The Role of Developing Countries Governments in HRD Programs
The Egyptian Experience

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Introduction

Economists and development experts have always maintained that human resources is a significant factor for achieving high economic growth and improve the standard of living in any country. They assert the undisputed fact "the real treasure of any country is its human resources". The important issue now is: what a developing economy can and should do to develop its human resources meaningfully and efficiently? Egypt, as a developing country, has launched an effort for human resources development (HRD), following its privatization program, during the period 1999 – 2009. During this period it accomplished some degree of economic stability, prosperity, and efficiency. Understandably such accomplishments are HRD based; and are essential for the well being of the people.

To evaluate the Egyptian HRD efforts based on observed results should not be considered a judgment about these efforts long term meaningfulness. In fact, the meaningfulness of HRD program in the long run is not at all clear. It would be reasonable to suggest that the country's HRD achievements are deemed meaningful if they serve the purpose of sustaining long-term economic, human, and social progress; and compatible with the country's special social, political, and technical development needs and ambitions. Given this criteria we will be able to find out the quality level of Egypt's HRD.

Useful lessons can be learned from reviewing the Egyptian experience regardless of the long term quality of its results. Generally speaking, such review should help achieve the following:

1. Underline the major challenges and obstacles that a developing country needs to overcome to effectively develop its human resources.
2. Define the role of government administration in overcoming these challenges and obstacles.
3. Identify suitable measures to guarantee good HRD results in light of the developing country's special needs and circumstances.

Purpose of the study and methodology:

What can, and what should a developing country's government administration do to promote meaningful national HRD? How can a developing country's administration achieve national HRD most effectively in the light of the complexity and difficult realities of modern world? The issues raised by the previous questions can be problematic as far as HRD in developing countries is concerned. Never the less, the Egyptian experience provides some leads regarding those issues. Egyptian economic progress and its general development support that argument. Seemingly, the Egyptian HRD programs have made its focus and prime objective the general good of the people. This has been done despite the constraints imposed by international realities, and the difficulties caused by many unfavorable internal social, cultural, economic, and political conditions. These factors restrict the country's options and impose many constraints on its ability to act independently.

Needless to say, contemporary life is full of challenging contradictions and inconsistencies. These can have negative impact on a developing country's surge to advance. These include: limited resources, the complications associated seeking agreement and consensus, and cultural, technical and psychological obstacles hindering people's readiness to be utilized effectively in development. Egypt appears to have done, to some extent, well in dealing with these challenges. What is required? What is the formula for HRD success in a developing country given the Egyptian experience? This study is an attempt to provide an answer.

This study is a qualitative investigation of the government administration HRD role in Egypt. The purpose is to reach some constructive conclusions regarding the proper role in developing countries. As a guide for the study the following questions were established:

1. Considering the time framework on which this investigation concentrates, what did the Egyptian government have to do to discover, define, and meet the country's HRD needs? What did the government in Egypt focused on (in terms of program content and means of accomplishment) to achieve the desired HRD results?
2. What were the main factors behind the Egyptian HRD program during the period of study (1999-2009)?
3. What can be learned from the Egyptian experience regarding the government administration HRD role in developing countries?

In order to answer the previous questions the study reviews the relevant literature; exploratory interviews with government officials from Egyptian Ministries involved intensely in national HRD and examination of relevant government documents were conducted. Interviews and examination of documents are prime methods in qualitative reach (Bryman, 1989).

Interviews were used as a fact gathering tool; and to verify and substantiate finding of literature survey. The procedures observed in conducting the interviews followed those suggested by Oppenheim in his discussion of explanatory interview as a research tool (Oppenheim 1992). Arrangements were made to meet with officials of different ranks at selected government organizations. These organizations were chosen on the basis of their close link to HRD program the meetings were made through contact by phone. To create a comfortable and un-intimidating atmosphere, interviewers were freed of any matter that could make respondents suspicious of the researcher's intentions. At the beginning of each interview, the respondent was assured about the interview's pure academic purpose. Also, interviews were not tape recorded. Government documents were used as a source of data to fulfill the following functions:

1. Provide information on issues that were not addressed during interviews.
2. Check the validity of information derived from interviews.
3. Discover the gaps (if any) between official HRD policy and practice.

