INTRODUCING HRM THROUGH PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we describe how problem-based learning (PBL) can help students understand the fundamentals of human resource management (HRM). In PBL, students are presented with problems and must find a solution to them. In the process of doing so, they develop the knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of the problems and develop other skills for problem-solving, finding solutions when all information is not known, and working in a team setting. After introducing problem-based learning, we present two versions of a semester-long exercise that instructors can quickly adapt. In version 1, we provide students with problems to be resolved that address the various functions of HRM. In version 2, students create problems or mini-cases that they then go on to resolve. In the process of solving these problems, students develop critical thinking skills and "content knowledge" related to HRM functions.

INTRODUCTION

Typically, students are introduced to HRM through a lecture-based classroom experience, followed by the case studies found in their textbooks. The case discussions are intended to determine if students can apply their learning from the lectures. The progression is from the transmission of theory to their application. In this paper, we consider a contrasting approach to learning, one in which students learn theory by resolving problems and, in doing so, they develop problem-solving and many other skills. First, we describe the problem-based learning approach, and we discuss how it differs from traditional lecture-based approaches. Then we discuss how PBL has been applied as well as its empirical support. Finally, we present two versions of an exercise that we have used successfully in introductory HRM courses.

PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

What is PBL?

PBL is "a student-centered pedagogical strategy that poses significant, contextualized, real-world, ill-structured situations while providing resources, guidance, instruction, and opportunities for reflection to learners as they develop content knowledge and problem-solving skills" (Hoffman & Ritchie, 1997, p. 97). PBL is centered on problems (De Graaf & Kolmos, 2003; Waters & Johnston, 2004) that reflect clinical practice (Kilroy, 2004) or, more generally, professional settings. Problems can address theoretical or practical problems, but they must be based on real, or at least realistic, situations (Allen, Donham, & Bernhardt, 2011).

In a typical PBL classroom, students resolve problems without receiving all of the relevant information needed to solve them. Students work in teams to define the nature and scope of problems, identify and seek out the additional information that they need, and find viable solutions to the problems at hand (Kilroy, 2004). Students must apply the knowledge that they have gained through their research not only to solve problems but also to communicate the results of their findings. As indicated by Allen et al. (2011, p. 220):

> The teams form questions based on self-identified gaps in their knowledge, and they use these questions to guide subsequent independent research outside the classroom, with research tasks parceled out among team members. When the students reconvene, they present and discuss their findings, integrating their new knowledge and skills into the problem context. As they move through the stages of a complex problem, they continue to define new areas of needed learning in pursuit of a solution.

How Does PBL Differ From Traditional Courses?

Fit with current workplace needs (uncertain transfer of knowledge versus development of collaborative problem-solving skills). Traditional lecture-based courses presume that students will be able to transfer their newly acquired knowledge to workplace situations at a later date. However, in such cases, the learning transfer process is complex: when theory is learned 'out of context,' students may not know how to apply it to 'real world' problems. As Davidson and Major (2014) argue, students can no longer rely upon their memory in order to be effective in the workplace. Most jobs required skilled problem-solving rather than rote

memory of concepts and ideas. In contrast, PBL inherently requires that students develop these problem-solving skills when resolving problems are that complex and messy, just like 'real world' problems. As Delaney, Pattinson, McCarthy, & Beecham (2017, p. 214) point out, "PBL provides meaningful learning in which learners are continually challenged and engaged in developing their skills; this educational strategy also helps students in transferring their learning to their work settings, and thus contribute to enhancing personal and organizational performance."

Role of theory (given priority versus incorporated as needed): Traditional lecture-based approaches to learning rely on the "bucket theory" (Allen et al., 2011) in which students are filled with the fundamental knowledge that they may need to retrieve at the right moment in the future. In PBL, students learn theory as and when it is needed to resolve a specific situation. In this manner, a theory is integrated into rather than 'disconnected' from the problems that they are meant to address. As a result, students develop skills in searching out relevant theories and research and using these to resolve issues.

Role of students (passive recipients versus active self-directed learners). Traditional approaches to learning are content- or subject-centered (Kilroy, 2004); i.e., they emphasize the subject matter that instructors communicate with their students. In this manner, students are passive recipients of their instructors' insights. In contrast, PBL is student-centered and relies heavily on students' ability and motivation to learn (De Graaf & Kolmos, 2003; Walters & Johnston, 2004). PBL empowers students to search for information relevant for problem resolution. As such, it requires that students adopt a more active posture toward their learning process in comparison with traditional educational approaches that adopt more passives modalities (e.g., listening to lectures; Davidson, & Major, 2014). By relying on small-group learning, PBL favors student engagement in active learning, which helps them develop their thinking and problem-solving skills as well as their content knowledge (Kilroy, 2003). So, with PBL, students do not 'stand-alone' in fostering their learning, given that they develop their knowledge and skills by interacting and discussing problems in small groups (Kilroy, 2004; Waters & Johnston, 2004). Because each individual brings their own set of skills to the discussion, the process of sharing perspectives helps each group member acquire both content knowledge and problem-solving skills.

Role of instructors (content provider versus learning facilitator). In PBL courses, instructors serve as facilitators of learning rather than content providers. As facilitators, they guide students by asking probing questions and monitoring group processes (Major & Eck, 2000). Moreover, PBL instructors help students identify their learning needs and encourage them to assess and direct their learning processes (Boud & Feletti, 1991). Finally, PBL instructors "guide them by monitoring group discussions and intervening when appropriate, asking questions that probe accuracy, relevance, and depth of information and analyses, raising new (or neglected) issues for consideration (Allen et al., 2011, p. 21). PBL instructors must help students learn about concepts, facts, and processes related to the course content through the resolution of problem situations. However, as mentioned by Kilroy (2003), not all instructors are prepared to adopt the (more complex) role of facilitator in their classrooms. Also, instructors may hesitate to use PBL because it tends to be more time-consuming to set up and organize than lecture-based courses.

Does PBL Work?

Broad application. PBL has been used in a variety of domains, such as social sciences, mathematics, and health sciences (see Davidson & Major, 2014). For example, in their study of nursing students, Tiwari, Lai, So, and Yuen, K. (2006) constructed problem situations based on information derived from real patients. They found that students who had participated in a PBL learning experience scored higher on critical thinking measures that those who attended lecture-based classes. There are few reported studies on the use of PBL in a management education context. We found one article that describes how a lecture-based HRM course for pharmacy students was redesigned into a PBL format in which students were provided with complex, "ill-structured problems" to be resolved (Monk-Tutor, 2001). As a result of the PBL design, "students improved both content knowledge and higher-level cognitive skills such as problem-solving, conflict resolution, and communication during the course" (Monk-Tutor, 2001, p. 65).

Research results. There have been many studies of the efficacy of PBL including meta-analyses and meta-syntheses of meta-analyses (for example, Albanese & Mitchell, 1993; Colliver, 2000; Dochy, Segers, Van den Bossche, & Gijbels, 2003; Gijbels, Dochy, Van den Bossche, & Segers, 2005; Kasim, 1999; Newman, 2003; Savin-Baden & Major, 2004; Strobel & Van Barneveld, 2009; Vernon & Blake, 1993). Overall, relative to traditional education strategies, PBL results in superior cognitive and affective outcomes. Regarding knowledge retention, studies show mixed results depending on how knowledge retention is measured. As summarized by Yew and Goh (2016, p. 76), "PBL is more effective than traditional approaches when the measurement of learning outcomes focused on long-term knowledge retention, performance or skill-based assessment and mixed knowledge and skills. It was only when the focus was on short-term knowledge acquisition and retention that PBL appeared less effective." In their study of MBA students experiencing either 'PBL then lecture' or 'lecture then PBL,' Capon and Kuhn (2004) found that members of both groups were similarly knowledgeable about the subject matter. However, the 'PBL then lecture' group members were better able to explain the concepts in integrative essays. Moreover, relative to students in traditional courses, students in PBL-based courses: (a) are better able to pace and progress in their studies (Severiens & Schmidt, 2009), (b) are more satisfied with their learning (Sobral, 1995), (c) consider their courses to be more engaging and useful (Albanese & Mitchell, 1993), and (d) offer higher teaching evaluations (de Vries, Schmidt, & de Graff, 1989; Schmidt, Dauphinee, & Patel, 1987).

