

Human Resource Management The Case of the X Footwear Company

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Abstract. The leather and footwear industry in Vietnam is currently faced with a shortage of human resources (HR). Therefore, HR competition inside the industry is vigorous. The most important task of managers is how to appeal to talented, skilled workers and limit the number of skilled workers leaving companies to work for competitors. In order to appeal to and maintain talented people, companies should pay more attention to reward policies as well as motivation policies for them. This research focuses on the case study at the X Footwear Company, based on studying the human resource management (HRM) of the company. A questionnaire was designed to collect data related to HRM from employees. More specifically, the questionnaires concentrated on: (1) performance appraisal, (2) wages and rewarding, (3) the working environment, and (4) training. Results from 350 responses provide a detailed picture about HRM at the X Footwear Company. We also draw some implications for management, limitations of this study and recommendations for research about this topic in the future.

Keywords: Human resource management (HRM), firm performance, X Footwear Company.

1. Introduction

The Doi moi (renovation) policy has opened up new opportunities for Vietnam to make full use of its inherent comparative advantages, notably relatively untapped natural resources and an abundant and low-cost workforce. These advantages are being exploited to increase Vietnam's exports, which helps generate an increasing flow of foreign income for economic growth and industrialization, and has made it become the fastest growing economy in Southeast Asia. Vietnam has also attracted significant inflows

of foreign direct investment (FDI). FDI has not only generated profits for foreign investors, but has also represented an important capital source, bringing in technology transfer and advanced managerial skills (Quang and Van der Heijden, 2009; Thang et al., 2010).

More specifically, the world leather and footwear industry continues the trend of moving manufacturing to developing countries, especially nations that have a favourable investment environment and stable politics like Vietnam (CIEM, 2006). This creates several opportunities for Vietnamese companies. However, they also are faced with more concentrated competition from overseas. Therefore, how can companies survive,

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especially while operating in an industry with many competitors? How can the companies utilize HR to encourage business activities and improve employees' incomes? How can local domestic enterprises adopt some of the HR practices - emphasizing training and incentive compensation rather than the base wage?

This study attempts to answer the above questions by using a case study approach (Yin, 2003) to analyse the HRM activities at X Footwear Company. The case study is a suitable research strategy when it is necessary to study the phenomenon empirically in its context. The advantage of the case study method is accurate control for all other factors that may influence HRM and a lack of insufficient data. The empirical evidence was collected by personal observation through a desk study, on-site visits, and a survey questionnaire in the X Footwear Company.

2. Theoretical Framework

In a rapidly changing and competitive environment, HRM is seen as a strategic factor in influencing not only the success of organizations but also that of nations. HRM has assumed considerable importance in both the theory and practice of management of

organizations. The developments are not confined to any particular country, being found internationally in both developed and developing countries. That is not to say that there is a universal model of HRM applicable to all countries. With that caveat in mind, let us briefly review the various theoretical approaches to HRM.

Fombrun and his colleagues (1984) at Michigan Business School launched a model, which emphasized that organizational effectiveness depends on achieving a tight fit between HR strategy and the business strategy of the firm. In short, strategic HRM should be seen as the overlapping part of both strategic and general management on the one hand, and personnel management on the other. The selection system ensures the deployment of individuals with the appropriate aptitudes, knowledge and experience. The appraisal system enables the firm on a regular basis to assess whether performance is satisfactory. The reward system distinguishes between different levels of performance. Finally, the development system should be available in those instances where the appraisal system indicates performance shortcomings (Figure 1).

