

THE ROLES, GOALS AND ACTIVITIES OF EMPLOYERS AND HR PRACTITIONERS IN NEW ZEALAND FOR ORGANISATIONS TO BE SUCCESSFUL AND COMPETITIVE: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This research considers the role, activities and contribution of HR and managers in six closely related themes that should be addressed to maintain high workplace productivity in a complex business environment in which there are many competing interests. Previously a reward approach was simple with two main streams pay and benefits. In New Zealand HR practitioners have been exposed to global competition creating the need for their roles, goals and activities to be recognised in adding value in organisations to be successful. The outcomes of this research shed light on when is an employer an employer of choice, employee empowerment, employee engagement, rewards based on individual and the whole organisation's performance including the remuneration component that is a reward system classifiable into monetary- and in-kind payments. Recommendations and the conclusion form the last two sections.

INTRODUCTION

In today's global economy Human Resource (HR) practitioners must be prepared to meet the considerable challenges and expectations posed by the continuing evolution of their roles, goals and activities to confirm how their function is creating and adding value to the organisation. An organisation is formed in order to fulfill a specific mission or purpose. This mission or purpose cannot be achieved unless the organisation searches for and selects the best potential employee with the right skills, knowledge and aptitudes (KSAs) for each identified job or position. It is imperative, therefore, that an organisation would design and implement an appropriate reward system in order to attract the best suitable employees in order to achieve its desired goals and objectives (Nel, Werner, Du Plessis, Fazey, Erwee, Pillay, MacKinnon, Millet and Wordsworth, 2012).

In the past, a reward (remuneration) approach was actually very simple: pay and benefits. Labour was a lot less mobile but by taking their skills offshore was really uncommon up to the stage that politicians realised what was happening especially in New Zealand. They began to refer to it as the brain drain from New Zealand. Jobs today are more of a balloon than a box; they shift as economies change and company structures morph. Individual efforts are far more valued and recognised with job security coming more from employability rather than paternal protection (Youngman 2011; Boxall 1995).

Designing and managing a reward system that includes benefits, services, and even empowerment with employee engagement as the next step is rather a complex task. It must not only ensure that the organisation is attractive to potential employees, that is the employer of choice, but it must also ensure that the employees, when placed, are as productive as possible with optimum levels of job satisfaction.

The global economic climate has become increasingly turbulent, businesses seek to keep ahead of the competition by working faster and smarter; by raising productivity levels per employee while, at the same time, increasing innovation and minimising costs (Chavan, 2009). Employment security is no longer

guaranteed, and loyalty from employees is no longer a given. Companies have always faced many challenges, but at no other time have the business challenges become more pronounced, with rapid and volatile change, as in the 21st century (Du Plessis, 2009; Jørgensen, Owen, & Neus, 2009).

At the heart of the business are managers who must deliver required services to increasingly demanding customers, through employees having differing levels of understanding, personalities, backgrounds and abilities (Drucker, 2006). Managers face complex business environments in which there are many competing interests. Working out how to make the best use of the intellectual capital they have at their disposal in the form of existing productivity tools and employee knowledge to drive productivity can be a major challenge for many of them. This research considers the role, activities and contribution of HR that can be used to drive high workplace productivity in such an environment.

Organisations must be able to attract a sufficient number of job candidates who have the abilities and aptitudes needed to add value to the company. In other words they have to become an employer of choice to ensure that they have a pool of suitable applicants who can enter the selection process when they have vacancies. A company's workforce is the lifeblood of organisations and they represent one of its most potent and valuable resources according to Du Plessis & Frederick (2010).

