

SOFT HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ALIGNMENT AND EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY OF ORGANISATIONS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstracts

This seminar explores the critical role of soft human resource alignment in enhancing creativity within organizations, focusing on dimensions such as communication and business transparency, and measures including initiative and innovation. Effective communication and transparency are foundational to creating a workplace environment where trust and openness prevail, enabling employees to freely exchange ideas and collaborate more effectively. By fostering a culture that values these dimensions, organizations can better align their human resources with creative goals. Additionally, promoting initiative and supporting innovative practices are key measures that drive employee engagement and creative problem-solving. This seminar will examine how aligning these HR practices with organizational objectives can lead to increased creativity, improved performance, and sustainable growth. Practical strategies for implementing these alignment practices will also be discussed, providing actionable insights for enhancing both individual and collective creative potential.

Introduction

Creativity, a cornerstone of innovation and progress, thrives in environments where individuals feel valued, supported, and understood. As businesses and organizations increasingly recognize the importance of nurturing creative potential, they must address not only the technical and strategic aspects of their operations but also the softer, more human elements that can significantly influence creative outcomes. This is where the concept of Soft Human Resource Alignment comes into play, (Amabile, 1996; Shalley & Gilson, 2004).

Soft Human Resource Alignment refers to the strategic alignment of HR practices with the nuanced needs and motivations of employees, fostering an environment where creativity can flourish. Unlike traditional HR approaches that often focus on rigid structures and formal procedures, Soft HR Alignment emphasizes understanding and addressing the individual and collective needs of the workforce—such as providing supportive leadership, recognizing personal strengths, and encouraging open communication.

By aligning HR practices with the softer aspects of human interaction and organizational culture, companies can create a fertile ground for creativity. This alignment not only enhances employee satisfaction and engagement but also cultivates an atmosphere where innovative ideas can be freely shared and developed. In essence, Soft Human Resource Alignment serves as the bridge between a supportive work environment and the unleashing of creative potential, driving both individual and organizational success in an increasingly competitive landscape.

Background of the Study

Creativity is often hailed as the lifeblood of modern organizations, serving as a key driver of innovation, competitive advantage, and organizational success. In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, where technological advancements and market demands are in constant flux, the ability to generate novel ideas and adapt to change has become more critical than ever. However, fostering a culture of creativity is not merely about encouraging individual brilliance; it involves creating an environment where creative potential can be fully realized. This environment is significantly shaped by how well Human Resource (HR) practices align with the soft, interpersonal aspects of employee engagement and well-being—a concept known as Soft Human Resource Alignment. (Luthans Stajkovic 1999 as cited in Collis and Hussey, 2009).

Soft Human Resource Alignment encompasses a strategic approach to HR that prioritizes the emotional, social, and psychological needs of employees, rather than focusing solely on procedural and technical aspects. It involves tailoring HR practices to foster a supportive and inclusive work environment, recognizing individual strengths, and encouraging open communication and collaboration. This approach contrasts with traditional HR models that emphasize rigid structures, standardized processes, and formal evaluations, often overlooking the softer elements that can profoundly impact employee motivation and creativity.

Research has shown that when employees feel understood and supported, they are more likely to engage in creative thinking and problem-solving. For instance, environments that encourage psychological safety allow employees to take risks and experiment without fear of negative repercussions. Similarly, practices such as personalized recognition and flexible work arrangements can significantly boost employee morale and creative output. Yet, despite the clear benefits of aligning HR practices with these softer elements, many organizations still struggle with integrating these principles into their everyday operations.

The existing literature on HR management often focuses on the impact of structured HR processes on organizational performance, but there is a noticeable gap in exploring how Soft Human Resource Alignment specifically influences creativity. While there is some research on the role of supportive work environments in fostering creativity, studies that directly connect Soft HR Alignment with creative outcomes are limited. This gap presents an opportunity to explore how HR strategies that emphasize emotional and interpersonal alignment can directly enhance creative processes and outcomes within organizations.

Understanding this relationship is crucial for organizations aiming to cultivate a culture of innovation. By bridging this gap, the study will contribute valuable insights into how Soft Human Resource Alignment can be strategically employed to unlock and maximize creative potential. This exploration will not only fill an important void in the current research paper but also provide practical recommendations for organizations seeking to enhance their creative capabilities through more nuanced and empathetic HR practices. In doing so, it will pave the way for more effective HR strategies that align with the dynamic needs of a creative workforce and drive long-term organizational success.