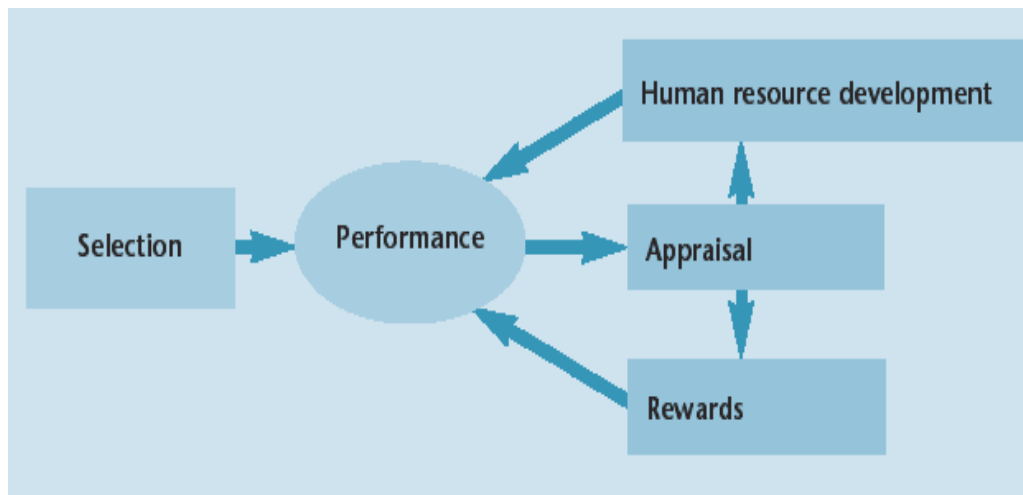


Figure 1: The Michigan model of HRM
 Source: Fombrun, Tichy, and Devanna (1984).

In its transition economy, Vietnam, has old technology and unstable economic conditions. However, the Government has put HR as a priority during the national development progress. In such an economy, HRM is a composition of theories, policies and functional supporting HR, training and developing as well as retaining employees in an organization to achieve the optimal results for both the organization and employees. More specifically, HRM activities encourage employees to contribute effectively to the objectives of the organization and help them to achieve individual objectives. Adopting the HRM model of Fombrun et al. (1984) and applying it to Vietnam, researchers have developed an

HRM model for the Vietnamese context (Dung, 2001; Gary Dessler, 2003; Diem and Quan, 2007; Thang and Quang, 2011).

To contribute to the theoretical literature, a theoretical framework was developed and proposed to fulfil the requirements for analysing HRM and firm performance issues, shown in Figure 2. This figure, is based on the fundamental premises of HRM activities and firm performance. HRM activities are predicated on contributing to higher-level group and organization objectives, results, and performance. A number of HRM activities are included - recruitment, training and development, performance appraisal, benefit and compensation, and working environment.

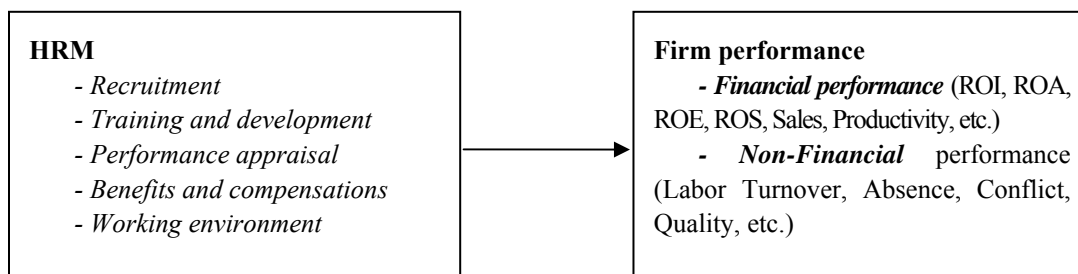


Figure 2: A framework to analyse HRM activities
Source: Thang, Quang, and Buyens (2010).

3. Methodology

The main research methodology to be applied in this research is qualitative. Information and data related to HRM of the X Footwear Company was collected via:

A Desk study: A literature review of relevant documents and materials on theories of HRM was conducted. Study of the selected case organization's reports, data and background description will also be accomplished to provide an inclusive picture and a profound analysis for report writing.

On-site visits: The empirical evidence was collected by personal observation through on-site visits and interviews with the executives and functional managers of the X Footwear Company.

Survey questionnaire: The questionnaire was designed to collect data related to HRM from the

X Footwear Company employees. More specifically, the questionnaires concentrated on: (1) performance appraisal, (2) wages and rewarding, (3) the working environment, and (4) training and development. More detail about the questionnaires are in the appendix. The survey via questionnaires was delivered to all employees and there were 350 responses. For data entry and analysis SPSS software was used.