HR practitioners in New Zealand have been exposed to global competition creating the need for their roles, goals and activities to be recognised in adding value in organisations to be successful. The emergence of globalisation, development in technology and telecommunications; the shift towards a knowledge-based workforce; labour legislation and intensifying competition for skilled labour create new competitive realities for organisations. Employers are now looking to the HR practitioner to go beyond the delivery of cost effective administrative services and provide expertise on how to leverage human capital (Du Plessis, 2010). The roles and activities of both the employers and HR practitioners have changed over the years and this study endeavours to shed more light on these roles, activities and goals. In this paper six closely related themes are analysed and discussed: Employee engagement, rewards based individual performance, rewards based on organisational performance, an employer of choice, benefits and services, and employee participation and empowerment.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

From the research problem, taking into account the broader focus on key HR roles, goals and activities, one realises that there is a need to consider to what extent HR practitioners in NZ organisations contribute to the success and competitiveness of organisations in the current situation; but how prepared are they for the future in NZ?

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

Over the past decades several studies were done in NZ among HR practitioners' roles, goals, and activities including their competencies, future capabilities, and challenges. The ultimate objective of this study is to determine the extent to which the current contribution of the roles they play, goals they set and achieve and activities of HR practitioners in New Zealand organisations match their current competencies as well as the previous studies' predictions by HR practitioners. By comparing this study of NZ organisations with previous studies add more value and it informs the reader of how changes have taken place over the past almost twenty years in NZ.

METHODOLOGY

Background

A very comprehensive HRM questionnaire covering 358 items to identify HRM and management trends was jointly compiled in New Zealand and Australia in 1994: (IPMNZ, 1994). The same questionnaire was used with permission for a survey to identify the future competencies and roles of HR in those countries for the year 2000 by the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand. The same questionnaire was modified and refined and used again in 2000 by Burchell (2001) in association with the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ) to determine a future perspective on human resources in 2010 in New Zealand. The final section of the said questionnaire sought to obtain demographic information from respondents. The same questionnaire was used with permission after minor editorial modifications for an identical survey in South

Africa in the last quarter of 2002. The topics covered in the questionnaire included human resource goals, roles and activities, and so forth. Due to the magnitude of the survey only a small section is analysed and reported upon in this paper.

The quantitative methodology adopted was an e-survey; a questionnaire containing structured closed questions. This involved the selection of a sample of people from the HR practitioner population in NZ to ascertain how factors differ, and to make inferences about the population, or in other words generalising from sample to population. Reliability of this study was seen as high (15.4% responded) as previous leading HRM studies conducted in NZ were successful with a response rate of 41 %, 11% and 34 % respectively.

Sample selection

The study focused on HR practitioners in NZ organisations who are registered as members of the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ). HRINZ have 3600+ individual members who are involved in the management and development of HR in private and public sector organisations throughout NZ. The target population was limited to HRINZ members that had registered to participate in HR research requests that HRINZ provided links to; the total number of HRINZ members in this category was 635. A total of 119 members responded but 98 questionnaires were fully completed and usable resulting in a 15.4% response rate.

Data collection

The data was collected via the e-survey, which was a repeat of previous studies and therefore a very important longitudinal study. The invitation to participate went to 635 members of HRINZ.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of questions to adequately explore each of the HR themes researched in this study. All the questions in the questionnaire were closed questions. Only six closely related themes are covered in this paper but due to the size of the study and length limitation for this paper not all the information could be discussed. The Tables reflect the research questions used in this paper, and the rationale for using the six specific themes is discussed later.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

A reward system includes anything that an employee may value and desire and that the employer is able or willing to offer in exchange for employee contributions (Marsden, 2011:16). Du Plessis (as cited in Nel et al, 2012) explains that the reward system is composed of two components: the remuneration component and the non-remuneration component see Figure 1, below.