Such functions are valuable in qualitative research (Bryman 1989).

Literature Review

A large body of literature exists on HRD at both the macro and micro levels. The subject continues to attract researchers' interest. Focus of research in relation to the subject covered a wide spectrum of issues.

At the macro level, recent research included the presentation and review of theories and perspectives on national HRD in developing countries (Wang and Swanson 2008; Garavan, 2007; Lynham and Cunningham, 2006, McLean, 2004). Analyzing cases of national HRD in developing world was also a focus of recent research (Cox et al., 2006; Bardhan 2002).

At the micro level, a number of issues relating to HRD in developing countries were explored in recent literature. Among these issues are employees' satisfaction (Wan, 2007; Chen et al., 2004)'

On a more general frame of reference, researchers studied HRD in relation to many modern working environment concerns. Included are technology (Felker and Sundaram, 2007; Sun, 2002) culture (McGuire et al., 2002) and small organizations (Nolan, 2002). Of the more important findings of research at the micro level are the following:

*Investing in HRD would trigger high level organizational and individual performance (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2002)
*HRD should be viewed and used as a business strategy tool (Gilley et al., 2002).
*A Positive correlation exists between HRD and employees' satisfaction (Guest, 2002).
*Adequate HRD practices contribute to a high level of organizational commitment among employees (Iles et al., 1990).

Three important conclusions can be drawn from literature view: First, in order to form meaningful HRD program a developing country needs to consider and address a number of challenges that grow out of its unique internal and external environment. Only through careful understanding of these challenges can the developing country tackle the issue of HRD with hope. This is a prime responsibility of government administration. Second conclusion is that the success of a developing country in dealing with the challenges of HRD wisely determined by its understanding of the requirements and limitations imposed by its special needs and circumstances.

Each developing country is in fact a distinct case, requiring a set of HRD activities that take into account the exclusivity of the situation. The recognition and consideration of this fact is another important responsibility of government administration. Third conclusion is that the country's HRD programs should reflect sound government administration ethical and technical principles and practices. This necessitates a government administration role established on the bases of strong sense of responsibility and accountability; and reinforced formally by law, regulation and rigorous control.

Hypotheses of the Study

The previous conclusions drawn from literature review were points of reference on which the induction of five hypotheses regarding the Egyptian government administration HRD role were based. These hypotheses are:

1. In the context of its efforts to design meaningful HRD programs, the Egyptian government considers the challenges that must be addressed to overcome obstacles growing out from its unique internal conditions and realities of modern world which can hinder its HRD.
2. The Egyptian government has focused its HRD activities on areas which it perceives should receive high priority in light of the challenges and obstacles it envisions; the human and social development objectives it seeks; and economic progress level it wants to achieve .
3. Government organizations which are concerned with national HRD initiation and execution coordinate their efforts effectively as a precondition for understanding the country's special HRD needs, and identifying the requirements of effective HRD program.
4. Government organizations in Egypt define, early and carefully, the resources (financial and non-financial) needed to achieve its HRD priorities. This enables it to deliver satisfying results, and skillfully a) utilize culture diversity to support its programs; b) learn useful lessons from models of modernization and industrialization; and c) identify and benefit from opportunities associated with market globalization trends.
5. In order to deliver sensible HRD results the Egyptian government administration demonstrates strong sense of responsibility and accountability both ethically and technically.

Interviews (Analysis and discussions):

To examine the validity of the above hypotheses, four interviews with high Egyptian officials were conducted. The officials come from the Prime Minister office, the Ministry of Labor Force, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Related government publications and reports were reviewed and analyzed to verify and supplement the interviews. Also the researcher engaged in discussions with some academics at Cairo University who are consultants on relevant government programs.