4. Results and Discussions

Recruitment

Through on-site visits, we found that job rotation and personnel transfer was taking place effectively, ensuring there were sufficient number of employees in departments and workshops and at busy events such as trade

fairs and ceremonies. The company cooperates with other organizations to recruit labour including the Job Centre of Vinh Phuc Province, in collaboration with the College of Industry No. 3 and the College of Irrigation. However, recruitment still needs improving in some aspects, as follows:

The administration function and HRM function are combined in one division and that leads to one person being responsible for joint tasks. This person is responsible for administrative issues and is also in charge of wages and rewarding for employees. The recruitment group is not in charge of HR planning, therefore, they cannot be active in recruitment. The recruitment group is currently overloaded due to the large number of labour requests with urgent needs, but the company does not have enough staff to serve this function.

The company website is designed with a Recruitment tab. However, it is not very effective due to a lack of attention. If you click on the tab, you can see only one form of information to fill in to send to the HR department. There is no information on vacant positions or task information.

The cooperation between the administration department, the HR department and other departments, business units, factories is not coordinated, especially in interviewing technician candidates. The interviews are conducted without the participation of a technical department representative. In addition, HR planning is just simply proposing the number of employees for recruitment to each department in a year.

Performance appraisal

The result of the survey showed 59 responses (approximately 16.85%) said the performance appraisal is fair and accurate. Fifty-seven responses (approximately 16.28%) believe the upper level managers are not capable to provide an accurate performance appraisal. Two hundred and fifty responses (approximately 71.42%) saw the benefits of performance appraisal as supporting them with a clear working plan and personal training and development. Only 62 responses (approximately 17.71%) saw no improvement from performance appraisal. Eighty-one responses (approximately 23.14%) said the current performance appraisal method is not suitable. More detail about the results are in Table 1.

Table 1: Performance appraisal

Statements	Number of responses (350 employees)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Performance appraisal is fair and accurate	8 2.29%	12 3.43%	39 11.14%	54 15.43%	82 23.43%	77 22%	78 22.29%
You believe that your manager has sufficient ability to evaluate your performance	15 4.29%	16 4.57%	26 7.43%	62 17.71%	98 28%	71 20.29%	62 17.71%
Performance appraisal process helps you to have a clear plan on training and career development	11 3.14%	12 3.43%	22 6.29%	55 15.71%	71 20.29%	84 24%	95 27.14%
Performance appraisal is useful to improve quality of performance	25 7.14%	7 2%	30 8.57%	67 19.14%	91 26%	72 20.57%	58 16.57%
The current performance appraisal method is suitable	33 9.43%	18 5.14%	30 8.57%	78 22.29%	81 23.14%	52 14.86%	58 16.57%

Source: Author survey 2012.

In general, employees were satisfied with performance appraisal. However, the limitation here is that the company does not have an official performance appraisal. When the company expands, the number of employees will increase sharply and the labour force become more diversified. The performance appraisal will need to be improved to encourage a promotion attitude among employees. Talented people will expect to receive concrete performance appraisals in accordance with suitable rewards. The competition will be more vigorous if manager evaluation is just general. The manager evaluation will not answer employees' expectation. This is a matter that needs more attention from the management board of the company.

Benefits and compensations

The survey results showed that 245 responses (approximately 70%) said they did not receive high wages. Two hundred and thirty-one responses (approximately 66%) said their salary had not increased. Two hundred and twelve responses (approximately 60.57%) said they could not rely on income received from the company to maintain their standard of living. Only 93 responses (approximately 26.57%) thought the salary equal to their contribution. One hundred and twenty-six responses (approximately 36%) think their salary and wages are fair. More detail about results are in Table 2.

Table 2: Benefits and compensations

Statements	Number of responses (350 employees)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
You receive high salary	115 32.85%	62 17.71%	68 19.42%	52 14.85%	30 8.57%	14 4%	9 2.57%
Your salary is increased periodically	122 34.86%	55 15.71%	54 15.43%	67 19.14%	36 10.29%	8 2.29%	8 2.29%
You can maintain your living standards with income received from company	103 29.43%	56 16%	53 15.14%	55 15.71%	37 10.57%	23 6.57%	23 6.57%
Wages are equal to your contribution	67 19.14%	38 10.86%	65 18.57%	87 24.86%	59 16.86%	21 6%	13 3.71%
Wages, income paid fairly	58 16.57%	27 7.71%	56 16%	83 23.71%	64 18.29%	35 10%	27 7.71%

Source: Author survey 2012.