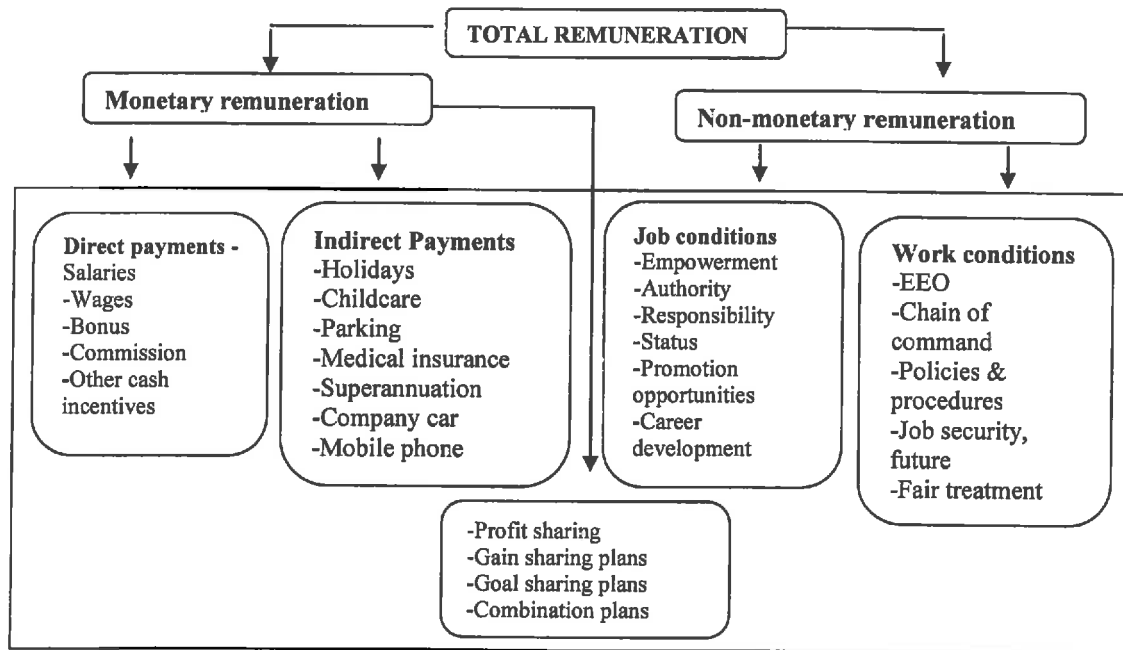
Source: A J du Plessis as cited in Nel et al (2012, p267)

This paper confines itself to when are employers an employer of choice, employee empowerment, employee engagement, rewards based on individual and the whole organisation's performance including the remuneration component that is a reward system classifiable into (a) monetary payments and (b) in-kind payments. Organisations all have different remuneration policies which is what gives the organisations or companies their competitive advantage. This paper also shed light on employee participation and empowerment that could contribute for an organisation to be regarded as an employer of choice. Therefore, remuneration management is a human resources management activity aligned with the organisational strategy that deals with every type of reward individuals receive in exchange for performing organisational tasks. It includes pay and benefits (total remuneration) or just pay (cash remuneration) (Nel et al, 2012).

Monetary claims on benefits and services are wages or salaries paid to an employee in the form of money or a form that is quickly and easily transferable to money at the discretion of the employee. Whereas in-kind claims are claims on goods and services made available and paid for either totally or in some percentage by the employer (Nel et al, 2012). Many organisations, especially in the United States, have shifted from administering salaries to administering total remuneration. There are indeed new remuneration trends. There

are several approaches to remuneration management in the modern age with all its pressures and changes, such as broadbanding, skills-competency-based pay, variable pay approaches and others (Wood et al, 2013).

Figure 1: Total Remuneration Management System



The pay debate that is, the argument regarding the best way of rewarding people for their services, has always been important because relating employee compensation to company profits (and thus to its survival) is unavoidable. This pay debate is far from settled precisely because the relationship of productivity, profitability, and personal gain in firms is critical, intractable, and permanent. The benefits could be linked with empowerment of employees and the services they get from their employers. These services and benefits could be the reason why people regard certain organisations as an employer of choice (Du Plessis & Frederick, 2012).