HRM PBL EXERCISE

Objectives

This exercise helps students understand and apply the concepts of the varying HRM functions. By the end of the exercise, students should be able to:

1. Understand the HRM implications of various workplace situations.
2. Correctly identify the functions associated with various workplace situations.
3. Correctly identify solutions to various workplace situations.
4. Apply a problem solving/analytical orientation to dealing with HRM problems.

Participants and Time Requirements

In the past, we have undertaken both versions of this exercise with groups of 30 to 60 undergraduate students as part of an Introduction to Human Resource Management course. This exercise could easily be adapted to students at the MBA level who would likely provide more complex (and rich) problems to be resolved. This exercise spans an entire semester. Students are introduced to the exercise in the first class and, depending on the version adopted, invest their time in the remaining classes resolving the problems. The amount of class time required varies with the nature and number of problem situations to be addressed and the degree of preparation undertaken prior to the class. Previously, it has taken approximately 90 minutes for student group work and plenary debriefing. More or less time may be required depending on the approach that is used to carry out the exercise in class and how much work the students – individually and in groups – have done before class to resolve the problems. Typically, students have read the chapters in their HRM textbook that relate to the problems to be resolved.

Required Materials

The instructor must provide students with access to problem situations to be resolved. The instructor can post the problem situations on an instructional platform such as Moodle or a Cloud service or send the documents via email. No other materials are required.

Carrying out the Exercise

1. During the first class, instructors can **determine students' level of knowledge of HRM concepts and terminology** through the use of a brief case study such as the one prepared by Grimard and Cossette (2017). If students appear to struggle with the case study and HRM concepts, then instructors may choose the 'easier' version of this exercise (Version 1). In this version, students are provided with problem situations to be resolved rather than being required to develop the problem situations themselves (a task that may only be possible if students have at least a basic notion of HRM). Also during this class, instructors can help students form groups of five to six.

2. Instructors can **provide students with an overview of the Group Project as follows**: This group project adopts a problem-based approach towards building your knowledge and skills in human resource management. You will be learning all you need to know about HRM through the process of trying to find answers to problem situations that managers and employees are currently facing. In other words, problem-based learning is relevant, active, engaging, and rewarding. Thus, PBL stands in contrast to the traditional 'tell them and test them' approach that encourages passivity and memorization of concepts and theories that are detached from any real-world application. Problem-based learning requires that students take initiative to (a) Do their homework prior to each group meeting; (b) Contribute actively to all group meetings; (c) Present their group's work to the rest of the class for their learning and feedback, and (d) Provide feedback to other groups. In other words, in a problem-based course, you must direct your own learning, come to class well prepared and expect to play a leadership role in their group.

3. Next, in **Version 1** of this exercise, instructors provide students with the problems to be resolved, indicating how to access them. Instructors may create their own set of problem situations based on discussions with managers and employees or use the extensive sampling of problem situations to be resolved that are presented in Appendix A. Skip to step 5.

4. In **Version 2** of this exercise, students identify the problem situations themselves. Given that many students have work experience and, indeed, are working while they are pursuing their degree, they tend to be able to generate relevant and appropriate "problems." Instructors may provide students with the following instructions for doing so: All students must collect and post to the instructional platform two problem situations pertaining to any of the HRM functions and/ or the legal environment of HRM by September 11, 20XX. The source of these situations can be anyone they know (managers, coworkers, friends, family members, etc.). The problem situations should be specific and sufficiently detailed so that they can be analyzed without making many assumptions. Also, they should present some identifying information regarding the person who is confronting this situation. Here is an example: "I saw a blind ad in the paper the other day advertising for a Human Resource Manager for 'a local siding company.' They asked that all applications be submitted to a box number and include a handwritten letter and a resume. I am currently a human resources professional, and I think that this position would be a step up for me. Should I apply? - Claude, Human Resource

professional, Government"

5. Instructors should **provide students with the following instructions**:

   1) **Individual reports.** Students should prepare for their group's discussion of each problem situation (one HRM function per week) by doing their research and writing a report by themselves. As presented in Appendix B, the Individual Report should include several sections:

      a. The problem situation itself
      b. The key issues that are evident in the problem situation
      c. An analysis of the key issues (suing several resources including but not limited to the textbook)
      d. Recommended actions
      e. Reference list

      This Individual Report assignment is to be completed entirely on your own, without the help or consultation of others. Although two individual assignments may result in the same recommendations, the analyses and sources of support for any arguments that are made should not be identical in wording or content. In other words, students must be careful to not copy from someone else's assignment or copy words or ideas from articles without giving the authors full credit. To do either is considered to be plagiarism, which will result in a grade of 0 for the assignment and possibly other penalties.

   2) **Deadlines.** Individuals must post their reports to the instructional platform no later than 11 pm the day before the class in which your group will be discussing and preparing its analysis and recommendations to the problem situation. The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that all group members come to class prepared to fully contribute to their group discussions. A 1% penalty on the final grade will be assessed for: (a) Each individual report that hasn't been uploaded to the instructional platform by 11 pm on the indicated days, or (b) Reports that are of extremely poor quality. Poor quality reports are those that show that very little learning has taken place, that don't include all the sections noted above, and/or that contain particularly brief answers to questions.

   3) **Group analysis.** Each group will be assigned one problem situation to be resolved per week. Students should bring a copy (electronic and/or paper) of their assignments to the class in which their groups are addressing a problem situation. Groups will use 30 minutes of class time on this day to prepare a single group response to the problem situation using the format provided in the sample. Ideally, the group response will be a combination of all the individual responses. Furthermore, at this meeting, each group should decide how they will be presenting and discussing their recommendations to the rest of the class as well as soliciting their input. At this meeting, groups should also decide how/who will be preparing the revised and final version of the group response (Group Report).

   4) **Group presentation.** Each group must present their group report to the class. This report can be done in a creative, interactive fashion but should be no longer than 5 minutes so that there is time to solicit and receive feedback. Over the semester, each group member should have an opportunity to be the person in charge of the presentation on at least one occasion.

   5) **Group reports.** Prepare the final version of the group report. After each group has presented their group analysis and received feedback on it, they should prepare a final version of it and upload it to the instructional platform. The deadline for submitting these final versions is deferred to the last class so that each group has plenty of time to make whatever revisions are necessary.

   6) **Grading.** Group reports will be evaluated on the following criteria:

      • Was it submitted on time?
      • Is any part of the report plagiarized?
      • Are relevant key issues identified?
      • Does the analysis address the key issues?
      • Is the analysis based on at least two references to empirical evidence and/or the relevant employment laws?
      • Is the analysis appropriate (logical, in-depth)?
      • Are an appropriate recommendation and justification for the recommendation made?
      • Are sources fully and appropriately referenced?
      • Is the response written professionally?

6. **Class discussion of problem situations.** Instructors should provide groups with 30 minutes to prepare their group responses to the problem situation that they have been assigned. After 30 minutes, instructors should ask each group to present their problem situation and their response. Instructors should involve the class as a whole in discussions of the analysis and resolution of the problem situation and ensure that the relevant HRM function and the problem situation are appropriately addressed. By the end of each class, students should have an understanding of the HRM function addressed by the problem situation.

CONCLUSION

We have used this exercise in several Introduction to Human Resource Management courses. Once students are offered appropriate examples and assistance in creating problem situations, they can develop them without difficulty. Regarding the preparation of Individual Reports, initially, some students find this to be very challenging. However, with the support of their groups and the instructor, they quickly develop the skills necessary for preparing reports of reasonable quality. Although we haven't undertaken an evaluation of the results of our problem-based learning approach relative to alternative approaches such as lecture-based courses, informal feedback from students indicates that they have a better appreciation of the centrality of HRM in organizations and their ability to apply analytical techniques to HRM problems has improved substantially. They report that they have learned to resolve problems – HR or otherwise – by engaging in a structured analytical process.

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APPENDIX A –
Sampling of Problems to be Resolved

(These are modified versions of problems developed by students in previous problem-based Introduction to Human Resource Management courses.)

