

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES: A CASE STUDY

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Statement of Problem

China's gross domestic product is growing at a rate of ten percent per year, with increases of twelve percent for its gross national product. A large component of China's economic success is that of economic expansion into world markets; China is desirous by many countries as a "factory" setting in which manufacture of raw materials and durable goods is cheaper than in the home country. However, many businesspersons in China do not simply want to be relegated to a supplier of goods for the rest of the world, and are actively cultivating unique intellectual, artistic, and technological properties that can be sold both within China and to international buyers.

It is recognized that English has become the standard language of international commerce; while this may change at a later time, most transactions between countries in which two distinct languages are spoken will use English as the preferred common language. Also, China currently perceived the United States, Canada, and the European Union as trade partners, and English is a dominant language within these locations.

As more Chinese students enter into the university setting, there is an increased demand for English language classes. The school systems in most Chinese territories offer English language classes to students, but advanced language classes are advantageous as these aid in fluency and

increase the students' lexicon of advanced terminology. However, the demand for these classes is difficult to meet due to the lack of English-language teachers who are proficient in English at the university level. There is also a need to retain those teachers who are currently working at the university setting; many of these teachers have been recruited from English-speaking countries on limited work visas and will return home after their time in China has elapsed. As such, there is a need to attract qualified teachers and retain those persons currently active as teachers.

An Effective Recruitment and Retention Program

The recruitment and retention program requires a number of factors that address shortcomings in the university system or address conditions that exacerbate teacher attrition. When isolated separately, these factors form specific steps within a sequential reform process that can be implemented by the Human Resources department.

Working with the Government

As the foremost source of English-language teachers is from English-language countries, the first step in improving the quality of English-language classes at the university level is to work with the government. China's government has long maintained an unequal relationship with the West in terms of

population movement; historically, scholars and professionals are allowed to leave China and work within the West, while very few persons were allowed to do the same in China. However, this has changed over the last decade, as the government has recognized specific advantages associated with allowing working professionals to enter into the country and participate in the economy.

English language teachers have already been integrated into the professional environment, so this stage in the reform process is focused on changing the limits of tenure instead of implementing new policy. This will likely make it easier to implement the required changes. Unfortunately, it is not known how long this will take to achieve; with a strong advocacy movement, this step could take as little as six months, but without support this may be bogged down in the governmental bureaucracy indefinitely. This step is fundamental and unavoidable for creating lasting change for the target problem, and therefore it is recommended that the University works to acquire support from politicians and prominent figures within the community to affect policy reform within a six-month timeline.

Recruitment from Western Countries

There are multiple strategies in place through which recruitment of English-language teachers can occur. These do not meet the current demand for qualified educators. At the current time, programs and scholarships are available for teaching English abroad; these tend to attract recent university graduates who wish to take some time off and improve their world experiences and their resumes prior to

finding permanent employment back in their home countries.

It is recommended that these programs and scholarships be improved in terms of offering incentives for qualified educators. This has two core advantages. First, when the number of candidates increases, the University can be more selective in choosing those who are best suited to the needs of its students and faculty. Second, creating an incentive-based program can entice the qualified teacher to remain active in the University for longer periods of time; for instance, an incentives package can offer cumulative rewards based upon the number of times that the teacher agreed to stay on for an additional semester's labor (e.g.: one semester's work is equal to three thousand dollars, the next semester will result in six thousand dollars, the next will yield nine thousand dollars, and so on). This means that the recruitment and retention programs are synonymous when addressing teachers from Western countries. It is recommended that a cap be placed upon the overall salary that a recruited teacher can acquire, but an additional incentives balance needs to be struck to ensure that the teacher will be able to draw a desirable salary and not see attaining the level of the salary cap as a reason to leave China and return home.

This program has disadvantages. It will be difficult to change the philosophy of recruitment from Western countries as a process that does not need significant incentives. Currently, the attitude towards recruiting teachers is that it provides younger professionals a desirable opportunity and that the work is inherently its own reward; after all, the West is increasingly integrating Chinese into its own language pool as a means of maintaining a competitive edge. Changing

the attitude towards these young scholars from helping foster a mutually beneficial learning environment to one where the young scholars are viewed as a necessary element in developing China's English-language repository will take time. This can be done while also cultivating funds for scholarships and incentives program. It is estimated that these processes will take a minimum of eighteen months from suggestion to widespread acceptance within the University and its financiers.