Stone (2011) supports the fact that the objective of a remuneration package is to influence employee motivation in a positive manner so it leads to improved organisational performance and strategy. If rewards are to be useful in stimulating desired behaviours, they must meet the demands of the employees whose behaviours they are intended to influence. People gain satisfaction from their work, but for various reasons. The degree of job satisfaction that employees enjoy has not only been difficult to identify and define, but also to measure with any degree of certainty.

There has to be a clear link between remuneration and performance (Rudman 2010). In other words, both employer and employee have to be satisfied in the exchange relationship. Marsden (2011) points out that organisations should have a more holistic view of the whole employment relationship and its value. High levels of employee engagement could enhance individual as well as organisational performance. Value-added remuneration is one in which components of the remuneration package (benefits, base pay, incentives and so on) create value for the organisation and its employees (Nel et al, 2012).

Employee benefits may be defined as rewards that are allocated to employees for being members of the organisation and for their positions or job-levels within the organisation (Paine, 2008). These benefits will include some of the following: benefits for death, accident, sickness, retirement or unemployment. Factors influencing the growth of employee benefits are industrialisation, trade unions, wage controls, cost advantages, tax advantages, inflation, and legislation. Perquisites, or perks, are a special category of benefits and are available only to employees with some special status, such as upper-level managers.

As employees acquire more skills, they become more flexible resources, developing a broader understanding of the work processes and of their contribution to the organisation. In terms of employee-related outcomes, skills-based pay results in higher pay rates, increasing satisfaction, higher skills growth, commitment, and capacity for self-management or problem solving. There is greater teamwork among

On the other hand Du Plessis and Frederick (2012) argue that there is pay for competencies which are the sets of skills, knowledge, abilities, behavioural characteristics, and other attributes that predict superior performance. True competencies are those that add value and help predict success – these are the ones that should be rewarded, which involves identifying those competencies that are needed to support an organisation's strategy. Many organisations are discovering that they want to reward more than just the skills or knowledge necessary for a role. Employees are needed who are not only skilled, but also energetic, service-conscious, and problem solvers. The answer lies in the development of less obvious competencies – the ability to work in teams, to accomplish specific goals, to solve problems rapidly, and to understand the customer's perspectives and meet their needs in a way that really adds value. Nel et al (2012) postulate that certification of competence in skills necessary to perform well in the job is required to get a pay rise. The actual selection of competencies depends on the nature of the business, and the nature of the job – competencies could include leadership, flexibility, initiative, and so on.

A reward strategy is a long-term plan designed by an organisation that aims to attract the best talent to it whilst ensuring that its present employees are operating at optimum levels of job satisfaction so that its strategic goals are achieved. Human capital gives a company its sustainable competitive advantage. In Nel et al (2012) Du Plessis has designed a model for organisations to follow should they find it necessary to design and implement a new remuneration system. Such a system has many advantages amongst others a satisfied workforce, be regarded as an employer of choice, employee engagement and so on. The first step requires a thorough analysis of the present remuneration structure, current remuneration policies, pay procedures, and salary problems. Thereafter, the remuneration system designer formulates new salary policies based on the business strategy of the organisation and incorporating the value chain.

Source: A J du Plessis as cited in Nel et al (2012 p275)

The next step is to develop the implementation plan, working closely with remuneration experts, consulting with trade unions, and communicating with all employees. Once the new system is in place, evaluation and monitoring should be carried out on an on-going basis; feedback should be given and if necessary more changes should be made. The nature of the business and its strategic plans will influence the design of the new remuneration system. The new system could be skills- or knowledge-based, competency-based, performance related, variable-based incorporating incentives, and broadbanding could be used as a pay base.