1. Human Resource Planning/Job Analysis

Problem 1.1

Our newly established company sells a wide range of office products such as pens and paper as well as more significant office supplies like computers. We are unsure of the strategy to use to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. We could use a cost leadership strategy to gain a competitive advantage through lower costs of operations and lower prices for products. We could use a differentiation strategy to gain a competitive advantage by creating a distinct product or offering a unique service. We could use the focus strategy to gain a competitive advantage by focusing on the needs of a specific segment(s) of the total market. What HRM strategy would be most appropriate for each of the corporate strategies? - Roger, HRM Director, Office Products Company

Problem 1.2

Our company has 10 full-time sales representatives who are experiencing their busiest sales period. With decreased sales expected in the next three months, I must decide whether to keep the employees on and run at a loss or to lay some of them off. Good sales reps are hard to find in the auto parts industry due to specific product knowledge, and I believe that my employees are the best to do the job. The equivalent of four full-time positions needs to be eliminated for these three months. If I lay them off, they will be unlikely to return. There are no other positions within the company for the employees since all departments are facing similar downsizing possibilities. What should I do? - Tom, Manager, auto parts sales company

Problem 1.3

I work in HRM for a foreign language program at the university. Due to recent cuts to our program, we have had to freeze the hiring of new instructors, although we expect our enrollment to increase in the next semester. This trend towards increasing enrollment is expected to continue in the next few terms. In order to avoid costly full-time instructors, we have hired new instructors on a need-only basis, letting them know that they will not be rehired in the next term. Is this our only option/reasonable? - Darek, HRM, university

Problem 1.4

I'm the owner of a local restaurant chain, and I'm in the process of acquiring more restaurants. The number of employees that I will be managing will increase from approx. 50 to approx. 150. I am considering hiring a human resource professional to manage all the staff in his restaurant chain, however, I also have the choice of letting the manager of each restaurant take care of things. Do the benefits of hiring an HR professional outweigh the costs in an industry where the employee turnover rate is high, and the supply of available workers fluctuates seasonally? - Bill, owner/manager, a restaurant chain

Problem 1.5

I'm the manager of a local manufacturing company that employs two full-time employees and one part-time employee in its workshop. Demand for our product depends upon the season, with demand at its highest from May 1 to Dec 31 and demand at its

lowest from Jan.1 to May 31. During times of high demand, the three employees often have more work than they can handle, and overtime is common. However, during the slower months, the part-time employee and at least one of the full-time employees are sent home due to a lack of work. In this industry, it takes at least a month to train a new employee and not everyone can handle the requirements of the position. If I lay off or continually send home the part-time employee, whom I consider to be an asset to the organization, I risk losing them to another company with no guarantee of finding a suitable replacement in time for our busy season. However, if I keep all three employees, the company will lose money because sales levels will not be high enough to cover their salaries. Should I keep all three employees, let the part-time employee go, or is there another solution? - Todd, a manager, a manufacturing company

Problem 1.6
Lately, at work, I've been asked to do tasks by my boss that I did not expect to do. These tasks aren't in my job description, and I'm not sure if I should do them (in part or in whole). I'm afraid that if I bring this up to my boss, he will reprimand me or feel threatened that I am questioning his authority. I do not want to do these tasks because I would have never taken the job if I knew they would be included. Should I bring this up to my boss or not? - Susan, secretary, law firm

Problem 1.7
My corporation's workforce consists of mostly tradespeople. With the amount of training, apprenticeship and experience needed to enter the workforce as a tradesperson, it has been forecasted that there will be a shortage of trained people within the next 10 years. To be able to enter into trades in my corporation, students are required to have certain high school courses in the math and science genre: algebra, geo-trig, physics, etc. The Board of Education has always had a shortage of math and science teachers in the rural setting so this becomes a barrier to a lot of students. In preparation for the retirement of the "baby boomer" generation, my corporation must become proactive in recruiting people into the trades. In this time of an economic reduction, it is up to the Recruitment department to find cost-effective ways to encourage careers in trades. In the past, we have participated in school career fairs and sponsored achievement awards to encourage math and science students. Our biggest competitor has implemented job shadowing and mentoring programs, but the budget requirements for this can be high. Please provide recommendations and assess whether our efforts will be more effective than our competitors. - Rita, a recruitment specialist, major oil company

Problem 1.8
I am a Human Resource Manager at an IT consulting company. I have learned that some important work-related tasks are being overlooked. At the same time, other tasks are being unknowingly completed be two or more employees (in other words, several people are doing work that only one person has to do). What can be done to create a more efficient and smoothly-run workplace? - Mary, human resource manager, IT consulting business

Problem 1.9
Recently, our organization has expanded, and management has decided that we need to have a bilingual (English and French) customer service telephone line that our clients can call during the weekdays. Our organization is located in a small city, and it is usually difficult to find qualified candidates that can speak French. Should I suggest to management that we lower our employee requirements in order to attract more candidates for these positions? - Laura, human resources, mid-sized business

Problem 1.10
I just successfully finished my firefighters' training and want to start working. The local fire department, however, has restrictions on how much employees can weigh to be able to apply there. I am 5 pounds over the restricted limit. In my training, I have successfully shown that I can perform on the job just as well, if not better, than the other people being trained. I feel that I am being discriminated against. What should I do? - Alex, firefighter candidate, a small city

Problem 1.11
At my work, we are thinking about creating a permanent trainer position. With a busy season coming up, we think that the trainer would be instrumental in training new employees (20-30 per year) and helping other employees with new company policies. The downside to this is the cost of the trainer during the quiet season. There already exists a permanent training program within our company. Furthermore, it requires a full-time commitment from the trainers across the country. As a group, they get together up to twice a year and go over the new policies and find out new ways to implement them in their regions. We are right on the fence as to having the right amount of staff to require a trainer at our location, but it is up to management discretion. The trainer could be created using an existing staff member. This would require procedures so the staff can apply and process applicants. The position would be one of a permanent nature and not by season. This person would prevent the trainer from the need to become retrained if a large gap occurs between training periods. This promotion would add extra responsibilities to the trainer and would require them to get a pay raise. The pay raise would be fine for when they are training but, during downtimes, this extra pay would take away from profits. Our region would also have to pay for the annual meetings that take place (we have to pay the costs of plane tickets and accommodations). We would temporarily promote the employee, but our company policies shy away from doing this. Once someone is promoted, they stay that way unless something happens regarding the performance or for personal reasons. Would it make sense to create this position, or let the managers take care of the responsibilities? - Jamie, head of corporate training, the movie industry

Problem 1.12
I don't trust HR, and I don't see what their 'added-value' is to me as an employee. What is their role supposed to be? Do they exist to protect the organization from its employees, or are they supposed to help employees? They have never been of any use to us employees or to the managers (they get in the way when we're hiring). - Roger, technician, private company

2. Legal Environment

Problem 2.1

As an employee of a fast-food chain restaurant for several years, I'm often scheduled for open shifts by management. These shifts start at a particular time; however, I never know when my shift would end and I'd be able to go home. It all depends on how busy it is on that particular day. Several times I would be sent home after 1 or 2 hours, and I was paid accordingly. I thought that I should be paid for a minimum of 3 hours, even if I was there for less than that. Was my employer taking advantage of me? - Jason Spezza, a fast-food employee

Problem 2.2

I'm a manager at a fast-food place earning about a dollar more than minimum wage. Every month there is a managers' meeting at 8:30 in the morning and sometimes on the weekend. The meetings last for about 2 hours, and all managers must attend. If you do not attend and don't have a good reason for missing one, the boss talks to you about why meetings are important and that it is part of your job. The problem is you don't get paid for the meetings, and if you miss one, you get in trouble. Should I demand to be paid? Not go to the meetings outright? Or suck it up and attend just like everybody else? - Joan, manager, fast food joint

