

ABSTRACT

The argument that continues to gain momentum is that Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) are change enablers that assist organisations to achieve a competitive advantage, especially within the healthcare environment. The need for functional HR performance in the healthcare environment is high often leading to several research endeavours. However, the benefit of using an HRIS in healthcare is always in the limelight in the research space. Although, researchers are yet to prove how HRIS can be effectively utilised for workforce sustainability in the South African healthcare environment. The research questions are: What are the reasons for the lack of effective HRIS in the health sector? What impact does HRIS usage have on the retention and sustainability of skilled workers in the health sector? and How can HRIS usage assist the health sector to improve its service delivery to the public?. Using the mixed method, data were purposively collected from four hospitals, with forty-one interviews and forty-six questionnaires. Atlas-ti and SPSS were used for data analysis. The study found that the lack of HRIS stems from reasons such as lack of awareness and education of HRIS. Notably, the continued preference for manual HR processes, dilapidated infrastructures, outdated information systems, leads to a severe lack of access and non-documentation of necessary data/information of staff. Thus, effective use of an updated HRIS is needed to assist in the management of healthcare workers. Additional recommendations include guidelines for effective HRIS and future research directions in this study.

INTRODUCTION

In achieving their strategic objectives, organisations rely on the Human Resource Department (HRD). However, Information Systems (IS) are prevalent in all professional domains, including the field of Human Resource Management (HRM). These IS's, despite their various identities, have been the subject of numerous studies in the fields of information technology, psychology and social sciences (Barik, 2015; Al-Dmour, Obeidat, Masa'deh, & Almajali, 2015; Ruël & Bondarouk, 2018). Interestingly, IS's are the driving force of an efficacious organisation, the one that characterises a proficient HRD would be based on the effective utilisation of Human Resource Information System (HRIS). An effective HRIS would be expected to authorise a non-manual and paperless functionality of the HRD (Barišić, Poór & Bach, 2019; Valcik, Sabharwal & Benavides, 2021). Within the healthcare sector, the HRM processes data such as workforce information management, payroll, and other HR-related information, which can be supported through the use of effective HRIS to achieve sustainable healthcare delivery services. Nevertheless, the role of effective HRIS as enablers of effective healthcare services, the effectiveness of HRIS has been disregarded as a subject of research in the healthcare sector of South Africa (Udekwe, Iwu, de la Harpe & Daramola, 2021).

However, the public health sector is regarded as one of the most essential sectors in an economy due to its impact and practicality in the care of human lives (Iwu, 2013; Muthoka, 2016). The healthcare sector is further recognised as one of the most treasured, fast-growing and substantial sectors for growth and development in a country. Moreover, countries that do not consider human lives as important in their growth strategy might find it difficult in achieving their goals (Rispel et al., 2019). Perhaps, the governments can make use of HRIS for strategic decisions about their health workforce in the country. This signifies that HRIS is critical in the health sector of a growing economy (Maruru, 2014; Kuyo, Muiruri & Njuguna, 2018). Furthermore, the health sector is regarded as the amalgamation of all sectors, institutions and resources that are interrelated and managed for improving healthcare services in a country. Therefore, HRIS should be regarded as an important system that is used to measure the efficiency of healthcare workers in general (Mahlulo, 2020).

Considering the importance of healthcare in an economy, there is a need to research the reasons for the lack of effective HRIS in the health sector, to determine its impact on the management of the health workers and the sector in general (Tursunbayeva, Pagliari, Bunduchi & Franco, 2015). In doing this, the reasons for the lack of effective HRIS to support HR functions within healthcare can be revealed (Alam et al., 2016). This according to Tjofflät et al. (2018) may assist in determining the potential of HRIS towards contributing to healthcare effectiveness.

The study, therefore, explores the effective utilisation of HRIS in the public health sector of South Africa. There are three steps that define the logic of the study: First, the need to determine the reasons for the lack of effective HRIS, secondly, the effect of HRIS usage in retention of health workers and sustainability in the health sector, then thirdly, the effectiveness of HRIS for service delivery in the health sector. The study seeks to attend to these three issues through a grounded methodological approach.

RESEARCH METHODS

- A mixed-method data was purposively collected from four (4) hospitals in the Western Cape of South Africa, with forty-one (41) interviews and forty-six (46) questionnaires collected. Atlas-ti and SPSS were used for data analysis.
- This was a descriptive and exploratory study aimed at gaining an in-depth knowledge of the barriers to the effective use of HRIS in the health sector (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019).

