

Qualification: CIPD Diploma in Applied Human Resources

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Using a Research Approach in Human Resources – Activity 1

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Student Name: Duncan Hook

Student Number: 1920325

CIPD Membership Number: 5665008X

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Signed: 

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Using a Research Approach in Human Resources

Through the process of conducting research we are gathering evidence to enforce a hypotheses or answer a question to a problem we have identified (Anderson, 2009, p. 142).

Barends (2019) of the Center for Evidence-Based Management uses healthcare as an analogy as “in daily life claims are being made all the time” and what researching and gathering evidence allows is for these claims to be either reinforced or disproved allowing us to form new ones.

The ultimate benefit to HR of using a research approach is that these proven theories enable us to make recommendations underpinned by our findings. HR recommendations have, historically, predominantly been based on practitioners experience and so are reliant on having said experience and are then based on the opinions of one individual (Young, 2020). The CIPDs approach encourages the gathering of data from multiple sources (Briner, et al., 2020) so guidance is better informed and can stand up to questioning. An example given by Gifford (2019) is that it is a widely held belief that motivating employees leads to better performance but this statement itself brings up questions: “What actually motivates people?” and “What [is] the link between motivation and performance?” (Barends, et al., 2019). Another contemporary example is the changing ways that we are working currently, with homeworking frequently seen as a cause of poor work life balance and additional stress but broader research could give us answers (Horton, 2020). By seeking to solve these problems by conducting research we can make recommendations that have weight behind them and should be more effective as a result.

One recommended approach to research based work comes from Briner (2019) and is endorsed by the CIPD (Young, 2020). He breaks the stages for conducting evidence-based practice into 6 steps: to “Ask” questions identifying a problem we want to solve, “Acquire” data from range of sources, “Appraise” the data to determine if it matches our requirements, “Aggregate” the data presenting with analysis in a way that our audience can digest, “Apply” this research by forming recommendations for the original problem and finally “Assess” the results of the research project summarising the effectiveness of our recommendations and the answer to our problem (Briner, 2019).

In identifying our research subject, Horn (2009) outlines four main approaches researchers may take and the convenience of each. A “burning desire” subject close to our hearts may be more motivating to study. The “replication strategy” sees us apply existing study to potentially deliver similar results. We may have “Convenient Access” (Horn, 2009) to data or materials due to workplace situation which may inform the choice of subject. Alternatively, it may be that the organisation themselves have a problem which needs solving which can give the benefit of them bending over backwards to grant access to data to solve the problem (Saunders, et al., 2007, p. 164). Whichever motivation, it is important to keep in mind the audience for the final research report and whether the findings will be relevant or useful to them (Perkins & Woodhams, 2016, pp. 90-91).

Exploring existing material, or “secondary data”, on this subject will enable us to verify that it is a valid one for further study (Horn, 2009, p. 18) and help us to generate our theory or questions which guide our research. Anderson (2009, p. 144) explains this is an opportunity to test our theories ensuring they stack up against pre-existing research. In addition to data from our organisation, highly recommended reliable sources of data will be in academic journals or textbooks on the subject (Perkins & Woodhams, 2016, p. 95). When conducting a literature review it is still important to review critically and not take all publications as writ (Beardwell & Daniels, 2020). While factoring in the tenure of data or changing trends it is equally important to access contemporary data in internet databases to verify the findings of these publications. At the same time, while Perkins and

Woodhams (2016, p. 95) do concede that the internet rich in information, it can be so broad that the data isn't always reliable and recommends reputable sites such as the ONS as good sources of quantitative data.

The basis of a methodology will be formed from the importance of qualitative or quantitative data as a way of answering our theory. The benefit to focussing on gathering quantitative data is the speed at which data can be gathered through surveys, easily presented visually in graphs and interpreted by the audience (Perkins & Woodhams, 2016, p. 94). What this can lack is the additional context that qualitative data provides. Likewise, while detailed qualitative data from open-questioned interviews will be rich with context, the results can take longer to collate and can be more open to interpretation. Anderson (2009, p. 136) recommends a balanced approach suggesting attitude surveys as they a replicable set of closed questions which can still be presented in a graph and give us some qualitative narrative.

References

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