Problem 2.3

I've been at my current job for about three years, and I've recently been scheduled for many overtime hours. I do not mind working overtime, as long as I get paid for it. That is the problem. I recently overheard some coworkers talking, and they mentioned that our head manager might be changing some of our hours on payroll. I started to keep close track of my hours and noticed that I have been missing some of the overtime that I work. I'm wondering if I should approach the head manager myself and mention the missing pay? I know that people have done this in the past. She told them that she was not changing the hours; rather, the accountant at head office was doing it. I know, from my current position, that she is fully in charge of payroll and overtime, and that she can change it before releasing it on Sundays. Should I confront her or should I simply contact the Labor Board? I feel that if I do mention it to her that she will simply come up with an excuse, but if I contact the Labour Board, she will know that it was me, and this will affect future reviews or promotions. What should I do? - Travis, swing manager, fast food restaurant

Problem 2.4

I work at a prestige cellular phone company. For the past few weeks, I needed to work overtime because the time allotted for specific tasks was insufficient for completing the tasks. The Area/District Manager, Dick, feels that I was given ample time and any extra hours worked will be banked. Nevertheless, I think that banked overtime hours have to be agreed upon between the employee and the employer, and, if not, they must be paid out. When I told Dick this, he decided that the overtime hours can only be paid out if I will accept regular pay on those overtime hours. Should I report Dick to Human Resources? - John, sales, cellphone kiosk

Problem 2.5

I have just opened a new restaurant in town, and I realized that there is no way for people in wheelchairs to have access to our second level eating area. Should I risk the loss of their patronage, having only one section for them to be seated in or should I look into the installation of an elevator or something to allow them all access? – Amy, restaurant owner

Problem 2.6

My boss has asked me to attend interviews for new employees. During these interviews, I noticed that he is only considering men into consideration, even though many of the females who applied seem more qualified for the position. Should I confront my boss and risk being fired? - Kelly, head cook, restaurant

Problem 2.7

There are a number of employees in a department all using a common workspace. This working environment is a friendly place where co-workers feel free to build relationships and joke around, but at the same time, respect the strict level of professionalism required in a diverse work environment. Recently, however, an employee brought me a racially discriminating document that he found in the workspace. How should I research the incident? - Colette, human resource manager, hardware store

Problem 2.8

I saw an internal posting advertising for a management position dealing with Indigenous issues. I meet all of the qualifications listed but noted a statement on the advertisement requesting that only indigenous persons apply. I am more than qualified to complete the duties of the position but do not hold Indigenous status. Could this be classified as discrimination? - Jody, a government employee

Problem 2.9

I am a human resource professional in recruitment with a key initiative to increase the number of Indigenous employees in my company. I advertised for an administrative support person and, after analyzing the applicants, the top candidate was an Indigenous woman with a disability. The hiring supervisor interviewed the top four candidates, and the same woman was still clearly the top candidate. The hiring supervisor, however, decided against hiring the top candidate for this position. Considering legal implications, what should I say to the hiring supervisor? - Jean, senior recruiter, a small city

Problem 2.10

I was recently hired at a large department store. My job consists of hiring all customer service employees. One of the company's mandates is to have 10% of its employees in a visible minority group. Currently, only 5% of the employees are of a visible minority

and all of the positions are already filled in the department. What should I do? - Paul, a manager in charge of hiring, large department store

Problem 2.11
I am a manager of a reputable office that offers the best salaries and benefits/perks in the city. I hired a summer student last summer, promising her employment from July to August. In particular, I promised that July would be full time, and August would be part-time with the chance of full time. Our agreement was verbal. Well, things in the industry slowed right down, and I had to let her go in the middle of August with no pay for the last two weeks since I could not afford it. She told me that she would take us to the Labour Board to get her two weeks of pay. Will I be in trouble for not paying her out the last 2 weeks in August? - Monique, a manager, a professional office

3. Recruitment

Problem 3.1
I am a human resource professional in recruitment who is trying to hire industrial mechanics for a plant environment. Three of our top industrial mechanics have already been headhunted by a company about 300 miles away, and I now need to hire three new employees. The position pays well and has competitive benefits. I advertised in the local newspaper and received no applications. Next, I advertised countrywide on job search sites at a high cost and received only five applications. How can I increase the number of applications for these positions? – Jeanne, recruiter, food processing company

Problem 3.2
There have been lots of promotional opportunities within our company. We usually recruit within the company, but we really need new ideas and ways of doing things. What can we do to attract new prospects with fresh new ideas – without angering our current employees? - John, human resource manager, advertising sales company

Problem 3.3
XYZ Company is a privately owned company in the housing industry. A new position has opened up in research and development. The company's policies are to offer the position to employees already employed by XYZ and who are qualified.
It is an attractive position, and XYZ is positive that there will be many applications from internal candidates with the necessary qualifications. However, XYZ does not believe that any of their current employees are right for the job and would like to solicit from outside of the company. How does XYZ solve this problem? – James, president, XYZ

Problem 3.4
I manage a restaurant and am opening a second location on the other side of town. I require an assistant manager to help with managing both locations. Hiring this person within the organization will save me time in training and them getting acquainted with the staff. On the other hand, this person will have already worked with the staff and may have difficulty gaining respect from them. The benefit gained from having to do less training is attractive. Should I hire this person internally? - Sam, a manager, restaurant

Problem 3.5
While managing a small convenience store, I ran into a serious problem. We were severely understaffed, and although we had ads out in several places, we were not hearing back from anyone. One employee caught another employee smoking dope in the bathroom while on duty and informed me of this. I cannot afford to lose a worker without first hiring someone else. However, doing drugs while on duty is serious. With no one answering my ads, what should I do? - Lisa, manager, convenience store

Problem 3.6
My friend works as a recruitment specialist for a large insurance company, an organization with many staffing requirements. I manage a relatively small (and new) financial consulting company that does not have very well developed HR policies. My friend thinks that I should use their HR policies, but I think that the huge difference in the size of our organizations will affect the way we do recruitment. What would you recommend? Judy, manager, financial consulting company

Problem 3.7
As the human resource manager for a government department, I usually send one of our young and new staff members to do recruitment on campus and at job fairs. In contrast, my counterpart in another department usually attends these things herself because she thinks that this is more effective and gives a better impression of the department. Who is right? Mitch, HR manager, a government department

Problem 3.8
I have been a recruiter for nurses in a hospital for about 10 years. All I do in terms of recruitment is to send notices of job openings to nursing programs. I am having trouble recruiting enough nurses. I am starting to wonder if there are other ways to recruit nurses that would be more effective and if using several different sources would be even better. - Raymonde, nursing recruiter, a hospital

Problem 3.9
Our company has gotten quite a bad rap lately for problems with "social responsibility" (according to the media). Lately, the number of applications for our job openings has slowed down. I think that our poor image is affecting the number of people who apply for our jobs. Is this possible? - Mike, manager, tobacco company

Problem 3.10
When I read the careers section of the newspaper, I notice that when companies have openings for senior managers, they tend to use executive search firms to do their recruiting. Why do they do this? Are their human resources people incompetent, or are executive search firms much more effective in finding senior managers? - Jade, student, business school

Problem 3.11
I work for a local company that gives employees bonuses if they refer potential job candidates that they end up hiring. Sometimes, it looks like everyone knows each other in the company because people have referred their friends. I guess this is a good thing, but I wonder if the company is missing out on a better quality workforce by relying on this method of recruitment. I'm planning to talk to my manager about this and was wondering what proof there is that referrals from employees are a good thing. - Bernard, dispatcher, courier company

4. Selection

Problem 4.1
I am a human resource manager in charge of hiring for a medium-sized software company. Our company is conducting interviews and hiring for a project lead position. Out of all of the applicants being considered for the position, there is one male applicant and one female applicant left. Both applicants meet the qualifications for the position and the male applicant interviewed slightly better. However, there are currently no female project leads. Should I choose the female applicant because females are underutilized as project leads in the company? - Larry, HR Manager (hiring), software company

Problem 4.2
I applied for a job as a senior sales representative at a major department store. I handed my resume in and received a call back for an interview. When I arrived at the store, the manager had all the applicants take a lie detector test. It was a lot of pressure and asked many questions about stealing inventory. When the polygraph test was over with, I had a one on one interview with the manager of the store. She asked a lot of questions such as what are your hobbies and have you played any team sports? I'm interested in the job, but I am not sure if I should take it given all this pressure. What should I do? - Krista, university student