Two interviews were conducted with two officials in the Prime minister office. One is a leading authority within the department of economic planning. The other is also a leading authority within the department of Human resources. The responses of these officials to the research questions can be summarized in the following points:

- In planning and designing HRD programs, the government based its decisions on the intensive work undertaken by a planning committee. This committee is made up of representatives from different ministries; and established for the purpose of identifying relevant issues, and introducing strategies to meet the challenges imposed by it.
- A number of measures have been used by the government to understand and conceptualize HRD needs; then set policy options. Only after that, HRD policy formulation takes place. Among these measures a) intensive relevant studies by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. b) relevant research by academics from different universities c) through analysis of relevant reports released by independent national and international identities such as scholars , research centers, and world bank d) Bench-marking countries that have undertaken actions and concentrated efforts in relation to HRD including China, Brazil, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan. The objective is to learn from the mistakes and strengths of the experiences of others.
- The government decides to depend, in the short run, more heavily on international markets to sell what it produces. This done by specializing in areas of production the country can perform best in light of existing capabilities and resources.

The third interview was conducted with another high government official from the Ministry of the Work Force. We used the same questions and the response of the official indicated the following:

- The government HRD policy emphasizes a step by step approach; prioritizing what is more important for the well being of the people. This is done through developing basic skills; that is, skills of cheap labor.
- The government strong awareness of world and domestic realities and affairs is present during development and execution stages of HRD programs; and that enables the government to understand what is required.
- One of the most perpetual factors that influence the government HRD decisions is the adaptation of technology and management policies which are compatible with modern trends, approaches, and advancements.
- Government HRD programs have always been flexible.
- The government has aligned itself with the private sector; taking into consideration the private sector's interests, and supporting its HRD programs.
- The government undertook complex of projects such as universities, roads, bridges etc. Such projects are changing how people think; which is an important outcome as far as HRD programs' design and execution are concerned.
- HRD programs, initiated or supported by the government, started to emphasize the development of human skills, while continuing to emphasize the development of technical skills.

The last interview was with an official from the Ministry of Human Resources Development. His response to the research question:

- The Ministry focuses on offering training that targeted low skills individuals who have no chance to higher level of education. These training programs provided participants with skills required by industry. It advertises extensively for its training schemes. Its training is cutting across all industries.
- The government supports HRD by offering more and greater capacity for training, apprenticeship schemes, and financial support to compensate the private sector for some of the cost of hiring unskilled workers and providing training.

Review and analysis of the information obtained from interviews support, to a great extent the hypotheses of the study:

+ It was clear from the interviews, review of government publications and reports that the Egyptian was involved in HRD during the period of study. This involvement has been characterized by intensive investigation to define areas of focus that should receive priority. These areas must have direct positive impact on the government strategic objective of improving human development and economic progress. For that purpose, the government organizations concerned with HRD realized the importance of coordinating their activities. Coordination would facilitate the accurate realization of the country's HRD special needs, and what is required to meet these needs. The strong emphasis on inter government coordination with regard of HRD activities is reflected in many government HRD formal arrangements. Coordination between government agencies involved in HRD has been proved valuable in the Egyptian scene. Because of it, the prime challenges facing the government HRD efforts have become better recognized, and thoroughly addressed. This has enhanced government administration ability to effectively assume the role of an active HRD agent.

+ Government administration realized the significance of the availability of adequate financial resources. Evidence to that is the allocation of extra funds by the Ministry of Finance. Also the efficient use of the available resources by the readiness of the Ministry of Human Resources Development to stop funding training programs that do not prove to be efficient in delivering meaningful outcomes.

+ The government administration has understood the value of bench- marking that is, the modernization efforts and industrialization models of countries with admirable experiences. Also, the government HRD practices have benefited from the fact that the attractive opportunities, which are worth considering for national HRD programs, do emerge from trends of market globalization. The Egyptian government administration has applied bench-marking correctly. Bench-marking for HRD does not mean following the footsteps of those considered examples of success with relation to the subject indiscriminately. Rather, it means comprehending the message of those examples as they offer the best available philosophy, ideas, and practices for HRD. Based on its correct understanding and comprehension of the lessons learned, Egypt has been able to design its own HRD project that is suitable to its needs and special circumstances.

+ Most importantly, the Egyptian government through its departments, that carry the national HRD responsibilities, invested heavily in the construction of more industrial training institutes. It also encourages (some times, force) employers to continuously train their workers. It also provided soft loans to encourage graduates to pursue their career and establish their own small businesses. In addition it forged closer relationship with industrial players to close the gap between the government and the industries.

