The Implementation of Human Resource Information System in the Public Sector: An Exploratory Study of Perceived Benefits and Challenges

Authors : Aneeqa Suhail, Shabana Naveed

Abstract : The public sector (in both developed and developing countries) has gone through various waves of radical reforms in recent decades. In Pakistan, under the influence of New Public Management(NPM) Reforms; best practices of private sector are introduced in the public sector to modernize public organizations. Human Resource Information System (HRIS) has been popular in the private sector and proven to be a successful system, therefore it is being adopted in the public sector too. However, implementation of private business practices in public organizations us very challenging due to differences in context. This implementation gets further critical in Pakistan due to a centralizing tendency and lack of autonomy in public organizations. Adoption of HRIS by public organizations in Pakistan raises several questions: What challenges are faced by public organizations in implementation of HRIS? Are benefits of HRIS such as efficiency, process integration and cost reduction achieved? How is the previous system improved with this change and what are the impacts? Yet, it is an under-researched topic, especially in public enterprises. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by empirically exploring benefits and challenges of implementation of HRIS in public organizations. The research adopts a case study approach and uses qualitative data based on in-depth interviews conducted at various levels in the hierarchy including top management, departmental heads and employees. The unit of analysis is LESCO, the Lahore Electric Supply Company, a state-owned entity that generates, transmits and distributes electricity to 4 big cities in Punjab, Pakistan. The findings of the study show that LESCO has not achieved the benefits of HRIS as established in literature. The implementation process remained quite slow and costly. Various functions of HR are still in isolation and integration is a big challenge for the organization. Although the data is automated, the previous system of manually record maintenance and paperwork is still in work, resulting in the presence of parallel practices. The findings also identified resistance to change from top management and labor workforce, lack of commitment and technical knowledge, and costly vendors as major barriers that affect the effective implementation of HRIS. The paper suggests some potential actions to overcome these barriers and to enhance effective implementation of HR-technology. The findings are explained in light of an institutional logics perspective. HRIS' new logic of automated and integrated HR system is in sharp contrast with the prevailing logic of process-oriented manual data maintenance, leading to resistance to change and deadlock.
Keywords : human resource information system, technological changes, state-owned enterprise, implementation challenges
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