Statement of the Problems

Creativity is universally acknowledged as a crucial driver of innovation and competitive advantage in contemporary organizations. It fuels the development of new products, services, and processes, enabling companies to adapt to shifting market demands and technological advancements. Despite its critical importance, many organizations face persistent challenges in harnessing the full creative potential of their workforce. These challenges often stem from a disconnect between traditional Human Resource (HR) practices and the softer, more nuanced aspects of employee engagement that are essential for fostering creativity, Vande Walle, (2008). This misalignment constitutes a significant problem area that undermines the ability of organizations to effectively leverage their employees' creative capacities.

One primary issue is the failure to recognize the impact of HR practices on the emotional and psychological well-being of employees. Traditional HR models frequently emphasize formal processes, performance metrics, and standardized procedures, which can overlook the importance of creating an emotionally supportive work environment. This oversight can lead to a lack of psychological safety, where employees are reluctant to share innovative ideas or take creative risks due to fear of negative consequences or judgment. As a result, the organization misses out on valuable contributions and the potential for groundbreaking innovations.

Additionally, many HR departments struggle with aligning their practices to address the diverse and evolving needs of employees. For instance, while some organizations may offer flexibility in work arrangements, others may fail to consider how such flexibility intersects with individual work styles and preferences. This misalignment can result in a work environment that does not fully support or

encourage creative thinking, as employees may feel constrained by rigid policies or inadequate support systems.

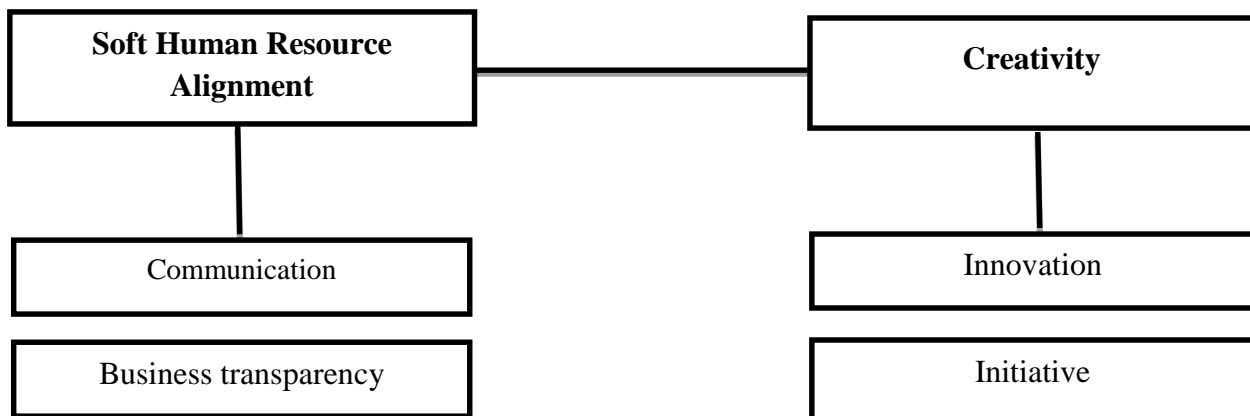
Another significant problem is the lack of personalized recognition and feedback. Traditional HR approaches often rely on generic performance evaluations that do not account for the unique contributions and creative potential of individual employees. Without tailored recognition and constructive feedback, employees may feel undervalued or unappreciated, which can diminish their motivation and willingness to engage in creative endeavors. This lack of individualized attention can also impede the development of a culture where creativity is actively encouraged and nurtured.

Furthermore, there is a gap in integrating Soft Human Resource Alignment into the strategic vision of the organization. Many companies continue to focus on traditional HR metrics and outputs, such as turnover rates and compliance, without sufficiently addressing how HR practices can be aligned with fostering creativity and innovation. This narrow focus limits the potential for developing a comprehensive HR strategy that supports and enhances the creative capabilities of employees.