Table 2 shows that the salary system of the Company is not motivated to the needs of the employees. Most employees are not satisfied with their salary. Employees say they could not maintain a reasonable standard of living with the income they get from their work and so they do not contribute passionately to the company. Many of them see the salary as not equal to their contribution. Therefore, they are depressed and may leave the work at any time to join any company that can pay them more highly.

Working environment

The survey results show that 137 responses (approximately 39.14%) said the work is high pressure. Eighty-seven responses

(approximately 24.85%) said they are requested to work overtime frequently. Two hundred and ninety responses (approximately 82.85%) said equipment at the working stations is clean. Two hundred and seventy-one responses (approximately 77.42%) said their job is secure and they are not worried about losing their job. More details about the results are in Table 3. Based on the above figures, we can see that the working environment is quite good. Most of the employees are satisfied with the working environment and feel safe to work there.

Table 3: Working environment

Statements	Number of responses (350 employees)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The work is conducted without high pressure	52 14.86%	38 10.86%	47 13.43%	67 19.14%	68 19.43%	41 11.71%	37 10.57%
Your work does not require you to work overtime	28 8%	19 5.43%	40 11.43%	38 10.86%	72 20.57%	73 20.86%	80 22.86%
Equipment at the work place is clean and safe	7 2%	9 2.57%	17 4.86%	27 7.71%	71 20.295	84 24%	135 38.57%
Security of work is good, no worries of losing job	12 3.43%	7 2%	13 3.71%	47 13.43%	59 16.865	85 24.29%	127 36.29%

Source: Author survey 2012.

Training and development

The survey results show that 20 responses (approximately 5.71%) said they were not provided with enough knowledge and skills to work. Only 12 responses (approximately 3.42%) said they participated in training programs that provided them with sufficient working skills. Fourteen responses (approximately 4%) said the company does not conduct an annual training needs identification survey. Only 14 responses (approximately 4.0%) agreed that the company does not have

policies supporting employees in training. Two hundred and seventy-three responses agreed that the company conducts post-training evaluations. Two hundred and sixty-nine responses (approximately 76.85%) said that the company is doing training effectively. More detail about the results are in Table 4. These numbers show most employees are pleased with the training policy of the company. We can see that the training policy of the company is quite effective, creating favourable conditions for employees to develop and improve.

Table 4: Training and development

Statements	Number of responses (350 employees)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
You have been provided sufficient knowledge and skills to work	1 0.29%	4 1.14%	15 4.29%	42 12%	72 20.57%	91 26%	125 35.71%
The company conducts a training needs identification survey annually	2 0.57%	4 1.14%	6 1.71%	35 10%	88 25.14%	96 27.43	119 34%
The company has a policy which supports training for employees	0 0%	4 1.14%	10 2.86%	44 12.57%	79 22.57%	94 26.86%	119 34%
The company conducts post-training evaluations	4 1.14%	5 1.43%	22 6.29%	46 13.14%	90 25.71%	70 20%	113 32.29%
In general, training is effective	3 0.86%	7 2%	23 6.57%	48 13.71%	86 24.57%	81 23.14%	102 29.14%

Source: Author survey 2012.

However, the training department has not conducted a job analysis and training need identification survey. Training evaluation also needs improving. In addition, the company has not implemented career orientation and career development programs for employees. On the other hand, the leaders of company are all very experienced, but they have not shared their experience in internal training programs.

Recommendations and Suggestions for the X Footwear Company

Recruitment

Complete a job description for each position: In order to recruit qualified staff, the company needs to not only conduct HR planning effectively to establish a long-term HR policy and an annual recruitment plan, but also needs to prepare job descriptions for the different positions. A job description helps clarify duties and the tasks of positions and departments and to avoid overlaps. This is one of the most important factors to improve management capability and to ensure fairness and transparency in performance appraisal and staffing. With the above-mentioned benefits, job descriptions are of the certain request during the development progress of the company.