Companies should keep up with the global trends where employees have more skills and are in the position to demand better benefits or even engagement in decision making (Härtel & Fujimoto, 2010). Individual as well as organisational performance could be a good indicator for the necessity of a new system. The research results in this project shed more light on this aspect later in this paper. In many organisations, individuals have not changed as rapidly as the cultures in which they are expected to work. Many employees cling to the belief that they are entitled to ever increasing salaries, punctual and substantial raises, and luxurious benefits packages. But old habits can be broken, old behaviours changed, old expectations replaced with more attractive new ones. The knowledge of new cultures and compensation strategies must not be the sole property of the compensation professional. Line managers must have a clear understanding of pay strategies, and the rewards process must be made clear to both supervisors and employees. To be successful, reward strategies must add value to the organisation, but one must understand how they work, what values and behaviours they support, how they must be administered and communicated, and what their limitations are (Du Plessis, Paine, Botha, 2012).

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Comparison of the profile of the respondents with previous studies in NZ

A study was executed in 2000 by Burchell (2001) in association with HRINZ to determine a future perspective on HR in 2010 in NZ. Using five related themes a study was executed in 2008 by Paine (2008) and a repeat of the 2000 study was executed in 2010 by Nel and Du Plessis (Nel & Du Plessis, 2011). Some of the comparisons are depicted in Table 1, 2 and 3 below. Paine used themes not discussed in this paper therefore her comparisons are not reflected in the Tables below.

The profile of the respondents is important to add value to their opinions. In the current (being 2010) study in NZ, the most frequent title was HR Manager (46.7%), and the next most common title was HR non-management (16.7%). Those two titles accounted for 63.4% of the reported titles. There was a huge and unexpected increase in the consultants' category from 14% in 2000 to 21.7% in 2010. There was a sharp

decline in the line managers with HR functions who responded in 2000 from 10 % to only 1.7% in 2010. It can be deduced that more organisations make use of consultants than allowing their line managers to execute HR functions and activities, see Table 1, below.

Figure 2: A model for designing and implementing a new remuneration system

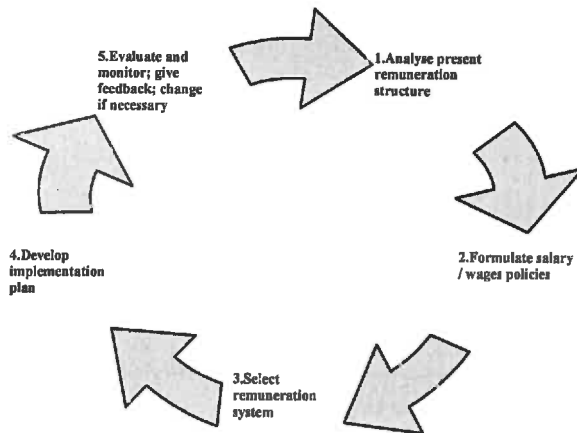


Table 1: Profile of respondents by profession in New Zealand in 2000 and 2010

Profession	NZ profile 2000	NZ profile 2010
HR (officer to director)	72.0%	63.4%
Business (line managers to CEO)	10.0%	1.7%
Consultants	14.0%	21.7%
Academic (all tertiary institutions)	4.0%	8.2%
Other	0%	5%
TOTAL	100%	100%

In New Zealand most organisations (83%) have fewer than 10 employees. In this study, the participants are from different sized organisations (see Table 2 below); the following groupings were compiled for analysis: small organisations with fewer than 100 employees (0-99); medium 100 to 499 employees, large is 500 or more employees. It should be noted that New Zealand is predominantly a country of small businesses, with 93.3% of enterprises employing 19 or fewer people ("SMEs in NZ: Structure and Dynamics," 2006)

Table 2: Profile of respondents by organisation size in NZ in 2000 and 2010

Number of employees in organisation	NZ profile 2000	NZ profile 2010
Fewer than 10	1.0%	11.7%
10 – 49	4.0%	8.3%
50 – 99	9.0%	5.0%
100 – 499	40.0%	28.3%
500 or more	46.0%	46.7%
TOTAL	100%	100%

In Table 2 above, the profile of the respondent's organisation size employing 500 or more employees for 2000 is almost identical to the 2010 and the group 50 to 99 employees is close with only 4% less in 2010.