Addressing these problems requires a shift towards a more holistic approach to HR that integrates Soft Human Resource Alignment principles. Organizations need to develop HR strategies that are not only supportive and empathetic but also dynamically aligned with the evolving creative needs of their workforce. This involves creating environments where psychological safety is prioritized, recognizing and valuing individual contributions, and providing personalized support that encourages creative risk-taking and innovation.

primary problems associated with Soft Human Resource Alignment and creativity include the inadequate recognition of the emotional and psychological needs of employees, misalignment between HR practices and individual needs, lack of personalized recognition and feedback, and the insufficient integration of Soft HR principles into organizational strategy. Addressing these issues is crucial for organizations aiming to foster a culture of creativity and harness the full potential of their workforce.

Conceptual framework



Author's Research Desk (2024)

Source: The predictor variables; strategic compensation and dimensions were adopted from the works of Amabile, (1996). Whereas the criterion variable; organizational productivity and measures were coined from the work of VandeWalle, (2008).

Aim and Objectives of the study

The primary aim of this study is to explore the relationship between Soft Human Resource Alignment and creativity within organizational settings. Driven by the following objectives. To:

- 1) Determine the relationship between communication and creativity.
- 2) Determine the relationship between business transparency and employee creativity.

Significance / Implications of the studies

Creativity is widely recognized as a vital driver of innovation and competitive advantage in modern organizations. It fuels the development of new products, services, and processes, helping businesses to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing market landscape. Given its critical role, understanding how to effectively nurture and harness creativity within the workforce is of paramount importance. The study of Soft Human Resource Alignment and its relationship with creativity offers significant implications for both theoretical and practical aspects of organizational management.

❖ Enhancing Theoretical Understanding:

The exploration of Soft Human Resource Alignment in relation to creativity contributes significantly to theoretical advancements in HR management and organizational behavior. Existing research often emphasizes the impact of formal HR practices on employee performance and organizational outcomes. However, by focusing on the softer, more human elements of HR alignment, this study fills a crucial gap in understanding how these factors specifically influence creative processes and outcomes (Amabile, 1996; Shalley & Gilson, 2004). It extends the theoretical framework of creativity by integrating the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of HR practices, thus offering a more comprehensive view of how creativity can be nurtured through HR strategies.

❖ Informing HR Practices:

Practically, the findings from this study provide valuable insights for HR professionals seeking to create environments that foster creativity. For instance, understanding that psychological safety is a key component of creativity underscores the need for HR practices that promote open communication and risk-taking without fear of negative repercussions (Edmondson, 1999). This means that HR policies should be designed to create supportive and inclusive workplaces where employees feel valued and empowered to share innovative ideas.

❖ Driving Organizational Innovation

Aligning HR practices with the softer aspects of employee needs has profound implications for organizational innovation. By creating an environment that supports psychological well-being and recognizes individual contributions, organizations can foster a culture where creativity is actively encouraged and sustained (Zhou & Shalley, 2003). This not only enhances the organization's ability to develop new and innovative solutions but also improves overall organizational performance and adaptability.

Review of related literature

Conceptual Review

Soft Human Resource Alignment

McGregor (1987) states, "Soft Human Resource Alignment involves treating workers as significant, if not the most important, resource in your firm." This represents a more modern approach, one that recognizes the uniqueness of each member of the workforce. As its name suggests, the soft human resource model is more concerned with things like employee perks and morale. This method prioritizes the sustainability of both the company and its personnel above the short term. A more democratic style of management that prioritizes open communication and fair compensation (including wage benchmarking and bonus structures), as well as employee autonomy, constructive feedback, and possibilities for advancement in one's career (McGregor, 1987).

Soft human resource alignment, as described by Analoui (1998, 1999, and 2002), highlights the importance of a company's management strategy to employee performance that is both effective and committed, and therefore to the company's results. In light of this, human resource management must be built not only on interpersonal connections, but on an inclusive framework that encourages participation from all staff members in the attainment of the company's goals (Analoui, 2002). It also claims that strategic Human Resource Managers play a decisive role and provides insight into the political context in which policy is developed and implemented. The choice model contributes to the growing development of human resources by addressing such issues as