Rational staffing: Every department should be consistent in staffing, assigning the right person to the right place whether they are newcomers or current employees. Heads of divisions or departments should be the person in charge of staffing. In order to conduct the assignment properly, the company should pay attention to the following: list all functions and major duties of the department, based on the company regulations/policies; list all functions/duties that are currently conducted by the department; and compare the practical list of duties to the ones in the policies of the company to realize additional duties, and to adjust policies to avoid overlaps.

Performance appraisal

Apply a 360 degree method to assess the capabilities and performance of employees: In order to maintain a quality HR, it is required

that the company not only pays attention to wages and welfare but also develops a suitable performance appraisal system. Appropriate performance appraisal will create positive competition among employees. Currently, many companies use terminology such as: "staff evaluation" and conduct "staff evaluation process". Therefore, some managers consider staff as the target of evaluation, and then they evaluate the staff member individually (personal characteristics, habits, communication, relationships and so on) instead of evaluating the contribution of employees to the company. When we use the term "performance appraisal" we mean the managers will assess what their staff have done to contribute to the objectives of the company and the company should pay them based on their capabilities.

IT application: Information technology in companies is increasing and leads to changes in every aspect of a company's operation. IT helps a company operate more accurately, scientifically and effectively. The company should apply IT into HRM as per the following recommendations:

- Employee management: store and update all information relating to employees from recruitment until they leave the company.

- A Finger print enrolment system will store information on the working time of employees while travelling between office, shops, and workshops and so on. The system could help the company manage the working time of employees and support managers in a performance appraisal at the end of each month.

- A Reminder application: This application manages the amount of work of each individual. Tasks include assigned tasks and individual tasks. All tasks are tagged with an appropriate status: incomplete, be prepared to complete, in progress, rate of completion, deadline and so on.

Benefit and compensation

Wages are a common concern in the company. The average salary of workers is

quite low and not equal to their contribution (X Footwear Company, 2010). This is considered as the main reason that many skilled workers have left their job. The change in wage structure is a critical matter for the company so the company needs to establish a project team to conduct this field of work. Based on the organizational structure of the company, the author proposes the following solutions to wage structure:

- Develop an internal staff level system.
- Consider and analyse the current wages paid by the company and compare them to others in the market.
- Design and propose a new wage structure that is fair and competitive.
- Undertake preliminary consulting on effective salary calculations for employees.

Working environment

Motivate employees and take care of their health, safety and life: The company should cooperate with the Trade Union to develop a corporate culture where all members are working and helping each other and are being encouraged to improve their knowledge, education level, professional level and managerial skills through internal and outsourced courses so that company becomes a second home of the workers - especially skilled workers and experienced managers - thereby increasing their commitment to the company. The company should organize parties, group tours, and team building activities more frequently to recognize the contributions of employees to the company. Currently, the company is doing these activities quite well. However, it needs to be more creative in order to encourage the participation of all employees. Therefore, event organizers must be very creative with new ideas to encourage other members.

Training and development

Training need identification: The training needs are all the needs that can be fulfilled by imparting training to the participants in a program and that training thereby will improve the productivity of the participants and meet the company objectives. Training needs identification includes the following activities:

developing tools for collecting data on training needs (individual questionnaires, group questionnaires, managerial level questionnaires). The training department should develop training demand identification planning, collect information on training needs, and analyse training needs information that has been gathered.

Conduct training evaluations: It is necessary to evaluate training programs and training activities so that there can be an adjustment in time and an improvement in training quality and training effectiveness through the following methods: multiple choice, evaluation and conclusions of experience with participants evaluating the program. With the mode of participants evaluating programs, the evaluation would be made in the middle and at the end of the training course. Outsourced training centres would provide the company with an evaluation summary for each course and for the whole program. The training department of the company would complete a training report which would be submitted to upper level managers.

5. Conclusion

The Michigan model is known as the “matching model” or “best-fit” approach to HRM. In essence, it requires that HR strategies have a tight fit to the overall strategies of the business. The model identifies five common HR processes performed in every organization. These include recruitment, performance, appraisal, rewards, and development. However, in reality, strategies are often determined and operationalized on a more intuitive, political and subjective level. Certainly, the decision-making is more complex than the model allows. Therefore, we added the working environment factor in HRM. More specifically, the X Footwear Company needs to consider selection, better rewards, planning and appraisal as leading to effectiveness. Senior management

can only be effective if there is strategic integration, functional flexibility, communication, an adaptable organisational structure, and high commitment and capacity to manage innovation of the company.