Table 3 below compares the six themes used in this paper as it was current in 2000 and predicted for 2010 and current in 2010 and predicted for 2020 by the respondents. None of the themes were closely predicted and none in reality are close as per the responses from the respondents.

Table 3: Six closely related themes - two categories: very important to critical for success

Closely related Themes	NZ 2000 actual	NZ predict for 2010	NZ 2010 actual	NZ predict for 2020
Employee engagement	27.3%	61.1%	68.4%	81.6%
Rewards – individual performance	11.0%	1.0%	30.0%	51.6%
Rewards – organisational performance	8.5%	14.5%	18.3%	41.6%
Reputation – employer of choice	32.4%	48.5%	38.4%	65.0%
Benefits and services	8.2%	8.2%	16.7%	43.3%
Employee participation and empowerment	3.0%	45%	35.0%	71.7%

Employee engagement

Employee engagement in the day-to-day activities of organisations seems to get momentum. The actual for 2000 was 27.3% and the respondents predicted that it will increase to 61.1% in 2010. The actual figure for 2010 was 68.4% and therefore it was actually more important as what the respondents predicted in 2000. Interestingly the figure increased with another 12.9% as predicted for the future (being 2020). It confirms the earlier statement that employee engagement gets momentum and it can be said that employers regard employee inputs more and more valuable for the success of their businesses. For 81.6% of the respondents, it is very important to critical for success in 2020. At the other end of the spectrum, only 13.2% of the respondents regarded it more important in 2020 than the actual figure of 2010 whereas in 2000 a huge increase of 33.8% was reported to 2010.

Rewards based on individual performance

The respondents were asked to state how important rewards is for individual performance now (being 2010) and for the future (being 2020). The 2000 respondents forecasted a decrease of 10% to 2010. They were totally off the mark because the actual figure for 2010 was 30% of the respondents that regarded individual performance currently (being 2010) and a further 21.6% on top of this figure regarded it important and critical for success in 2020. In comparison there is a 19% difference between 2000 and 2010 actual figures and a very close 21% between 2010 (actual) and 2020 predicted figure. Employees have changing needs and therefore a performance difference between individuals and organisations are required to respond to these differences. Many employees are now looking for more than just remuneration and organisations need to understand this quest in order to assist their staff to have a better balance.

Rewards based on organisational performance

Due to increasing diverse workforces in NZ, their opinion was related to the area of organisational performance. Between 2000 (actual) and 2010 (predicted) there was an increase of only 6% compared to the actual in 2010 (18.3%) and the predicted percentage for 2020 (41.6%) resulting in a 23.3% increase in importance, according to the respondents. The respondents of 2000 predicted very closely the importance of organisational performance. There is less than 4% difference in what they predicted for 2010 and what the actual figure was for 2010. It can be deduced that employers and also HR practitioners do not really understand the importance of rewards based on organisational performance. Their prediction for 2020 is less than 50% of the respondents (only 41.6%) regard this as important or critical for success. It is really alarming and HR practitioners and managers should take note of this careless attitude towards success of the business or otherwise it is a matter of them discarding the importance of teamwork, loyalty, employee engagement and empowerment of employees in the workplace. Organisations' responses to employees' needs may range from providing rewards other than monetary such as work arrangements to addressing employees' growing desire to have more family-friendly working environments.

Establishing a reputation as an employer of choice

Respondents were asked to give a response whether their organisation is an employer of choice. There was a 10% lower figure given for the actual figure in 2010 as what was predicted (48.5%) for 2010. It seems that organisations would establish themselves as an employer of choice for the future (65%) as they experience the lack of skills attributes and knowledge among their employees if they are not the employer of choice. Employees only have to visit the organisation's website to determine if their organisation is offering the

equivalent as other employers. It is always good if employees compare their rewards with similar organisations. Employees leaving an organisation now place their negative experiences or positive experience on the social media, Facebook and others, and employers / organisations are compared or measured by the public opinion of ex-employees or current employees. It is one thing to recognise the need to be the employer of choice, however it is quite another thing to have the rewards on the table for the employees and what they really experience working for an organisation.

