

Transforming Caribbean Higher Education Through People-Centered Human Resource Management

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In the context of a rapidly evolving higher education landscape characterised by technological advancements, shifting demographics, and increased demands for equity and sustainability the effective administration of institutions necessitates a fundamental re-examination of the role and functions of Human Resource Management (HRM).

No longer confined to administrative tasks, HRM must now be recognised as a strategic partner in institutional transformation one that prioritises the development, empowerment, and well-being of the workforce as a catalyst for organisational growth and resilience. At the core of this transformation is a shift toward people-centered practices that align HRM strategies with the broader goals of inclusion, innovation, and sustainability. This paper focuses on four key pillars: professional development and training, diversity and inclusion, employee wellness, and leadership development. Together, these components reflect a holistic HRM approach aimed at enhancing institutional agility and impact while influencing resilience and maximum transformative power. Training and professional development are critical to equipping faculty and administrative leaders with the knowledge, skills and abilities required to respond to the evolving academic and governance challenges. This includes not only disciplinary knowledge but also leadership competencies, innovative management practices, and student engagement strategies. By investing in talent management, institutions foster a culture of adaptability and academic excellence.

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are equally important. As campuses increasingly reflect a diverse student population, HRM must ensure that the human capital diversity mirrors this reality in both composition and influence. Inclusive recruitment, equitable training and development opportunities, and culturally responsive workplace policies are necessary to foster a sense of belonging and to reinforce the institutional commitment to DEI. Employee wellness, often underestimated, is another pillar that supports long-term institutional sustainability. Faculty and staff frequently experience high levels of stress due to the demands of academia and administration. Embedding wellness initiatives such as mental health support, flexible workplace policies, and holistic well-being programs into HRM practices contributes to healthier, more engaged workforce and helps to reduce burnout and turnover

Lastly, leadership development and succession planning are imperative as senior administrator's approach retirement. Proactive identification and development of future leaders particularly those from underrepresented groups ensures institutional continuity, innovation, and inclusive governance. Structured mentoring, training, and leadership opportunities create a robust leadership pipeline that reflects the institution's values and strategic priorities.

This paper will argue that transforming HRM from a support function to a strategic business partner is essential for the future of higher education. By embedding professional growth, diversity, wellness, and leadership into HRM strategy, institutions can build adaptive, inclusive, and future-ready environments for faculty, administrators and learners alike. This human-centered approach not only enhances administrative effectiveness but also reinforces the role of HRM as a foundational pillar in higher education transformation in the Caribbean region. This paper will utilise a qualitative case study approach, using document analysis and interviews to explore people-centered HRM practices in Caribbean higher education.