) it has the ability to think, feel and react; (3) its value appreciates with the passage of time (because of experience, training etc.); (4) it has the ability to influence on determining its cost (pay); (5) it has the ability to organize (as unions, teams etc.); (6) its behaviour is complex and may be unpredictable; (7) it has the ability of creativity and innovation, which cannot be found in any other resources; and (8) it makes decisions in respect of all other resources. Today I argue that these unique characteristics are still accurate when employees in an organization are viewed generally.

An important point to mention here is that the above uniqueness is in general sense indeed. In special sense, all employees in an organization may not contribute to achieve its goals. It has been observed that some employees discouraged, or even sabotaged achieving organizational goals by disengaging in the job, disturbing productive employees to work, and engaging in counter-productive behaviours such as stealing, harassing co-employees, and making customers dissatisfied purposefully. It is true that employees are the people who establish organizational objectives, formulate plans and implement them. Also, it is true that those who are bad or corrupted employees do actions which are harmful to other employees and the organization. They are many examples in real business world that show collapses or declines of organizations owing to unethical, indisciplinary, and illegal actions of one or two or several employees. Thus, it is not accurate to write that all employees are productive and make the organization successful and more successful. As a matter of fact, some employees are more productive than others. Job performances of different employees are different. Indeed, an organization or its department may have an employee who is very outstanding in terms of productivity and hence is unparalleled. I argue that the term "Human Resources" includes employees who are right or appropriate in terms of attitudes, their competencies, their behaviours, and their final results produced.

Efficient utilization of HR, as mentioned in the original definition analysis, refers to optimum use of employees by eradicating (or minimizing) wastage. I understand still this meaning is valid. It is essential to utilize employees of the organization so that their knowledge and skills, efforts, time etc. do not get wasted.

Effective utilization of HR, as mentioned in the original definition analysis (Opatha, 2009), means use of HR for organizational effectiveness, which is the extent to which goals of the organization have been realized. Today too I confirm and emphasize that every employee of the organization is to be utilized in order to achieve a certain organizational goal or relevant organizational goals.

Thus, my current revisit to the definition given by me in the past enables me to assert that it can be considered as a definition of HRM which is valid at the present time too, and even in the future. It is simple, clear, and useful for studies.

### **An Inclusive Definition of HRM**

In this basic research paper, I intended to formulate and introduce an inclusive definition of HRM. One may question about the need of presenting such an inclusive definition in the context that my definition given in 2009 is still valid and applicable. Yes, I reiterate so. However, there is a possibility of criticizing the definition in the way that it does not incorporate contemporary or recent developments such as stakeholder perspective and sustainable perspective. Further, one might criticize that the definition is not comprehensive as it does not include strategic perspective which is an established perspective in the modern literature of HRM.

Textbook writers (I did not use research articles as this research paper is predominantly based on established and recognized textbooks available to me) namely Kleiman (2000, the first edition), Mello (2002), Anthony, Kacmar, and Perrew (2006), Stewart and Brown (2009, their first edition) discussed strategic perspective of HRM. The strategic perspective mainly focuses on (1) utilizing human resources and HRM as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Kleiman, 2000; Mello, 2002); (2) HRM is integrated with the strategy and strategic needs of the organization such as vision, mission, and goals (Anthony et al, 2006); (3) HRM policies and functions cohere within themselves and with other functional fields of the organization (Mello, 2002; Opatha, 2009); and (4) HRM strategies are aligned with competitive business strategies (Stewart and Brown, 2009). I argue that the strategic perspective results in certain HRM outcomes such as HRM-based competitive advantage, integration, alignment, and coherence.

Jackson and Schuler (2003) present a perspective or an approach called strategic partnerships which mean satisfying multiple stakeholders. According to them, stakeholders are individuals or groups that have interests, rights, or ownership in an organization and its activities. Indeed, HRM is primarily for benefit of the employees of the organization (a key category of stakeholders) and for the benefit of the organization's owners (a key category of stakeholders). However, HRM is supposed to serve or contribute to meet expectations of customers, suppliers, and other organizations such as unions and government agencies.