the importance of individual preferences, the capacity to commit and interact, the power to impact and be affected, and the truth about the efficacy of top management (Analoui, 2002). The Choice Model, in its overall view, highlights the need of identifying and diagnosing internal (organizational), personal (individual), and external (environmental) characteristics in order to fulfill the organization's goals. These factors concern the creation of HR policies and frameworks, which should occur at the highest levels of management before being communicated to line managers for execution. The end result would be a boost in productivity, efficiency, and satisfaction in the workplace and beyond (Analoui, 2002). Human resource alignment refers to the degree to which an organization's inputs (such as employees) and its outputs (such as products) are in sync with one another. The Model posits that the personal behavioral effectiveness of an organization's top managers has a significant impact on both the external and internal sources (Analoui, 2002). This means that an individual's mindset, skills, knowledge, political leanings, socioeconomic position, and awareness of stakeholder objectives are all crucial to an organization's success in attaining its goals. If we place this model within the context of hard and soft approaches, we can see that the benefits are centered on total commitment of all organizational employee, involvement, decentralization, and participations towards the decision-making process for organizational objective achievement, which indicates that this model is built strongly on the soft approach of human resource alignment. The choice model is a rational model because it allows for more options when pursuing a mission, the discovery of new strategies that are relevant to further appraisal of opportunity, a reevaluation of the positive and negative influences of all alternatives, and the implementation of strategies that lead to high performance and effectiveness for the organization (Analoui, 2002). Employee morale is said to benefit most from a soft human resource alignment strategy, as stated by Millington (2000).

Communication and Business Transparency

Two-way communication and openness about the company's goals and operations are two examples of the soft human resource practices that contribute to a more aligned workforce. When businesses encourage their staff to actively participate in corporate discussions and express their own ideas, questions, and concerns without fear of retaliation, they are engaging in two-way communication. To better address difficulties, two-way communication must be strong. By keeping everyone apprised of the company's newest developments, aims, and progress, it fosters a more comprehensive understanding of the business and improved interactions among employees (Edison et al, 2004). Based on their research and experience, Baregheh et al. (2009) conclude that an organization's investors, consumers, partners, and workers may trust the company more when it is transparent. Transparency in business is being forthright and upfront with all parties involved. The goal of any type of corporate transparency is to cultivate and maintain the company's reputation for openness and honesty in its interactions with its stakeholders, which may take many various shapes depending on the nature of the communication and who is being addressed. Investors consider transparency in terms of how easily they can get financial information about a firm, such as its pricing levels and audited financial reports, as described by Baregheh et al. (2009). (1) Transparency with Investors and Shareholders Your Company has to be able to reassure investors by releasing financial reports that are thorough, honest, and independently audited. Customers value honesty and open communication with the companies they support financially. Businesses that want to build trust with their consumers should provide open and fast responses to customer questions and comments, as well as make more data about their offerings easily accessible. Admitting fault instead of attempting to cover it up and making amends with consumers is also part of being transparent. When carried out properly, being open and honest with your consumers increases your brand's loyalty, your sales, and your employees' sense of accomplishment

Creativity

Creativity in the workplace, as defined by Baird and Meshoulam (1988), is the capacity to think of and implement unique solutions to problems. Definition of Creativity in the Workplace New and

Beneficial Ideas Generated by Employees about Products, Procedures, and Processes (Nwanekezie, 1996). It's important to keep in mind that creativity is analyzed with a focus on outcomes (Osibanjo et al, 2014). Organizations actively foster innovation and competitiveness by rewarding employees for using their imaginations. Given the current focus on teams in many industries, team interaction has also become an important part of putting the creative process into perspective. To maximize employee creativity, it's crucial to have a firm grasp of how members of a team influence one another. It is acknowledged that predispositions toward creativity certainly play a role, but it is also possible that the social impacts of the team environment might vary the degree to which people are able to be creative. These stances may originate from inside, when people are motivated by their own ambitions for success. These needs are internally driven, meaning they aren't influenced by material incentives. On the other side, people may be affected by things like peer pressure, the need for approval, or the want to avoid criticism. Bear in mind that extraneous elements may be broken down into two groups: those who actively seek positive evaluations and those who passively try to avoid negative ones.

