**Chapter 1**

**The Nature of Human Resource Management**

**Discussion Questions**

1. *Identify five examples of human resources in your college or university.*

Students’ answers will vary. Students will identify a variety of activities. Their examples might include recruiting or hiring new faculty members, training classes offered to the employees of the college or university, employee health or wellness fairs, job security (i.e., tenure), faculty or staff pay issues, grievance and discipline issues that have been publicized, and benefits offered to employees such as medical or dental insurance.

1. *Summarize the evolution of the human resource function in organizations.*

The Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century sparked a greater interest in business growth and expansion that soon resulted in greater awareness of the various functions of management that were necessary for long-term organizational success. Scientific management (which was introduced in the early 1900s) brought about the study of structuring jobs to maximize efficiency and productivity. In the early twentieth century, large organizations continued to grow even more. Therefore, they needed to hire more workers. They created specialized units (that is, employment departments) to hire and manage their workforce.

Individual differences among people were recognized by Darwin, Binet, and Simon, leading to the first intelligence tests used during the course of World War I. By 1923, books such as *Personnel Management* by Scott and Clothier were spelling out how to match a person’s skills and aptitudes with the requirements of the job. The human relations era emerged following the Hawthorne studies (between 1927 and 1932). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y, which focused attention on worker satisfaction and productivity, were popularized.

Personnel management was well established as an administrative function by the 1930s and 1940s. World War II introduced the psychological testing of employees. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made human resource management more complex. In the 1970s, human resources were becoming increasingly recognized as an important and strategic part of the organization. People (or human resources) are now seen as an organization’s most valuable resource. Technological advancements and changing social and business environments are causing the evolution of the human resource management function.

1. *Summarize the basic ideas underlying the human resource management system concept.*

Human resource activities are not self-contained, but instead they are highly interrelated and impact one another. Human resource managers should consider the interrelatedness of human resource activities when designing or redesigning particular human resource processes. Further, human resource management is part of a larger organizational system where functional activities affect each other. The organization can even be conceptualized as part of a larger global system, impacted by societal similarities and differences across country borders.

1. *What are the goals of human resource management?*

The four goals of human resource management are to facilitate organizational competitiveness, to enhance productivity and quality, to comply with legal and social obligations, and to promote individual growth and development.

1. *Who is responsible for human resource management?*

In contemporary organizations, human resource management responsibilities are shared. Human resource managers and staff within the human resource department may carry out the majority of human resource activities or may serve as human resource advisers to others within the organization. Operations managers often carry out many human resource activities such as hiring, salary determination, training needs assessment, and performance management. Self-managed teams may even be given responsibility for the human resource activities associated with their own work teams. Organizational executives, especially human resource executives, are responsible for the strategic aspects of human resource management.

1. *Do you think human resource management would have become more important even if laws such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act had never been passed? Why, or why not?*

Students’ answers will vary. However, it is likely that human resource management would still have risen in importance due to an increasing amount of research stemming from the human relations movement (that is, the Maslow, McGregor, and Hawthorne studies). It is well recognized that employee attitudes and behaviors have a large effect on individual, group, and organizational productivity. Therefore, it is possible that human resource management would still have gained importance, although the focus would be less on legal aspects and more on behavioral aspects of human resource management.

1. *What are some of the challenges that human resource managers will face as a result of the recent Supreme Court decisions regarding same-sex marriage?*

Students’ answers will vary. Some of them may say that the instance of the Supreme Court ruling of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was unconstitutional. The effect here was to say that same-sex couples, married in states which recognize such marriages, were entitled to all federal benefits that went to other married couples. From the perspective of HRM departments, this has potentially huge implications for insurance and pension benefits to same-sex spouses.

1. *Identify several consequences of an organization’s failure to recognize that its human resource management practices make up an interrelated system.*

Students’ examples will vary. A compensation system may be redesigned, encouraging effective employee behaviors that are at odds with specified job characteristics. A performance appraisal system may be changed without recognizing the need to change the rewards system as well, to encourage appropriate performance among employees. A hiring process may be changed without consulting legal guidelines, which might result in a lawsuit against the organization.

1. *Do you think some human resource management goals are more important than others? Why, or why not? What implications might be drawn if a particular manager felt that certain goals were indeed more important than others?*

According to the text, the four goals of human resource management are as follows: to facilitate organizational competitiveness, to enhance productivity and quality, to comply with legal and social obligations, and to promote individual growth and development. It seems reasonable to assume that students may find some goals more relevant or important than others, according to their individual needs, values, experiences, chosen major, and so on. If managers felt that certain goals were more important than others, it could imply that they were focusing on what they “know” in terms of functional expertise, professional experience, or organizational understanding. For example, a manager with a production background may find that productivity and quality are the most important to organizational competitiveness, while a human resource manager may believe that individual growth and development are the most important. If some goals are emphasized while others are ignored in an organization, this could violate the concept of human resource management as a system within the organization. Emphasizing productivity while ignoring the importance of legal and social obligations could result in legal problems or a poor organizational reputation. Overemphasis on individual growth and development could negatively impact the organizational bottom line by ignoring competitiveness requirements. It is probably best to take a balanced approach to the human resource management goals.

1. *Do you think it might be possible for a large company today to function without a human resources department?*

It is possible, but not likely. As human resource issues become increasingly important and complex, it is necessary to have one or more experts dedicated to the human resource function within the organization. In theory, an organization could outsource its entire human resource department. However, the organizations to which the human resources activity is outsourced would not have the strategic knowledge of its client organization. This would negatively impact the effectiveness of human resource programs and policies in supporting strategic imperatives of the organization.