Human Resource Development in Nonprofit Organizations – Three Country Comparison of the U.S., Canada and Japan

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Over the last decade, 38,000 nonprofit organizations have been incorporated in Japan since the enactment of the Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities in 1998. As with the increase of nonprofit corporations, volunteers and paid staff engaging in and working at nonprofits have also surged. However, most organizations face various human resource challenges including development of next generation leaders as well as core staff, succession planning, and motivation of volunteers and staff with the diversification of engaging and working styles in nonprofit organizations. Moreover, though universities housing nonprofit courses and programs have increased, it does not necessarily link to the careers in the nonprofit sector. In this situation, effective management and development of diverse human resources is pivotal for the sustainability of nonprofit organizations. Moreover, social capital such as trust, norms of reciprocity and networks seems to play an important role in human resource developments in nonprofits. This situation applies not only to Japan, but also to other countries such as American and Canada with much more people working at nonprofit organizations accumulating rich history and experience of human resource management and also have been keen on the role of social capital creation.

Thus, the author pursues to grasp the state and challenges facing nonprofit organizations in the U.S., Canada and Japan in relation to human resource developments and make comparative analysis to learn some lessons to be applied. The author explores effective and sustainable approaches to human resource development and the role of social capital in human resource development at nonprofit organizations.

Literature has dealt with diverse aspects of human resource management in nonprofit organizations including factors in employee retention (Brown and Yoshioka 2003) and leadership development in different generations (Kunreuther et al. 2008) as well as comprehensive human resource management (Pynes 2004). Drucker (1990) proposes that the biggest difference between nonprofits and business is human resource and stakeholder management; that is, relationship management within and outside the organization. Nonprofit organizations have a role to create social capital in community (Frumkin 2002). King (2004) proposes that nonprofit leaders should create social capital in recruiting and developing board members, and sharing vision and mission with staff. However, the concrete relationships between human resource developments in nonprofits and social capital have not been clarified, and thus, the author pertains to clarify the concrete relationships between the two and the process of creation and utilization of social capital by nonprofit organizations.

Interviews were conducted at nonprofit organizations, key infrastructure organizations, nonprofit think tanks and universities holding nonprofit education program in the U.S., Canada and Japan through 2007 to 2009 as well as literature review on human resource development in these countries to grasp the overview of the state and challenges facing human resource development in nonprofit organizations in these countries such as Human Resource Council for the Voluntary & Non-profit Sector (2008). A social capital perspective such as trust, norms of reciprocity and networks is utilized to analyze human resource practices in these organizations and their respective countries. For example, creation and utilization of social capital in different types—bonding, bridging and linking—are explored. The research findings from the interviews are compared among three countries. Then, some implications for nonprofit organizations in these countries are proposed from the comparative analysis in order to learn the lessons and best practices to improve human resource management in these countries.
This research has grasped the state and challenges of human resource development in nonprofit organizations in the U.S., Canada and Japan with a social capital perspective. Developing and disseminating practical human resource tools, customizing the tools to different types of organizations, including a social capital perspective were found to be crucial for effective and sustainable human resource development in nonprofit organizations. This research sheds a light on social capital perspective in human resource development in nonprofit organizations. Moreover, a comparative analysis of human resource development in nonprofits in the three countries leads to useful implications for the nonprofit sector in these countries and beyond.

Reference