Foreign investment has created the opportunity for local domestic enterprises to adopt some of the HR practices, emphasizing training (CIEM, 1992) and incentive compensation rather than the base wage (Hoang, 1995). HRM improvements at X Footwear Company could be very meaningful because they could create benefits for not only the company in particular but also for the whole footwear and leather industry of Vietnam in general. Corporate governance has followed the

management style of state-owned companies for a long time. The system has its strengths but also present serious problems that need to be fixed in the coming time to support the development directions of the company.

This paper proposes some recommendations and suggestions for the company in order to improve HRM activities in the future. However, the recommendations and suggestions will not be effective and efficient without commitment from the management level as well as a change in thinking of the top management. Future research is needed to estimate the impact of HR activities (i.e., training, benefit and compensation) on firm performance at the X Footwear Company.

Appendix: Questionnaire on Human Resource Management

In order to support management board to develop suitable HR policy as well as increase satisfaction level of employees towards the company, kindly spend your time to complete this questionnaire. All answers are considered as valuable without being true or false. All information and answers will be kept as confidential.

Kindly indicate your agreement with following statements. Mark X from 1 to 7 for each below statement (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “Absolutely agree”):

1. Performance appraisal

Code	Statements	Agreement level						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
app 1	Performance appraisal is fair and accurate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
app 2	You believe that your manager has sufficient ability to evaluate your performance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
app 3	Performance appraisal process helps you to have clearer plan on training and career development	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
app 4	Performance appraisal is useful to improve quality of performance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
app 5	Do you think current performance appraisal method is suitable?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Benefits and compensation

Code	Statements	Agreement level						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ben 1	You receive a high salary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ben 2	Your salary is increased periodically	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ben 3	You can maintain your living standards with income received from company	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ben 4	Wages are equal to your contribution	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ben 5	Wages, income are paid fairly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. Working environment

Code	Statements	Agreement level						
env 1	The work is conducted without high pressure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
env 2	Your work does not require you to work overtime	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
env 3	Equipment in the work place is clean and safe	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
env 4	Security of work is good, no worries of losing job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. Training and development

Code	Statements	Agreement level						
tra 1	You have been provided sufficient knowledge and skills to work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
tra 2	You have attended training programs fitting with job requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
tra 3	The company conducts training needs identification annually	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
tra 4	The company has policy which support training for employees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
tra 5	The company conducts post-training evaluation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
tra 6	In general, training is effective	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Quản lý nguồn nhân lực Nghiên cứu trường hợp Công ty Giày X

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Tóm tắt. Ngành công nghiệp giày da Việt Nam đang đối mặt với tình trạng thiếu hụt nguồn nhân lực. Vì vậy, các công ty trong ngành công nghiệp này đang cạnh tranh mạnh mẽ về nhân lực. Một trong những nhiệm vụ quan trọng của các chủ doanh nghiệp là làm thế nào thu hút được công nhân có kỹ năng và hạn chế tình trạng họ chuyển sang các công ty đối thủ cạnh tranh. Để giữ và duy trì công nhân có kỹ năng, các công ty cần chú ý đến các chính sách thưởng cũng như tạo động lực cho người lao động. Nghiên cứu này tập trung vào hoạt động quản lý nguồn nhân lực tại Công ty Giày X. Một bộ câu hỏi đã được nhóm nghiên cứu thiết kế nhằm thu thập thông tin liên quan đến hoạt động quản lý nguồn nhân lực từ nhân viên. Cụ thể, bộ câu hỏi này tập trung vào các khía cạnh sau: (1) đánh giá năng lực, (2) lương và thưởng, (3) môi trường làm việc, và (4) hoạt động đào tạo cho nhân viên. Kết quả thu được từ 350 bộ câu hỏi phản hồi đã cung cấp một bức tranh tổng thể về hoạt động quản lý nguồn nhân lực tại công ty này. Chúng tôi cũng đưa ra các gợi ý cho hoạt động quản lý, các hạn chế của nghiên cứu này và những đề xuất cho các nghiên cứu tiếp theo trong tương lai.