Problem 4.3
I work for the local health district and have recently been interviewing candidates in order to fill a professional position within the organization. The person in this position would be working in HR directly under my supervision. I advertised this (unionized) position publicly in a newspaper. After the interested candidates submitted a resume, I selected which ones to interview. I have interviewed everyone that I intended to interview. My problem is that the candidate I have found to be most qualified and fit for the position is my cousin Vinny. I'm afraid that if I hire him, my decision will be challenged because people will think that I hired him because he is my cousin. Should I hire my cousin? - Roberto, Human Resources director, health district

Problem 4.4
I have been the Sports Director for only three weeks, but our business has been operating for four years. Our previous Sports Director accepted another position, thus bumping me up to his spot. With an opening in the sports department (my previous job), the gap needed to be filled. Many tapes and resumes were screened until it came down to two. One of the applicants was my age and has done sports stories and report his whole career but also has had on-air anchoring experience every day of the week for three years. Though he does good work, some would say he has "the perfect face for radio." The other applicant has more experience in the reporting field and not so much anchoring experience, as well, he is 12 years my senior. He seems like a more personable on-air type of guy. Not to mention he would be more pleasant to watch. Both of the interviews went great, and they both seem to have good qualities. How will I choose which should get the job? - Kent, sports director, sports tv station

Problem 4.5
I was recently looking for a new league coordinator for a recreational hockey league. I put out an advertisement and received four replies. One of the responses was from a very good friend of mine. Through my personal experiences with him, I know that he would be great for the job. He is passionate about hockey and loves organizing games. However, in his interview, he was much less convincing than the other candidates. In the end, I gave him the job anyway, because I knew that he could do it. Was this wrong? - Terry, coordinator, recreational hockey league

Problem 4.6
I am the owner of a popular restaurant in town and have a host position to fill. I now have to choose between a young man whose 'look' does not exactly fit my style at the restaurant but who seems very dependable and kind, and a young lady who fits my style more but seems to be shy and therefore gives off a 'stuck up' demeanor. Whom should I choose to best help out my restaurant? - Steve, restaurant owner

Problem 4.7

I have a job opening for a customer complaint specialist. I have received a large number of applications for the position, and I'm going to be conducting interviews right away. I am unsure what type of question format I should use for the interview. I have considered using a structured format, an unstructured format or a behavioral description format. I think that I should go with the unstructured format and trust my intuition. What is the most effective approach for conducting interviews? - Jon, HR Manager, local company

Problem 4.8

My brother is about 100 pounds overweight and not very good looking. I was wondering if that would hurt his chances of finding a job? L - Sharon, university student

Problem 4.9

I hired a salesclerk who had great job references and seemed very friendly. Unfortunately, those references were useless. She was a horrible employee. It was as though they were saying good stuff so that they could get rid of her. Should I use references to hire her replacement? Is there anything that I can do to make the references more accurate or evaluate them better? - Angela, assistant manager, clothing store

Problem 4.10

My question is very simple. Do good grades/grade point average in university give me a better chance of being hired? I do not want to give up my active social life. - Jim, a university student

Problem 4.11

I went through some training provided by consultants for conducting behaviorally-based interviews in selecting new employees. It all sounds good, but I am skeptical if it works or if it is just another fad that will eventually go away? Besides, it seems so structured! - Joan, manager, employment agency

5. Orientation, Training and Development, and Career Development

Problem 5.1

By word of mouth, I heard that the local school board was looking for a new secretary-treasurer. I am currently working at a bank as a teller and am interested in obtaining a new job. I know that there are going to be several people applying for the job at the school board, and I am not sure how good of chance I have based on my experience. Another problem is that the person in charge of hiring is a regular customer at the bank where I work. I do not want anyone at work to find out that I applied for this job until after I know if I get it or not. I don't want to damage my relationship with my co-workers and boss by them finding out that I'm looking for a new job. Should I apply for the position, or what should I do? - Amanda, bank teller

Problem 5.2

I'm is a new employee at a retirement home. The residents there are still fairly healthy and can come down for meals in a communal dining room. I just completed the required three-shift orientation for serving, but I do not feel ready to do the serving shift by myself yet. I feel that there is too much to remember, and the tasks aren't allocated and organized in a clear manner. I discussed my problem with management, and they told me that only three orientation shifts are allowed. Management also told me that if I have any problems, I should just ask the other workers for help. I feel uncomfortable asking my fellow employees for help. What should I do? –Jill, server, retirement home

Problem 5.3

Our new company provides customer service 'services' for clients in another country. While most clients are nice, some are rude and abusive to employees. As a result, several people quit the job after going through the training program or take lots of stress/sick leave. What could I do to lower the company turnover ratio and the amount of leave that is taken? - Kim, supervisor, cell-phone customer service center

Problem 5.4

When I was hired by my organization, I did not receive any formal training and was expected to learn things on my own. Though it was hard and unfair, after five years, I'm doing quite well in my job (but I'm still learning). The organization has recently implemented a training and development plan for its new employees. I'm afraid that my position may be at risk because I'm still not thoroughly trained in all aspects of my position. With this new plan, all aspects of every job will be looked at. New employees will also be taught the correct way to do things without shortcuts, like the ones that I have found work for me. Although these shortcuts lead to the same outcome, they sometimes miss a few important steps. The training and development plan is optional for employees who are already a part of the company. These employees (myself included) who do opt to take the training will not be paid for their time and will have to pay the employer for their time in training (as though it was a benefit). Should I enroll in the program? - Susan, cashier, retail outlet

Problem 5.5

I am the training coordinator for a corporation with offices throughout the country. Because we are changing our financial analysis software programs, we will need to offer comprehensive training to 200 employees in 30 different offices. The employees are knowledgeable about the old program and have a good understanding of basic principles of financial analysis software, but would

require training to transition to the new software. The local software vendor can provide a 20-hour training seminar for the program. I am trying to decide whether to arrange for the vendor to train all 200 staff, or train a senior staff member in the program and then have them develop and teach a course to train other employees. What should I do? - John, training coordinator, corporation

Problem 5.6
We currently have a vacant position to be filled. The only problem is that the person who was previously in that job, Sarah, is no longer with our branch. Because Sarah left before we could train a new employee or have a binder set up, we are in a tight spot. Sarah was responsible for setting up a new program that would help her job become more efficient and have better accuracy. Each employee is expected to prepare a binder that details their day to day responsibilities. Sarah was unable to set this up because of year-end pressures. We usually try to have the current employee train the new employee for a month or so. Two other coworkers could possibly do the training, However, with year-end pressures and one of the employees working part-time, it would be very hard for them to take time to train a new employee without working overtime (which the company discourages). I'm personally familiar with Sarah's job, but I do not know her day-to-day responsibilities. Who should train the new employee? - Charles, accounting manager, bank

Problem 5.7
I'm currently working two jobs. The first one is as a server at a popular bar where I get amazing tips most nights, plus my regular wage. I'm also a legal administrative assistant, the job I received after taking a 10-month course. Because of the tips, the server job pays more than my other job. My dilemma is that I'm feeling run down from working both jobs. The problem is that I invested lots of time, effort, and money to get my diploma to work in a law firm. Also, although the salary at the law firm now is not quite as good as at the bar, I expect to receive raises in the future and create a career for myself. However, I may have to take out loans to make ends meet if I stick solely with my law firm job. What should I do? - Alice, waitress, administrative assistant, two companies.

