

Role of Human resources for natural disaster preparedness: Is your workplace prepared?

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Abstract

Accomplishing the goal of a holistic approach for disaster management needs a framework of a proficient institutional setup with trained Human Resource team and field practitioners in different facets of the disaster management, starting from prevention and mitigation, preparedness, early warning, relief and recovery to be planned and their deliveries organized in a systematic manner. It also requires to have the capacities to ensure the disaster mitigation and management actions. It is, therefore, necessary to identify the existing shortcomings in the organization, based on previous disasters as well as the emerging needs of changing disaster risk scenarios, for example, creating an awareness in organizations. This paper suggests the role of HR in preparation and preparedness for disaster management.

Keywords: Disaster Management, Disaster Preparedness, HRM

1. Introduction

India has been traditionally been exposed to different types of natural disasters on because of its unique geo-climate conditions. Cloud Bursts, Floods, droughts, earthquakes, cyclones and landslides have been a recurring phenomena. About 60% of the landmass is prone to earthquake of various intensities; over 40 million hectares is prone to floods; about 8 % of total area is prone to cyclones and 68% of the areas is susceptible to drought (*Daya Kaul, Md. Ayaz, Lohitkumar S N*). In the decade 1990-2000, an average of about 4344 people lost their lives and about 30 million people were affected by disasters every year. Almost, every year we find in news one or the other part of the country battling from a natural disaster. The loss in terms of private, community and public assets has been astronomical. It affects not just the place at which natural disaster has occurred rather it has an effect on national income and economy too. Today, India has made a place in the world economy. The conomic growth and developments can be traced back from the year 1991, a landmark in the history of Indian economy, when the three pillars of Liberalization, privatization and globalization introduced to accelate the economic growth. However, the aspect of being prepared as an enterprise is yet not addressed and researched. In this paper I will discuss the role of Human resource for preparing an organization for a natural disaster.

2. Literature review

Globally, Very little research has been conducted on the linkage of human resources with disaster preparedness and planning, but after the increase in the number of current devastating events it should be a more heavily researched topic. Employers need to become prepared for worst-case scenarios to minimize confusion and loss, from both financial resource and human resource standpoints, before, during, and after a disaster. The results of previously conducted researches (usually done in developed economies like USA) indicate that the majority of workplaces are prepared, but with some crucial exceptions of important topics that workplaces need to become more knowledgeable about and better prepared for in the

future. Very less researched topic of linkage of human resources (HR) with disaster preparedness and planning has gained importance after the devastating effects of hurricane Katrina and the tragic events of September 11th, 2001 in USA. Employers need to become prepared for worst-case scenarios to minimize confusion and even more loss, from both financial and HR standpoints, after a disaster. The U.S.A have been formulating and establishing disaster plans and polices to prepare for a variety of disaster scenarios. The majority of these plans can easily be found online. Researchers named Barron, Phipps, and Steinmeyer (2005) compiled a helpful list of post-disaster issues for employers. These issues could be prepared for and dealt with pre-disaster, in the future. Barron *et al.* state that many employee handbooks do not include “game plans” on how to handle worst-case scenario situations similar to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. This type of devastation does not only happen on the nation’s Pacific, Atlantic, or Gulf of Mexico coasts or in large cities like New York, either. Inland tornados, floods, winter weather, earthquakes, and fires are among the other disasters for which personnel need to be prepared. In the United Kingdom the city of London has a very helpful online resource within the Greater London Authority website regarding “London Resilience.” This page includes comprehensive emergency and disaster preparedness for 3 the city, people, and businesses in London. It includes weekly duty officer updates regarding latest preparedness advice for the city, information on citizen and family preparation, business preparation and planning, and information on organizations that assist with emergencies and disasters within London for more resources (LONDON.GOV.UK, 2013). The website also stresses the importance of communication of the plan and policies to personnel and of testing plans before an emergency to be sure they are successful. These are very important things to keep in mind for any HR manager planning and making policies regarding this topic. On the other hand, some countries still lack emergency and disaster preparedness policies. For example, there is a lack of emergency and disaster preparedness information for the city of Rome in Italy. This is disconcerting, as “on average in Italy 240 people are killed and

75,000 affected by natural disaster each year. Italy bears the greatest risk of disaster in Europe” (Emergency-Planning.blogspot.com, 2008). Staffaroni (2012) looks at this lack of the Italian government's emergency and disaster preparedness planning and communication, and proposes guidelines of crisis communication plans for the country of Italy based on its most high-risk cities. Rome is very susceptible to high loss after a disaster due to its immense amount of important historic monuments and high volumes of tourists each year (Staffaroni, 2012). However, in case of India, not much research work is done on this topic,

3. Human resource and disaster management

Nobody expects an emergency or disaster – especially one that affects them, their employees, and their business personally. Yet the simple truth is that emergencies and disasters can strike anyone, anytime, and anywhere. You and your employees could be forced to evacuate your company when you least expect it. This booklet is designed to help you, the employer, plan for that possibility. The best way to protect yourself, your workers, and your business is to expect the unexpected and develop a well-thought-out emergency action plan to guide you when immediate action is necessary. At workplace emergency is an unforeseen situation that threatens your employees, customers, or the public; disrupts or shuts down your operations; or causes physical or environmental damage. Emergencies may be natural or manmade and include the following:

- Floods
- Cloud burst
- Earthquake
- Tsunami
- Land slides

The best way is to prepare to respond to an emergency before it happens. Few people can think clearly and logically in a crisis, so it is important to do so in advance, when you have time to be thorough. *Brainstorm the worst-case scenarios.* Firstly, As a Human Resource department yourself what you would do if the worst happened. What if there is an earthquake? Or a cloud bursts and you are in Himachal Pradesh plant of your company? Once you have identified potential emergencies at your office and the different locations (subsidiaries, branches of your office in India), consider how they would affect you and your workers and how you would respond.