RESULTS

Figure 1: Summary of reasons for lack of effective HRIS in the health sector

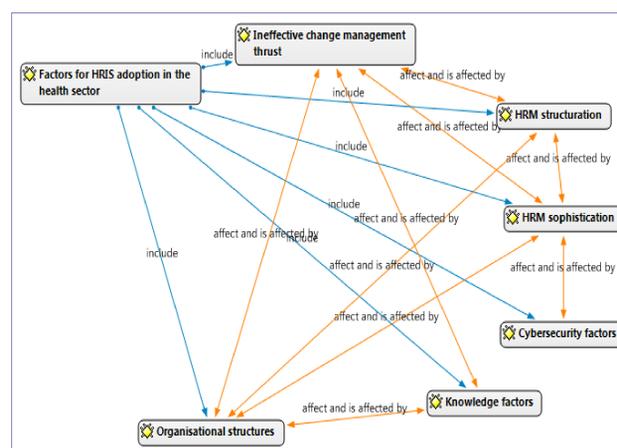
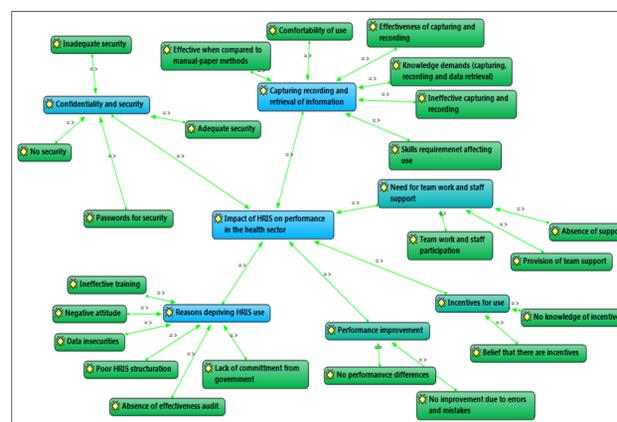


Figure 2: Summary of impact of HRIS to the performance and retention of employees in the health sector



DISCUSSIONS

- There is a lack of awareness and education of HRIS by the majority of the respondents. What appears to be the reason is that HRIS is an outdated PERSAL which most of the workers are not aware of how it works.
- Most of the respondents indicated that they do not have an HRD. Could this be the reason for frequent errors – poor data management including payroll management which warrants frequent visits to the regional office by workers.
- Security of workers information is also an issue of which the respondents indicated that the lack of HRD and also lack of access to HRIS in most of the healthcare facilities compromises HR information. Although, it is understood that there is a reasonable form of security of information on PERSAL, but not very effective due to the manual nature of most HR functions in most of the healthcare facilities.
- The high level of disagreement among the respondents on HR functionality enhancement was blamed upon the dependence of manual processes of HR functions. Also, the lack of upgraded HRIS in healthcare does not allow workers to access the system, which does have a negative effect on sustainability in the health sector.

DISCUSSIONS

- The size of the healthcare facilities was also pointed out by most of the respondents as a reason for not having an effective HRIS in the sector. They have to work through the regional offices HRD to get their information on HRIS (PERSAL).
- Having few HR people to capture information of entire workers in the HRIS (PERSAL) is a challenge that attracts errors and omissions in the capture and retrieval of HR information. This is also attributed to documents being lost in transit to the regional office.

CONCLUSIONS

- Perhaps, HRIS can alter the healthcare needs to be brought to the awareness of the healthcare workers. Also, the need for education and training to advance the knowledge and awareness of HRIS and how it can assist the healthcare workers in the performance of their duties is relevant.
- An HRD with people with the right skills and expertise, and also an upgraded HRIS, may be enlightening to action the above thoughts.
- The need to have an HRIS that allows workers access through a biometric system, in order to minimise/eliminate manual HR processes.
- An HRIS to conduct all HR functions, to eliminate manual processes and frequent payroll errors, omissions and documents lost in transit to the regional office.
- The need for adequate incentives and motivation that will be used to carry the entire workers along in their contribution towards adopting an effective HRIS in healthcare.
- Also, the need for the adoption of a change management process to support the government on the implementation of a new/upgraded HRIS in healthcare.
- The use of HRIS for both administrative and strategic decisions to save time and resources in the management of workers. It will also assist in the monitoring and retention of workers and also sustainability in the healthcare of South Africa.

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