The above conclusions give a good impression about the Egyptian national HDR program. However, a degree of skepticism, regarding some technical aspects and the long term quality of this HRD program, exists. The study was not undertaken to present details on such skepticism, or to discuss its legitimacy. Rather, the intention was to provide information, based on the Egyptian experience, about government administration HRD role in developing countries, and the challenges it needs to confront in order to deal with national HRD with hope. These challenges are outlined below:

1 – Upholding Cultural Values and Norms: If a developing country is to succeed in developing skills of its human resources, in a way that serves its real and correct development needs most effectively, its plan must respect the cultural values and norms which people are strongly attached to. This will secure a stronger commitment on the part of those targeted by the development efforts than it would be the case otherwise. It is therefore essential that government administration be careful when reviewing its development options, not to ignore the fact that the attitude and reaction of people toward its HRD plan. Plans and actions have to be shaped by what is culturally accepted and rejected. And this implies a necessity to concentrate on pursuing HRD programs which result in the development of corporate cultures that coincide with people norms and values. Corporate values defined as "the normal, social, and behavioral norms of an organization based on the beliefs, attitudes, and priorities of its members". Learning through education and training is central for the development of strong corporate culture. Strong corporate culture will likely enhance the efforts of effective national human resources development. Hence, this must be considered a first and important step in a national HRD program.

2 – Realization that States are not Equal in their Needs and Interests*:* The best national HRD plan is one that is designed to best serve the special needs and interests of the country and its sectors, National HRD planning should be objective, providing means to eventually set the stage for achievement of priorities, goals, and interests that truly make a difference as far as the fate of the country and the well being of its people are concerned. Planning is not a chance for planners only to show professional and skilful they are; but also how ethical, realistic and precise their judgment and choices can be.

3 –Allocating Sufficient Financial Resources and Using it Wisely: Financial resources can only be available by a limited amount. But the amount must be adequate to achieve the goals of HRD. Also it is essential not to misuse the financial resources. In short, the failure to continue the HRD course of action after starting it must not be allowed. It is very important to be able to continue financing HRD at all times and regardless of volatile swings in financial budget levels.

4 – Developing Comprehensive HR Strategy*:* The best national HRD is one that is part of a comprehensive national HR strategy. Good national HR strategies begin with identifying national work needs and work requirements. Recruitment and selection of those who have the greatest potential for development in light of job needs and requirements can be initialized. To be effective, recruitment and selection should be based on projections of worker's flow into, out of, and within work organizations. Information about past flows and product of education system is the starting point to make well founded projection of future workforce requirements. Strategic planning is the best means through which selection can be made. Following recruitment and selection, the process of HRD begins. Mentoring and coaching should be fundamental elements of the developing programs. Mentoring and coaching are essential to guide workers and provide them with reference points on their progress. Also effective HR strategy provides for HRD programs that invest in learning through training. The identification of training needs and policy; and the details relating to training content, scope, and overall thrust should be entirely in the hands of those who will supervise its beneficiaries. Workers should be engaged to discuss their training needs, both for current job and for planned career moves. Longer range training to meet career goals and strategic planning objectives should be part of HRD. Moreover, career broadening should be a prime focus in HRD programs in order to secure flexibility to quickly adapt to changes in the work environment. This would ensure of a large cadre of mobile employees who are willing and able to move to new demanding work assignments.

In addition, effective HR strategy provides for effective HRD through competition among workers for career progression; effective performance review process; means for knowledge transfer; and effective leadership.

5 – Utilizing HR Assessment Technology to Plan HRD: HR assessment technologies have developed to a very advanced stage now days. It can be beneficial, therefore, to initiate a particular HRD Program that serves the national HRD strategy through Application of suitable HR assessment technology systems such as those developed by Thomas International. Such systems are designed to assets in the selection, appraisal, and development and coaching of workers. These systems are best used in conjunction with a process whereby workers' experience, education, qualifications, competence and trainability can be assessed. Correct application of such technology should Produce objective results relating to precise HR development and training needs which are essential in light of specific country requirements and ambitions.