As a HR now you need a handy emergency action plan. An emergency action plan should cover designated actions employers and employees must take to ensure employee safety from emergencies. Not all employers are required to establish an emergency action plan. When developing your emergency action plan, it's a good idea to look at a wide variety of potential emergencies that could occur in your workplace. It should be tailored to your worksite and include information about all potential sources of emergencies. Developing an emergency action plan means you should do a hazard assessment to determine what, if any, physical or chemical hazards in your workplaces could cause an emergency. If you have more than one worksite, each site should have an emergency action plan. At a minimum, your emergency action plan must include the following:

- A preferred method for reporting fires and other emergencies;
- An evacuation policy and procedure;

- Emergency escape procedures and route assignments, such as floor plans, workplace maps, and safe or refuge areas;
- Names, titles, departments, and telephone numbers of individuals both within and outside your company to contact for additional information or explanation of duties and responsibilities under the emergency plan;
- Procedures for employees who remain to perform or shut down critical plant operations, operate fire extinguishers, or perform other essential services that cannot be shut down for every emergency alarm before evacuating; and
- Rescue and medical duties for any workers designated to perform them. You also may want to consider designating an assembly location and procedures to account for all employees after an evacuation

Accounting for all employees following an evacuation is critical. Confusion in the assembly areas can lead to delays in rescuing anyone trapped in the building, or unnecessary and dangerous search-and-rescue operations. To ensure the fastest, most accurate accountability of your employees, you may want to consider including these steps in your emergency action plan: Designate assembly areas where employees should gather after evacuating; Take a head count after the evacuation. Identify the names and last known locations of anyone not accounted for and pass them to the official in charge; Establish a method for accounting for non-employees such as suppliers and customers; and How do you account for employees after an evacuation? How do you establish evacuation routes and exits? Establish procedures for further evacuation in case the incident expands. This may consist of sending employees home by normal means or providing them with transportation to an offsite location.

It takes more than just willing hands to save lives. Untrained individuals may endanger themselves and those they are trying to rescue. For this reason, it is generally wise to leave rescue work to those who are trained, equipped, and certified to conduct rescues

The best emergency action plans include employees in the planning process, specify what employees should do during an emergency, and ensure that employees receive proper training for emergencies. When you include your employees in your planning, encourage them to offer suggestions about potential hazards, worstcase scenarios, and proper emergency responses. After you develop the plan, review it with your employees to make sure everyone knows what to do before, during and after an emergency. Keep a copy of your emergency action plan in a convenient location where employees can get to it, or provide all employees a copy. If you have 10 or fewer employees, you may communicate your plan orally.

As an HR educate your employees about the types of emergencies that may occur and train them in the proper course of action. The size of your workplace and workforce, processes used, materials handled, and the availability of onsite or outside resources will determine your training requirements. Be sure all your employees understand the function and elements of your emergency action plan, including types of potential emergencies, reporting procedures, alarm systems, evacuation plans, and shutdown procedures. Discuss any special hazards you may have onsite such as flammable materials, toxic chemicals, radioactive sources, or water-reactive substances. Clearly communicate to your employees who will be in charge during an emergency to minimize

confusion. General training for your employees should address the following: Individual roles and responsibilities; Threats, hazards, and protective actions; Notification, warning, and communications procedures; Means for locating family members in an emergency; Emergency response procedures; Evacuation, shelter, and accountability procedures; Location and use of common emergency equipment; and Emergency shutdown procedures. You also may wish to train your employees in first-aid procedures, including protection against blood borne pathogens; respiratory protection, including use of an escape-only respirator; and methods for preventing unauthorized access to the site. Once you have reviewed your emergency action plan with your employees and everyone has had the proper training, it is a good idea to hold practice drills as often as necessary to keep employees prepared. Include outside resources such as fire and police departments when possible. After each drill, gather management and employees to evaluate the effectiveness of the drill. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your plan and work to improve it.

4. Conclusion and suggestions

It may be understood that the role of HR in disaster management at work place is inevitable but still is under researched. It is an important responsibility of the management to firstly, have an infrastructure (like buildings, plants) which are earthquake resistant and constructed keeping in mind emergency evacuation. Secondly the preparedness plan by the Human resource and Administration Departments it includes the evacuation plan. Thirdly, training and development program of the employees of their organization. The programs should be regularly arranged and it may be kept in mind that mock drills should be a part of the programs. The employees should also be trained to handle the psychological state of mind at the time and after occurrence of the disaster. This work intended primarily to increase interest in research regarding natural disaster preparedness in the workplace and in all aspects of society, to save lives and decrease financial loss due to these disasters. Second intent of the work is to increase overall awareness for all who read this as to the dangers of these natural disasters and the crucial importance to prepare for these disasters to eliminate confusion and loss.

There should be more research done on such topic by involving researchers from the field of management with geographers. Corporate houses should be directed by the government for conducting regular training programs and laving heavy fines on organizations which are not safely constructed and maintained.

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