A recent developed perspective to HRM is the sustainable perspective. Though there are very few research articles about Sustainable HRM (Kramar, 2013) and almost no specialized or exclusive textbooks on Sustainable HRM locally and globally are available (at the time of



writing this paper) except the one titled Sustainable HRM written by me. Humbly I record here that it was possible for me to write a textbook by using sustainability perspective in 2019. One major dimension of sustainable HRM is Green HRM which is concerned with planet-related matters such as green roles of employee, green oriented HRM functions, green attitude, green behaviour, green performance of job etc (Opatha, 2013; Opatha and Arulrajah, 2014; Opatha, 2019<sup>3</sup>). Sustainable perspective focuses on economic, social, and environmental performance of the organization. Sustainable future of an organization needs to be economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially equitable. An imperative in sustainable perspective is that HRM transforms directly normal employees and then indirectly other parties such as owners and suppliers into green ones so that they give their maximum possible contributions to the nature or the natural environmental sustainability. I argue that the sustainable perspective results in certain HRM outcomes such as greening and ethicality.

HRM functions such as job design, job analysis, human resource planning, recruitment, selection, hiring, induction, training & development, performance evaluation, career management, pay management, incentives management, welfare management, employee movements, health and safety, discipline management, grievance management, and labour relations are indispensable for achieving HRM outcomes, and then organizational outcomes. Strategic, stakeholder, and sustainable perspectives are to be incorporated or embedded through the HRM functions. By considering what has been mentioned above, it is possible to give an inclusive definition of HRM and it is as follows:

***Basically, HRM is the adoption of certain functions and activities for utilizing employees efficiently and effectively in an organization to achieve its goals which include satisfying the key stakeholders to the possible extent and contributing positively to the natural environment. It involves formulation, implementation, and on-going maintenance of strategies, policies, procedures, rules, practices and systems of managing employees strategically, participatorily, and sustainably.***

It is not possible to formulate a definition that includes all the essential features which can be found in the existing body of knowledge of HRM. However, I believe that the above definition is relatively an inclusive one, at least in the sense that it covers strategic perspective, partnership perspective, and sustainable perspective to managing employees.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Being innovative in research methodology I decided to use this research paper predominantly based on the writings made by authors of standard and recognized textbooks which were available to me and were written in English medium. There were three research objectives to be achieved. The first one was: "To present definitions of HRM given by various appropriately qualified authors and make a brief descriptive analysis about the definitions". 25 definitions directly given by the relevant authors of 25 textbooks which were readily and physically available to me were presented. Implied definitions from the writings made by the relevant authors of 9 textbooks were also presented. It was found that most of the definitions studied possess some similarity. Another finding is that there are no considerable contradictory

differences existing in the meanings of all the definitions. These findings give a conclusion that the nature of the subject HRM is not controversial but is of a generally accepted position. Further, the descriptive analysis of the content of the definitions yielded 20 characteristics or features of HRM.

The second research objective of this paper was: “To revisit and review the definition of HRM developed by me in 2009”. My revisit to the definition given by me in the past resulted in an assertion that the definition is valid at the present time, and even in the future. Also, it was found that it is simple, clear, and useful for studies.

The third research objective was: “To introduce a definition of HRM which is inclusive”. In view of a possibility of criticizing the definition of HRM in the way that it does not incorporate gradual developments such as strategic perspective, stakeholder perspective, and sustainable perspective, and therefore it is not comprehensive, an inclusive definition of HRM was formulated and suggested. The formulated definition in this theoretical research paper becomes inclusive relatively as it considers strategic perspective, partnership perspective, and most importantly sustainable perspective. The definitions presented in a single paper, the descriptive analysis of the definitions and resultant 20 characteristics of HRM, and the inclusive definition of HRM hopefully lead significantly to the enhancement of the existing body of knowledge of HRM, locally and globally as well.

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