Retention of Existing English-Language Teachers

Recruitment and retention strategies may be synonymous for the Western teacher, but native-born Chinese English-language teachers are in great demand. This is even more evident at the post-secondary level where competition for qualified English-language teachers is fierce. While an English-language speaker who is native to a Western country is desirous in terms of facilitating appropriate pronunciation and developing fluency, a Chinese native who has spent time in the West and who has returned home to teach English is a valuable commodity. The teacher will be able to relate to the Chinese students and is more likely to interact with the students in both Chinese and English; this helps the students build their existing vocabularies. The native-born Chinese language speaker also relates to the staff and the faculty; this helps ensure that such teachers are members of the University team and are more likely to share the same goals of their co-workers.

However, the native-born Chinese language speaker is also more likely to move from one University to another based upon these very criteria. Such

persons are commodities and recognize that their skill sets are in short supply. In order to retain workers of this caliber, it is necessary to create a work environment that meets their professional needs and also provides rewards commiserate with their value. It is important to note that the rewards offered do not have to be financial or material in nature; a common criticism among teachers is that there is no professional development within the workplace, meaning that advancement is limited or non-existent. Typically, tenure is not offered to language teachers; it is recommended that a tenure program be put into place to reward those educators who remain committed to the University. Additionally, rewards for time spent on the job and quality of work performance should be reviewed on a routine basis (e.g.: after every twenty four months of employment, etc.).

This program has disadvantages similar to all tenure programs; often, persons receive tenure who are nominally qualified but who do not consistently maintain high levels of performance once they are granted permanent protection of their jobs. This means that a caveat may need to be added to the program, wherein the tenured language teacher will be reviewed for poor performance; it would be convenient to integrate this into the aforementioned review process for incentives, where the University maintains the option to break tenure if specific minimum performance levels are not met. The time frame for these processes will be eighteen months, and can be done at the same time as the recruitment strategies.

Personnel Involvement and Recommendations for Implementation

The implementation process will require ongoing communications between many distinctive departments both within the University and within diverse organizations including domestic and foreign governments. It is also likely that service providers be consulted that will help provide the necessary incentives used to entice both foreign nationals and native-born English speakers to remain active at the University. To clarify, government interaction will be required in order to facilitate smooth transactions into China; government supervision will be needed as a means of documenting appropriate work permits and determining a legitimate length of stay based upon the contract between the teacher and the University. This may be necessary for native-born teachers as well as foreign-born teachers, as persons living outside of the urban regions need to have work permits to maintain employment within a city. Indeed, as city dwelling is difficult to attain in many prominent Chinese cities, it is likely that offering work permits or permanent residency may entice many native-born English teachers to remain active at the University.

Bureaucracy in China is difficult to manage and requires a significant investment of time. It is therefore recommended that a liaison position be created that will manage these and similar aspects of the recruitment and retention program. The Human Resources director needs to appoint an employee to monitor these steps and also to act as a liaison for persons who require clarity on any given aspect of the program. This liaison will have an office that has a compliment of

clerical staff in order to make sure that deadlines are met in a timely manner.

In addition to facilitating communication between the government and the University, the liaison will also need to be in charge of addressing the University's needs for English-speaking teachers and filling these positions. It is the responsibility of the Language Department to identify the type of candidate that is required for a specific position (e.g.: whether a native-born or foreign-born speaker would best fill the University's requirements). The liaison would then have the responsibility of interviewing potential candidates, and recommending the three candidates who are best suited for the job to the Language Department, as the hiring decisions would take place there.

The liaison would also have to engage in professional development strategies for those persons hired as English teachers. Data suggests that teachers are more likely to remain at a single institution when they receive rewards commiserate with their experience, but are also more likely to leave a specific institution when they do not receive ongoing professional development. This suggests that the liaison will need to consider teacher enrichment strategies such as investment of graduate certification as a means of promoting retention.

Review of the Strategy

In order to make certain that these steps are proceeding as planned, consistent review is necessary. Human Resources needs to maintain the language liaison's office within the scope of its own department. The liaison will be required to provide documentation of progress on a monthly basis for the first twenty four

months of the program; it may be needed to review progress every two weeks if conflict or unforeseen challenges arise, such as conflict between the government and the University. All review will consist of oral reports and documentation that reflects the current status of each phase of the program. Specific consideration needs to be made to detailing observed areas in which problems have occurred or could occur, and recommendations that could be used to reduce or avoid these.

Once the trial period for the program has been established, review can be on a quarterly basis, with regular updates given during routine Human Resources meetings.

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