Mcleod (2008) claims that, on an individual level, a greater degree of learning orientation is associated with a greater degree of intrinsic drive towards creativity (the acquisition of new knowledge and inclination towards a mastery of tasks). It has been shown that employees who are more learning-oriented are more likely to take on tough tasks, which in turn may improve their capacity for innovative issue solving and the implementation of their ideas. The learning process may be accelerated and complicated by working as a team. Teams that actively seek information, acknowledge and handle group differences, and challenge assumed solutions to problems are engaged in learning behavior. Concerns concerning the team's learning behavior as a result of this situation include the following: Does the way a team learns affect individual members' ability to learn and be creative? Employees are influenced by the team's learning behavior, and those with a propensity toward learning succeed in environments where learning is encouraged. Question 2: Does the active approach (those who want to achieve positive judgments) of workers depend on the team learning behavior of the team? Employees that take an active role in team learning behavior are more likely to succeed in this setting. How does the passive attitude (those who avoid adverse assessments) of workers relate to the learning behavior of teams? Those who have a more passive approach to learning benefit from team learning because it fosters an environment where everyone feels comfortable speaking out.

Millington (2000) suggests the following for companies that want to encourage innovation: An individual's disposition, when coupled with the synergy of group study, produces a much more robust correlation with inventiveness than each factor could achieve alone. Individual disposition analysis and group learning should both figure prominently into any learning strategy. Team learning behavior may be encouraged by the leadership of a group that creates a stimulating setting for team members to engage in shared learning through collaborative discussion and experimentation.

Initiative and Innovation

Initiation and originality are the cornerstones of creative thinking. Initiative, as defined by Basset (2000), is doing one's own thing in the absence of constant direction. It's going to test your tenacity and resolve. People that take the initiative show that they are capable of independent thought and action. It requires rational thought and a strong will to succeed. One of the five most important transferable talents for success in the workplace and in life is the ability to take the initiative. Taking the initiative means acting on your own will, finding creative solutions to issues that others may overlook, and making an effort to develop your skills and knowledge beyond what is expected of you. If more information is needed, you find it, ask questions, and get assistance.

If you take the effort to learn and improve in your position, you'll stand out to potential employers as someone who can think for themselves, as stated by Beaumont (2000). Taking the initiative to keep yourself informed about your industry and the latest developments will put you ahead of the

curve and provide you an advantage in your chosen field. People that take the initiative to come up with new and intriguing ideas are often recognized and rewarded for their efforts.

Innovation is the process through which ideas are put into action to create something new or to enhance an existing product or service. ISO TC 279 defines innovation as "a new or altered entity realizing or dispersing value" in the standard ISO 56000:2020. Others have various definitions, but most share an emphasis on novelty, development, and dissemination of ideas and technology.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored on Organizational alignment theory, Reinforcement theory and Empowerment theory.

Organizational Alignment Theory

Alignment theory in organizations was established by S.W. Semler (1997). Organizational alignment theory examines how well an organization's strategy, structure, and culture work together. Through the elimination of internal obstacles to collaboration and performance that would otherwise impede the efficiency and effectiveness of work toward these objectives, this agreement provides an internal climate that enables attainment of the organization's strategic goals. When an organization's leadership and HRD procedures successfully foster consensus across all six dimensions of alignment (process, incentive system, values, norms, performance, and environment), that company should reap the advantages of enhanced internal organizational performance. Alignment in an organization is more of a condition than a result. It's a scale that goes from total antagonism to optimal cooperation. Organizational alignment is not something that can be manufactured, but rather nurtured and honed to perfection. Indicative of the highest potential for success in achieving the organization's strategic objectives is the tightest possible alignment.

Alignment in the workplace encompasses a wide range of concepts that all work together. The first structural area of alignment, for instance, is concordance between the aims of various tiers of activity within an organization's structure. Organizations that are well-aligned design a logical hierarchy of objectives for their most important processes, their sub-processes, their teams, and their individual tasks, such that the results of any process or activity contribute directly to the success of the process level of which it is a part (Barsky & Dittmann, 1990). Organizational members deliberately design procedures in this manner to boost productivity and eliminate roadblocks. It is easier for an organization to achieve its strategic objectives when its procedures are systematically constructed to support the achievement of lower-level goals, as is the case with this cascade of goals, than if the organization had been built to support the achievement of those lower-level goals. Alignment's systemic agreement of the incentive system with the strategic objectives, values, and tactics is the second structural element. A strong effect on individual and group behavior is exerted by the organizational motivational structure established by rules that reward punishment and give incentives.