Problem 5.8
I saw an ad on the university website for a job as an administrative assistant. So I applied, went for an interview and found out that it was one guy and me who would be working together. This guy runs his own business out of his home and just needs some help. He offered me the job during the interview. I was unsure whether to trust him as I would be the only one in the whole house working with him. Should I take the job or keep searching for another one? - Colette, administration, private sector

Problem 5.9
I am a manager at a fast-food place, and I just got offered a promotion. It would be one step away from running my own store. I would like the responsibility and work experience, but there are a few catches that come along with the offer. First, I would have to share the position with a friend, a person who usually gets into trouble by being too outspoken. Second, there would be no salary increase. Third, we do not receive the title of the position, just the duties until we prove ourselves capable. The problem is that I don't want the position with these terms, and I only plan on being around for another year or two. However, my friend plans on staying around longer; she wants this position. If I do not take the position, she will be transferred to another store, and she does not want to go anywhere. Do I take the promotion? - Jake, manager, fast food place

Problem 5.10
I've been out of work for four weeks now. Having submitted resumes all over town, I was starting to become desperate. I went to a temporary employment service as a last resort. I went through the whole process, including an application, assessments, and an interview. They said everything went fine and asked if I wanted to start a three-week term with the possibility of extension at a local bank. I accepted the assignment that would start in a week. Since then, I had gone for an interview for a much longer-term job at a retail store doing some reception work. I know I already accepted the other position, but they should be able to find a replacement (they have a week to do so). I feel that I need something longer term and with more security. Should I take my chances with the bank? - Claire, unemployed, 23 years old

Problem 5.11
My employer has offered me an exciting promotion in a city that is 20 hours away from where I live. This position needs to be filled as soon as possible, and my decision has to be made quickly. I am currently an associate manager, and this is a managerial position. This position would be a huge but rewarding challenge (financially and otherwise). It would require me to put in lots of unpaid overtime. If I do not take this job, my chances of pursuing other possible career advancements may be limited. Unfortunately, my wife is worried about finding a job in that city, and our daughter received a scholarship from the university in our home town. My other daughter is going into grade 12 and does not want to move because she wants to graduate with all of her friends. Should I accept the promotion? - Dale, associate manager, insurance company

6. Occupational Health & Safety

Problem 6.1
A maintenance worker, Bob, got hurt on the job and has been off the job and on workers' compensation for 15 months. Bob now wants to return to work in a limited capacity. First, I want Bob to complete and pass a full physical assessment. If Bob passed his medical assessment, he could come back to work. If Bob were to return to work and reinjure himself in the same spot (his back), would the company be liable for the injury? Since it is hard to actually prove a back injury, what if this person just wanted to work for the company so that he could again get 'hurt' and go back on workers' compensation? - Frank, manager, a local manufacturer

Problem 6.2

I'm working toward my journeyman's ticket with a non-unionized company in a small community. For family reasons, I cannot relocate. Although the work environment is not always to minimum safety standards, nobody has ever been hurt on the job. The safety issue is that the boss likes to cut corners such and get things done as fast and as cheap as possible. For example, to support a piece of equipment, instead of proper rigging techniques, we support it with the support leg of a crane. Because our boss is hard to get along with, nobody has talked to him about the unsafe conditions. Should I quit the job with the potential of not finding another job and therefore not getting my ticket, stay at the job with the potential of getting hurt at work, or say something to government safety officers and risk getting a bad reputation as a whistleblower and/or get fired? - Kobe, apprentice, local machine shop

Problem 6.3

I was recently hurt on the job. This accident left me barely able to do my 'regular work.' I have to continually take 10-minute breaks for every half hour of work because the pain in my arms is too much. My boss does not agree that I should apply for compensation. Should I apply, with the risk of jeopardizing my position at work? - Michael, roughneck, drilling rig

Problem 6.4

I was working on-site a couple of weeks ago and injured my back while lifting a heavy object. I've been off work for the past couple of weeks, and I'm not sure when I'll be healthy enough to return to work. My employers are hassling me about my injury, and I do not feel that they are going to compensate me fairly. I'm not sure if I should question them about this or not because I do not want to affect my position within the company when I am indeed ready to return to work. What should I do or whom should I talk to help resolve this situation? - Tom, a construction worker

Problem 6.5

Many years back, my uncle was diagnosed with mesothelioma after he had retired from the mines. Medical personnel linked his illness to the conditions he was exposed to while working in the mines. He later died of the illness, but no compensation was made to the family at all. Shouldn't the company at least show some responsibility by compensating the family? - Tayo, pizza delivery guy

Problem 6.6

I've worked at ABC as a senior advisor for 3 years now. I'm feeling run down and stressed out. I've taken all of my sick days and have no more left. I do not enjoy my job anymore, and I think it has a lot to do with the fact that my job requires me to do lots of traveling. I spend roughly 50% of my work week away from home. Although ABC pays me for my overtime hours, I just do not feel it's enough. It's a good-paying job, and I need it to support my family. So I don't want to give it up, but at the same time, I feel burnt out. What should I do about my situation? - Karen, senior advisor, ABC Company

Problem 6.7

I recently experienced a form of sexual harassment from my manager (she slapped my bottom). I enjoy my job and would not want to do anything to jeopardize it, but I do not feel comfortable working with this person any longer. If I file a complaint against her, I'm worried about the consequences, both from my manager and other employees. Nevertheless, I need to feel comfortable that this organization is concerned for its staff and will take a situation like this seriously. What are my options? - Jude, teller, bank

Problem 6.8

I'm currently in a job that I have been at for only six months. I'm having some problems with a male co-worker of mine who is continually making sexual comments to me. Although it has never gone beyond comments, they make me uncomfortable. I mentioned it to another female co-worker, and she told me it was best to just brush it off because nothing will be done about it. I want the comments to stop, but I am still the 'new kid on the block'. Should I go ahead and file a formal complaint, or should I take the advice of my co-worker and brush it off? - Connie, a sales executive, computer sales

Problem 6.9

I've been anxious while working as a cook in a fast-food restaurant. I've been getting unwelcome sexual comments by the Manager. I have told him that his comments make me feel uncomfortable, but he continues to behave in the same manner. I thought about going to talk to the District Manager, but I do not think that this will help since the company respects my manager. I think that it will be difficult to find another job because I'm only 16 years old, and I have no other experience. Should I speak to the District Manager or start applying elsewhere? - Michelle, cook, fast food restaurant

Problem 6.10

I have recently experienced a form of sexual harassment at my non-unionized workplace. Alex, who is in a position higher than mine, has been making sexual comments towards me. There is a payroll position that has opened up that I want to apply for, but the person in charge of hiring is Alex. I want to say something, but I also really want this job. What should I do? - Sandra, secretary, agriculture office

Problem 6.11

I work in a manufacturing plant that has a really poor record of safety. We are having accidents all the time; most of these are not very serious. Some of us think that 'the problem' is our boss; he's an asshole, so we do not want to work for him and he seems to care less about us and safety. Others think that 'we' are to blame. Who is right? What are the major causes of accidents in the workplace? - Bill, machinist, manufacturing plant

7. Compensation & Benefits

Problem 7.1
Rob is one of 10 drivers working for a growing local delivery company. He's been with the company for six years, which is unusual considering that most employees quit after 2.5 years. He is a valuable employee because he knows his job well. Moreover, Rob is good with his customers, and his relationships with them are strong. Some customers are loyal to Rob, not necessarily the company. Rob has also proven valuable as an acting manager when his manager is away. Rob has reached the maximum salary for his job. Because of this, he has not received a salary increase in two years, even though his co-workers received salary increases twice in the same period. I (his manager) want to keep Rob with the company, and Rob wants to stay with the company. I want to pay Rob more so that he will be satisfied with his job, but I cannot because her manager and the company's policy forbid it. Rob has made his pay dissatisfaction known and this issue is beginning to affect his morale around the workplace. What can I do? - Rhiannon, a manager, a delivery company

Problem 7.2
The starting wage for a dishwasher at a retirement home is "x" $ per hour. The starting wage for a server is one dollar per hour less than that of a dishwasher. The managers schedule servers for dishwashing shifts, sometimes without proper training. The servers have also not been compensated for the loss in pay. They have been working the dishwashing shift, but only making server's wages. A few servers have talked to management about the problem but nothing has been done to resolve the issue. What should be done? – Andrew, server, retirement home

Problem 7.3
I'm unhappy at the call center where I currently work. I recently heard about a job opportunity from a friend. This position is also that of a call center analyst, and my friend, who works for the company, has good things to say about the work environment. Since the work environment is the problem where I currently work, this opportunity seems attractive to me. However, the starting salary at the new company is much lower than my current salary even though the work is very similar. Should I pursue this job opportunity? - James analyst, call center

Problem 7.4
A company has made me an offer that would double my current paycheck. I'm satisfied and feel very comfortable with my present job, but the extra money is tempting. Should I quit my job and take up the other company's offer? - Laura, analyst, financial services company