Benefits and services

This question was designed to establish the extent to which organisations, in other words employers and managers provide benefits and services to their employees. Organisations in New Zealand are behind most organisations in the rest of the world providing medical assistance, retirement benefits and so on (Marsden, 2011; Nel et al, 2012). The research outcomes for this question confirm that in 2000 only 8% of the respondents regarded this as important and even the prediction to 2010 was a mere 8%. The actual figure for 2010 was double (16.7%) but they realise that employees will be more demanding in the future and predicted almost a three-fold increase to 43.3% to 2020. The increasing global nature of competition requires that organisations use all of their available resources to survive and to succeed (Sheehan, 2005). The emphasis on human resources and their value add in an organisation is of the utmost importance for success.

Employee participation and empowerment

This question was put to the respondents to determine what the involvement of their organisation's employees are in the decision making process and to what extent are they empowered and do they participate in the running of the business. In a study done by the SHL Workers and Good Management (Hopkins, 2012) it was found that 36% of managers regard their participation and involvement in the strategic direction of the organisation as part of their job. The study further revealed that it is not just monetary rewards but include responsibility, more control (empowerment) and more of a say in their work they are doing. Professional development, recognition for doing a good job is not everything and 67% of their respondents expect more money as rewards for being part of decision making and more responsibilities.

The respondents in our research project responded in 2000 with a mere 3% that acknowledged participation and empowerment and a huge increase to 45% was predicted for 2010. The actual figure for 2010 was 10% lower than predicted (35%) and for the future (2020) the figure is up by 36.7 % to 71.7%. It can be deduced that HR practitioners and employers know that it is important for employees to participate but they just don't want to "share" control (empowerment) with their employees as yet.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HR PRACTITIONERS AND EMPLOYERS

Concrete recommendations are proposed in this section, even though a very high level of employee participation and empowerment (71.7%) are evident in the results, the second highest prediction for any of the six themes, for 2020, used in this paper along with employee engagement (81.6%).

- They will have to be the change agents and leaders with the development and implementation of a new rewards system.
- Individual performance is important for the respondents therefore a definite reward system for individual performance should be developed and implemented.
- Employer of choice was rated at 65%. HR practitioners should assist employers to ensure that the needs of employees are met as far as possible and that feedback received from employees is taken seriously and something positive gets done about it.
- Employers and HR practitioners should use the talents of people from various backgrounds, experiences and cultures and engage them in decision making on certain levels and to successfully take part in aligning organisational strategies and performance with individual performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings indicate that the engagement and empowerment of employees has gained great momentum in NZ. In 2000 the actual figure was 27.3% compared to the actual figure in 2010 of 68.4%. A further 13.2% was predicted to 2020 to a total of 81.6%. Individual performance plays a significant role in the success of a business with a 19% increase since the 2000 study to the actual of 2010 while organisational performance increased with less than 10% in the actual responses for the two periods when the studies were executed. The employer of choice increased with only 6% for the same period while benefits and services doubled. Therefore it can be deduced that benefits and services for employees are critical for success. Employee participation and empowerment is up by the biggest margin of 32% and it confirms that employees want to be more involved in the day-to-day running of the organisation and that they would love to have more responsibilities even if there is no increase in pay but other rewards or benefits.

The six themes show similar increases for roles, goals and activities for employers and HR practitioners in New Zealand. The most significant result is employee participation and engagement, and recommendations were made in the previous section. A new kind of HR practitioner as well as a business manager and employee can be expected in successful organisations in the future adding sustainable value.

A very useful remuneration system was developed for use by employers and HR practitioners (Figure 1). Similarly a model for designing and implementing a reward system (Figure 2) was developed depicting the steps to be followed for successful implementation of a remuneration system.

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