6 – Promoting Positive Work Force Attitudes Toward HDR: An attitude is a psychological stand of a person in relation to an issue. National HRD programs need to be designed with recognition that members of work force attitudes toward HRD constitute an essential factor for HRD success. Positive attitudes among members of the work force constitute a condition for absorbing the programs requirements; and that is important for smooth program execution. It is central that work force members realize their personal needs for change and improvement, and be conceived of the direct and clear link between these needs and the designed HRD programs. Certainly this can be an incentive for active participation on the part of those who are supposed to benefit from HRD programs.

7 – Differentiating between Change and transformation: The concept of change is not synonymous with the concept of transformation. National HRD programs are not always based on this understanding. Hence they do not produce the right results. An HRD program may be triggered by efforts to improve processes. In that case the focus of the HRD program would be on changing the skills and knowledge while maintain the culture. On the other hand, HRD could be triggered by a strategy designed to tr5ansform the image of skills' identity of the entire work force. In this case the focus would be more on changing the workers' minds and culture than their technical capabilities. Obviously, HRD requirements for the two ends are different. HRD programs which focus on transformation are meant to create a new characteristics and reputation. And that change is more fundamental and enduring for a developing country nowadays than changing work style and improving workers' skills.

8 – Accepting the Challenges of Modern Technological Changes and Developments*:* Technological advances are changing the way people doing things. Current requirements are for more professional and technical tasks and fewer activities. Therefore, national HRD programs need to be built on realization that flexibility, skills, and professionalism are essential requirements to face up to modern work challenges. Since the nature of most aspects of nowadays work requires a high level of skill and versatility, HRD programs in developing countries should be committed to invest heavily in training and career development. To do that properly four key HR issues need to given adequate attention:
   a) utilizing knowledge and experience accumulated locally
   b) intensifying training of the work force in up-to-date skills necessary for planned assignments
   c) developing long-term career potential
   d) creating a positive work environment which motivates and promotes productivity.

9 – Creating a Positive Work Environment: The creation of a positive work environment is an essential requirement. This ensures that workers have a strong sense of their value and contribution. It should encourage commitment on workers' part, increase retention, and facilitate mobility and versatility. Government organizations should promote national HRD practices indicative of their emphasis on creating positive work environment. A positive work environment encourages, with caution, risk taking; allows for flexible work schedules; offers different options to employees. Good work environment is also characterized by consistency and tradition. Consistency and tradition build trust and commitment, and spawns openness by enabling employees to focus on work and career development.

10 – Sustaining the Effort*:* National HRD is not a one go effort. It is an ongoing process. Government organizations concerned with HRD should on an ongoing basis, review, discuss, and monitor the identification of changes in work force development and training needs.

At the end of the above discussion, it seems that the ideal formula for HRD success in developing countries, as can be realize from the Egyptian experience, is one that emphasizes the following points:

- Maintaining a political and administrative will to defy the challenges of limited resources, resistance, understanding, shortage of skills, global and local conditions, strategic planning, continuity, and above all, safeguarding the distinct value system people strongly identify with.
- Maintaining an administrative resolve to act competently, skillfully, and ethically according to the real interest of the people.
- Maintaining a government belief that the best, most efficient and most rewarding way for the country to advance and proper, is to rely on its own human resources.

This is the formula which seems to have worked relatively well for Egypt. And it can be suggested that the same formula would yield reasonable results for any developing country, provided that the government administration acts wisely and with string sense of responsibility.

Conclusion

The study examined the Egyptian national HRD experience during the period 1999 – 2009. The purpose was to learn lessons that help conceptualize government administration proper HRD role in developing countries. The paper identified major challenges confronting HRD efforts in a developing country. It provides evidence that the success of a developing country in dealing with these challenges wisely is determined by the ability to understand the requirements and limitations imposed on the country by its special needs and circumstances. This in turn is largely determined by the quality and effectiveness of government administration. Basically, to be an effective agent of sensible HRD programs government administration has to adapt practices that reflect effective inter-government coordination, and sound ethical and technical principles. It is suggested that understanding the challenges outlined in the study would enhance the ability of developing country's government administration to identify ethical and technical principles and practices that are most compatible with its special needs and circumstances.

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