Problem 7.5
I manage a new furniture store and am thinking about how to best pay my salespeople. I'd like to base their pay on how much they sell but think that I should also give them a base pay. What is the most effective way to pay salespeople so that they are motivated to sell furniture? - Michael, manager, furniture store

Problem 7.6
I'm going to be graduating in a couple of years and am hoping that I'll be paid fairly. I hear a lot about how women get paid less than men. Is this true? If so, what should I do? - Jolene, student, university

Problem 7. 7
I sometimes read in the newspaper about how the salaries of corporate CEOS are extremely high and that they have quite a few benefits and incentive packages. I think that people should be paid what they are worth. However, I also wonder what effect these outrageous salaries have on employees' morale when they are paid so little in comparison to the CEOs. Is there any research that shows any relationship between the size of this difference (between what CEOs are paid and what ordinary employees are paid) and employee morale or productivity? Also, are better-paid CEOs managing higher-performing organizations? - Peter, university student

Problem 7.8
My company told us that we would be fired if we told anyone what we were being paid. I'm at the bottom of the ladder so I'm sure that I'm not being paid much compared to others. But, I'm wondering why they would make pay levels secret. I think that pay secrecy is just their way of paying their 'favorites' better. I think that we should know what other people who are doing the same kind of work as we are doing are being paid. If I was a manager, I would have everything out in the open. What do you think? - Richard, clerk, insurance company

Problem 7.9
I'm trying to decide whether to work for a large organization (maybe government) or a small company. One of the things that I'm considering is pay levels. If I was doing the same job in a large and small organization, let's say, being a communications officer, would there be any differences in the pay rates (on average) related to differences in the size of organizations or in the public or private sector? - John, university student

Problem 7.10
I work for a company that offers stock options after you have worked there for a year. I'm not sure about them, but the human resources manager says that employees are happier since they have started offering stock options. Is there any relationship between owning stock in the place where you work and employee attitudes? - Kathleen, programmer, IT Company

Problem 7.11
In my workplace, women and men are paid differently (women are paid less) even though they do very similar work. For example, A.J. and I both graduated with our business degrees and started working in jobs for the company at the same time. Although our jobs are not the same (he deals with a different kind of clients), they are very similar and require the same knowledge and skills. Also, he does not have any more job experience than me, and his performance is about the same as mine (maybe not as good). Anyhow, I found out, indirectly, that A.J. gets paid about $3000 per year more than me. What should I do? - Suzanne, analyst, agricultural food products company

8. Performance Management

Problem 8.1
I'm the owner/manager of a small gas station with an unfortunately high employee turnover rate. The employees show little motivation and do not take much pride in their work. Another manager has suggested that I use past-oriented appraisal methods to evaluate my staff, specifically a rating scale for each employee. I am frustrated with my current employees and feel that this would give them the shot in the arm that they need to work harder. What is the most effective performance appraisal approach to motivate them? - George, owner/manager, gas station

Problem 8.2
I receive and process orders for a telemarketing firm. Our manager recently told us that the company is moving towards using an electronic performance-monitoring program. Some of my coworkers are been worried about having Big Brother looking over their shoulders or that management will try to increase the amount of work we do. There is concern around the water cooler about whether this will affect our manager's support and staffing decisions. Most of the employees, myself included, have always had excellent performance reviews. Our manager also discusses our strengths and weaknesses with us, and I thought that the feedback loop was working. I do not know if this move will make our work easier, or if it is dehumanizing our workplace. Should the company have asked us if we want this program, or should they be doing something to make the workers more comfortable? - Timothy, telemarketing, private sector

Problem 8.3
I'm an HR manager in charge of evaluating company employees. I have to review the output and performance of all company employees. I then must go over this evaluation with the employees and inform them of ways to improve their work ethic as well as compliment them on their successes thus far. Doris, one of the employees being evaluated, is four months away from retirement. She has had a long-standing and reliable relationship with the company. We have been colleagues for 20 years. Doris has been part of the company team for many years and usually put tons of effort into her work. Recently, I noticed that Doris' work quality was dwindling and that she has been absent from work more frequently lately. I've been newly promoted to my position, and I would like to follow company procedure without giving Doris a bad evaluation. What should I do? Should I evaluate her as planned? - Sam, HR Manager, ABC Inc.

Problem 8.4
As the Vice President of HR of an international company, I mandated my department to develop a new performance management system. Core Competencies of each position were outlined, and this has enhanced the recruiting capabilities for new employees. All existing employees are being evaluated based on these core competencies. Unfortunately, some existing employees are not good fits for their present positions and/or the company goals. How should we deal with these employees? Fire them? - Linda, vice president of HR, international company

Problem 8.5
We are experiencing a problem with a long-term employee, Andrew, who has been repetitively late for work in the last few months. At times, this employee has been significantly late. For example, Andrew would have to be at work by 8 am. but often arrives closer to 9 am. At times, Andrew has missed important meetings. His reasons for his tardiness has been less than reasonable. What should we do? - John, manager, local office

Problem 8.6
I, a warehouse manager, recently promoted an entry-level warehouse person, Jake, to a position of greater responsibility. Jake was responsible for the intake and distribution of parts for just one supplier of their product and was required to work independently in a small area in the back of their very large warehouse. After about six months in this new position, Jake's productivity declined. One day, I went back to have a discussion with Jake, and I could not find him at his workstation. With further investigation, I found Jake outside behind the warehouse, having a cigarette and urinating. Jake is provided with both morning and afternoon coffee break periods, so he does not need to take work time to do this. Jake acknowledged that his actions were unacceptable, but he admitted he just did not feel like walking across the warehouse to the restroom facilities. He took the liberty of having an additional cigarette break. How should I deal with the situation? - Shan, warehouse manager

Problem 8.7
After I had worked for about six years in a government office, my supervisor was promoted and replaced by someone who just seemed to hate me. I used to get great performance reviews, but my new supervisor started criticizing me, saying that he did not feel comfortable with me and questioning what I did. One Monday, when I came to work, at the end of the day, he fired me and told me to get my things and get out. I did, but I am wondering two things, what should I have done in this situation to prevent being fired

and what should I do now that I've been fired. I'm afraid that I will not get employment insurance or be able to find another job. Unfortunately, I'm not protected by a union. - Jane, computer programmer, government office

Problem 8.8
My friend works as a mechanic at an implement dealership. At the dealership, he notices that his co-workers take many breaks and smoke cigarettes or even drugs on these breaks. Also, they drink after hours and do not punch out on the time clock. His boss even does this stuff too. Should he confront his boss about this situation, or mind his own business and feel uncomfortable around his co-workers? - Martin, mechanic, garage

Problem 8.9
I am finding that one of my top employees is always efficient in doing her work and pleasing our clients in the office. There has never been an issue with her meeting her deadlines, and she makes next to no errors. But I find that when she has extra time or when her work is complete, she is always working on personal business either on the phone or via the internet. She tells me that it is okay because she does not take her two 15 minute coffee breaks. However, this is disturbing my other employees: they hear her on the phone or see her on personal websites. Her doing personal business is causing my other employees to be upset since they do not do these things. How can I make sure that everyone is satisfied? - Carole, manager, call center

Problem 8.10
My company's policy is to carry out performance reviews on its employees every six months. The performance reviews consist of a standardized multiple-choice form and a form filled out by the employee's supervisor. Recently, an employee disagreed with their review and the supervisor's comments. What should I do to investigate the situation and prevent it in the future? - Meg, HR manager, hardware store

Problem 8.11
My job requires a substantial amount of sales, and goals are implemented in order to push employees to achieve these goals. I have received two awards in six months for outstanding sales results, yet just recently, I received a letter indicating that my sales have slumped in the last two weeks. This action makes me feel underappreciated and angry since the time period that was considered happened to coincide with my final exams at university. Should I be looking for new employment or chalk it up to inconvenient timing? - Andie, sales, retail business

9. Labor Relations

Problem 9.1
In my current position with my employer, things are going well for me. However, some employees are unhappy with certain aspects of their jobs. In particular, raises do not happen often, and the benefits are weak. The thought of either forming or joining a union has come to the surface. I am currently happy with my position and its benefits; however, a union might include other aspects that I have not thought of. Should I join the union if it comes into our practice? - Jason, worker, manufacturer