Reinforcement Theory

Behavioral scientists John Watson, Ivan Pavlov, E. L. Thorndike, and B. F. Skinner are the forefathers of reinforcement theory. It posits that humans may be conditioned to continue rewarded actions and stop unrewarded behaviors via the use of incentives and penalties, some of which can be intangible. By repeating this process, a link is formed in the brain between a certain action and its subsequent reward or punishment. People are more inclined to repeat actions that result in a positive end, according to Thorndike's (1911) rule of effect, which forms the basis of the notion. Organizations have also made use of the principles of reinforcement theory. Organizational behavior modification theory (Bandura, 1969; 1986; Luthans & Stajkovic, 1999; Stajkovic and Luthans, 1997; as mentioned in Collis and Hussey, 2009) is a kind of reinforcement theory that focuses on changing worker behavior via planned reward interventions. You receive what you encourage is the key concept of the idea (Luthans & Stajkovic 1999 as cited in Collis & Hussey, 2009).

Empowerment Theory

Both organizational behavior and empowerment are discussed in Kanter's (1993) theory of empowerment. Workplaces where workers have easy access to information, tools, support, and opportunities to learn and grow are seen as more conducive to empowerment under this view. The term "empowerment" refers to both a value orientation for community work and a theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over decisions that affect one's own life, the functioning of an organization, and the quality of life in a community. In 1995, Perkins and Zimmerman found. The weak and downtrodden have been stigmatized, thus it is logical to assume that empowerment theory will help alleviate some of the resulting impotence. As a primary aim and method of social work practice, client empowerment is an essential concept to keep in mind. As pointed out by Kluska et al. (2004), psychological empowerment includes things like a sense of competence, autonomy, work purpose, and the capacity to affect one's organization. Empowered workers are more invested in their jobs, take more responsibility for their actions, and are more capable of meeting their employers' expectations (Degner, 2005). Kanter's idea has been extensively applied to the field of professional nursing (Kluska et al.; Mangold et al. 2006; Siu et al., 2005), demonstrating how organizational structures that provide easy access to resources may encourage workers to take initiative and produce higher-quality results.

According to Erickson et al. (2003), empowerment takes place when a company really empowers its employees and when those employees react to that empowerment with mutual interest and the aim of furthering the business's success.

Issues / Gap in Literature

Throughout the years and in the many studies conducted, Soft human Resource alignment has received little attention whereas Human Resource development has received a disproportionate amount of focus. Despite Soft human Resource alignment being a novel notion in the field of organizational management, (Kluska et al.; Mangold et al. 2006) only a small number of research have been conducted on the topic thus far. Humans, despite the enormous value Soft Human Resource alignment gives to corporate performance, fail to recognize its importance, which in turn hinders the achievement of company goals and objectives.

Soft human resource alignment is still in its infancy in terms of its application inside organizations, hence there is a need to bridge the gap in its implementation and develop the idea further if it is to become relevant. Because there has been a lack of research on the relationship between HR alignment and employee empowerment, and because the technique used in this study has not previously been examined, it is hoped that this research will help close this gap.

Contribution to Knowledge

By presenting empirical review on how soft human resource alignment may assist to promote creativity in organization, this research has made a substantial addition to the current body of knowledge. Furthermore, by investigating the moderating role of organizational culture on the relationship between soft human resource alignment and creativity, this research adds to the current literature on both topics.

Conclusions

In conclusion, aligning soft human resource practices—particularly communication and business transparency—with creativity is pivotal for organizational development. Strong communication and clear transparency establish a foundation of trust and openness, which is essential for fostering a collaborative and innovative culture. By implementing measures that encourage initiative and support innovation, organizations can effectively harness their employees' creative potential. This alignment not only enhances problem-solving and adaptability but also contributes to a more dynamic and engaged workforce, driving overall success and growth.

Recommendations

In respect to the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made.

- 1) Alignment between management and soft human resources is important because it increases employee agency, which in turn aids in the achievement of corporate objectives.
- 2) Whenever a company decides it needs to boost productivity, it should implement a soft human resource alignment strategy, and then, after that goal has been achieved, it should switch to a softer strategy, such as a horizontal or vertical alignment that empowers employees.
- 3) In order to improve the process creativity in line with your business, management should create a suitable human resource management policy.

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