Problem 9.2
Our factory is facing a strike by its unionized employees that consists of one half of our workforce. If our factory is unable to continue production while so many of our employees are on strike, can anything be done besides shutting down the factory for a period of time? - Peter, an HR guy, a large factory

Problem 9.3
I work in the Human Resources Dept. of a large organization, and we have a hiring problem. A marketing-type position was advertised internally. My colleague (who would be this person's supervisor) and I read resumes, and we found two people who could fill this position. We interviewed these two candidates, but our problem is that the one we see as most fit for the position has fewer seniority hours than the one we see as not as fit for the position. So since the position is unionized, and the agreement states that people with higher seniority should be considered first for internal hiring, if we hire the person with fewer hours, the person with more hours will appeal that decision, and we will be forced into the appeal process. Whom should we hire? - Rachel, HR Director, large organization

Problem 9.4
Joe, a junior employee, gets a new position that was also bid on an employee with more seniority. Although Joe has the education and technical background required by the new position, the senior employee does not. Both employees are in the same union. The senior employee fines a grievance with his union. What should the outcome be? - Joe, union employee, government office

Problem 9.5
I've been doing sessional teaching for the university and am part of their faculty union/association. I recently lost my sister and was given one paid day of bereavement. Any additional days that I took were unpaid. I was also pressured by my faculty to return so that the cost of replacing me in my absence would be minimal to the faculty. How were my rights as an employee violated, and what rights do employees have in times of personal crisis? - Karen, sessional instructor, university

Problem 9.6
My union and my employer are in the beginning stages of bargaining a new Collective Agreement. Some of my co-workers have put forth a resolution to the union regarding the implementation of a job-sharing program. During the Bargaining Conference, the

resolution was altered to satisfy the union's bargaining team. However, the changes were radical and affect how the program will work. The policy states that any permanent full-time employee can request that their job be shared for a specific amount of time. Since the job is under the scope of the union, the other half of the job share has to be bid. Initially, the resolution stated that the successful employee would return to their previous position when the job share contract ended. The union altered the resolution to read that successful part-time employees would return to their previous position when the job share contract ended, but full-time employees would not have their job held for them. In effect, the full-time employee would be terminated. The union asserts that their form of the policy is standard practice and will not listen to the reasoning behind the original resolution. My co-workers feel that the union does not want us to have an effective job-sharing program. They are frustrated that the union would sacrifice a full-time employee to play politics. We were wondering if the union is being truthful about their changes being standard for job sharing programs. Are there any changes that we could make to the original resolution in order to find common ground with the union? - Judy, collection representative & union member, major financial institution

Problem 9.7
I work as a part-time sales associate for a large store. I and most of the people I work with think that we have been treated very poorly. The manager sets up schedules that seem to be the opposite of what we request and can work. The manager promotes people based on how much they suck up to him. Some of the full-time people have trouble getting enough hours at work in order to make a living. He does not listen to us when we try to make suggestions. Anyhow, I'm thinking of getting a union in here, but I don't know what the procedure is for this. What would you recommend? - Bob, sales associate, large store

Problem 9.8
I own a medium-sized manufacturing company and have become aware that there is a union organizing drive among the employees in my shop. First of all, I do not know why they would do this to me since I treat them well. For example, I try to give them layoff notices with as much advanced notice as possible. Second, I'm thinking of getting the employees together in the lunchroom and asking them what their problem is and telling them that a union is just going to hurt them. Moreover, I want to tell them that we should keep this to ourselves instead of getting a third party involved. What do you think? Why would employees want to join a union? Should I talk to my employees about this? - Jeanne, owner, a medium-sized manufacturing company

Problem 9.9
My employees have just gotten unionized, and I'm worried that my company's effectiveness and employees' productivity levels will drop. Is this true? Is there a way that companies benefit from having unionized employees? - Bob, manager, distribution center

Problem 9.10
In my workplace, management (represented by Human Resources) and some union representatives get together regularly in a union-management committee as a way of building more co-operation and addressing and reducing any problems that might come up. However, I find that, when the time comes to renegotiate another contract, these same people seem to be major enemies. The union-management arrangement makes me think that there is no value in having this committee in the first place. What is the evidence for union-management committees – are they a good thing or useless? - Sarah, manager, health care

Problem 9.11
I was fired from a job as a teacher because I told some sexually explicit jokes in the staff room. Everyone else was doing this, so I figured that it was okay. Unfortunately, this was precisely the excuse that another teacher (who does not like me) needed to file a – false – sexual harassment complaint. I was fired without any chance to defend myself. When I approached my union about submitting a grievance about this, they just ignored me. I've been paying union dues for a long time, and I think that they should help me. What should I do? - Pauline, ex-teacher, elementary school

Please note: Instructors may write to the first author to obtain an "answer key" for many of the problem situations presented in this article.

APPENDIX B
Sample Individual Report

September 28, 20__
Recruitment and Selection

<u>Problem Situation</u>: I saw a blind ad in the paper the other day advertising for a Human Resource Manager for "a local siding company." They asked that all applications be submitted to a box number at the Leader-Post and include a handwritten letter and a resume. I'm currently a human resource professional, and I think that this position would be a step up for me. Should I apply? Claude, Human Resource Officer, Government

<u>Key Issues</u>: There are two key issues: (a) responding to a blind ad being used to recruit a manager; and (b) the validity of handwriting analysis or graphology in the selection process.

<u>Analysis</u>: Blind ads protect the confidentiality of recruiting organizations by not providing any information regarding their identity (Schwind, Das, & Wagar, 2001). They permit organizations to solicit applications from individuals without being burdened by a large number of walk-ins or phone calls and without providing competitors and current jobholders with information about personnel changes that are being made (Schwind, Das, & Wagar, 2001). They also allow organizations to recruit more applicants than they usually would if there is something about an organization that may deter people from applying (e.g., a mortuary; Schwind, Das, & Wagar, 2001). Organizations can also use blind ads to determine if current employees are looking for a job. Finally, blind ads resolve the potential PR problem associated with rejecting applications and not responding individually to all applications. I was unable to find any research that addresses the effectiveness of blind ads for employers or their implications for applicants. However, I did find research that indicates that organizations with good reputations tend to attract more applicants as well as higher quality applicants (Turban & Cable, 2003). Thus, organizations with good reputations that conceal their identity may be sub-optimizing the number and quality of applicants that they get.

Graphology "uses the systematic analysis of an applicant's handwriting sample to infer something about that individual's personality, his or her fit with the organization, or probable job performance" (Thomas & Vaught, 2001, p. 31). Although not widely used by employers in most countries, graphology, along with numerology, morphopsychology, and survival tests, is used extensively in France, primarily as a result of French employers' heavy use of consulting firms in HRM decisions (Brunstein, 1992). Despite the perception by practitioners and, especially, graphologists, that graphology is a useful selection tool (Leonard, 1999), graphology has not been found to be a valid approach for predicting job performance (Dean, 1992). In their review of research that considers the use of graphology in selection decisions, Schmidt and Hunter (1998, p. 270) concluded that,

> Whatever limited information about personality or job performance there is in the handwriting samples comes from the content and not the characteristics of the handwriting…most of the variation in handwriting is due to differences among individuals in fine motor coordination of the finger muscles. And these differences…are probably due mostly to random genetic variations among individuals…which do not appear to be linked to personality.

In sum, graphology is not considered to be a valid selection method and, as such, should not be used in selection decisions. There are more valid predictors of job performance that employers can and should use, for example, work experiences.

<u>Recommendations</u>: I recommend that you do not apply for this position for several reasons: (1) You probably would not want to work for an employer that refuses to identify itself in its advertisements; (2) The blind ad prevents you from doing research on the company that would allow you to base your application decision on facts; (3) It is possible that your current employer is testing your loyalty to the organization; and (4) You probably would not want to work for a company that makes important HRM decisions in a manner that does not appear to be valid. Empirical evidence indicates that the use of blind ads is likely to reduce the number and quality of applications that employers receive, and the use of graphology is inappropriate given its lack of validity and reliability in selection decisions. Of course, if they hire you, you can help them improve their decision-making, but this is a long shot.

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