

## HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND ISO CERTIFICATION IN SMES

**T S Nanjundeswaraswamy (Ph.D.) \***  
**Swamy D R (Ph.D.) \*\***

*\* Associate Professor, \*\*Professor, Department of Industrial Engineering & Management,  
JSS Academy of Technical Education, Bangalore  
Visvesvaraya Technological University, Belagavi*

### Abstract

*The paper empirically examines the HRM Practices in ISO and Non ISO certified manufacturing SMEs. The data was collected through a specially designed questionnaire from owners of 217 small manufacturing firms. Research shows Continuous improvement program is significantly associated with ISO Certified SMEs and presence of qualified HR manager is significantly associated with ISO Certification.*

**Key words:** *ISO, HRM, SMEs, Manufacturing*

### 1. Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are a vibrant and important sector of the Indian economy. It makes significant contribution to the annual GDP, exports and employment. The SME sector in India has, over the years, recorded an impressive performance in terms of range of items produced, contribution to value addition in the industrial sector, contribution to exports and employment. Performance of the SME sector, which forms a part of total industrial sector, therefore, has direct impact on the growth of the national economy.

Human Resource Management is one of the major keys for firms to gain competitive edge or a lasting and sustained advantage over their competitors in the modern world [1].

Present study is an attempt to find out status of HRM practices in ISO and Non ISO SMEs.

### 2. Literature review:

#### 2.1 HRM and SMEs

Human Resource Management (HRM) has been defined as the “Process of attracting, developing, and maintaining a talented and energetic workforce to support organizational mission, objectives and strategies [2]. Competent human resource are generally well educated and trained. They are also constantly developing their skills and knowledge to meet new market demands and achieve organizational objectives [3] and [4]. Some of the study reveals that personnel Management has been identified as a major area of deficiency in small business and in the small business research literature [5], [6], [7].

The general impression that research on HRM within SMEs is still in an explorative stage and does not apply to all fields of HRM practices. In spite of the above-mentioned studies, growing evidence, largely derived from case studies and small pilot studies, suggests that HRM practices can be more sophisticated than expected in a typical small firm [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], [13], [14].

Audretsch et al [15] and [16] argues that effective HRM practices are becoming increasingly important in the new “Knowledge based” economy, as companies face the double challenge of the need for more highly trained employees coupled with a shortage of qualified labor. These challenges, towards smaller firms in general, reinforce the need for effective HRM practices in the small firm. It is therefore not surprising that research on HRM

practices in small and medium-sized enterprises has captured increased attention in recent years.

It has been discussed, in literature review conducted by Connie Zheng [17] on the above issue reveals that the practice of HRM might enhance firm performance [18], [19], [20], [21] and [22]. The empirical studies on the linkage between HRM and performance result in two different views. One supports the view that the underlying practices of HRM enhance performance [23], [24], [25], [26] and [27]. The other argues that there is a weak link between HRM and performance [28], [29], [30] and [31]. However, there is a general consensus among researchers [32], [33], [34], [35] and [36], that greater firm performance can be achieved via better managing their human resource.

Gilbert et al [5], found that HRM practices in small businesses are undoubtedly quantitatively and qualitatively different from those in larger organizations. The growing small businesses need to develop their HRM practices, as increasing size inevitably brings in increased complexity, necessitating a more professional approach towards managing the personnel. They also report that HR Practices in small businesses are predominantly informal, ad-hoc and opportunistic, nevertheless, they are effective in small business. This argument is supported by many researchers [37], [38], Lee [39] Marlow et al [14], Pfeffrer [35], Storey [36] and Whittington [56].

Marlow et al [14], argue that the effective management of employees is also emerging as a key variable in the survival of small firms. They maintain that small firms frequently do not employ professional experts to manage human resource issues, are considerably less likely to be unionized (and thus have more freedom in determining their human resources strategy), vary markedly with regard to the provision of training, and often do not engage in strategic employee management with the goal of gaining competitive advantage.

Most studies on HRM within SMEs are based on qualitative studies. The available empirical information on HRM within SMEs suggests that smaller firms make less use of higher level HRM practices than larger organizations do [40]. Firm size is positively associated with the adoption of Human Resource Management practice and there is a difference in practices between small and large firms [41], [42]. Emphasis on HRM by SMEs is influenced by growth – oriented strategies, [43], [44] and [45].

Some of the researchers argue that HRM Practices may be a leading cause of small business failures [46]. Inadequate and inefficient HRM in SMEs may result in low productivity and high dissatisfaction and turnover amongst the staff [47]. There is no consensus amongst researchers regarding the role of HRM in small firm success [11]. More importantly, HRM strategies do not pay off immediately [48]. A substantial amount of unexplained variation remains across small firms: although company size appears to be a strong factor in predicting HRM practices, it is clearly not the only factor [43].

## **2.2 About ISO - Certification**

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is a network of the National Standards Institutions in 147 countries, organized on a one member per country basis. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, ISO serves as a monitoring organization that meets the requirements of business and quality. International Standards provide a reference framework, a common technological language platform between suppliers and their customers. This worldwide agreement facilitates trade and the transfer of technology. ISO is the world's largest developer of standards. Standards play a crucial role in ensuring quality, safety, reliability, efficiency and interchangeability.

ISO 9000 is at best a framework for quality assurance; any progress beyond this point cannot be captured within the printed words of a standard, but must be foremost on the agenda of the manager [49].

ISO 9000 is not a quality standard per se, but is a management control procedure, which involves businesses in documenting the processes of design, production and distribution to ensure that the quality of products and services consistently meet the intended purpose and ultimately the needs of customers. In other words its goal is to ensure conformity to predetermined standards [50].

### **2.3 SMEs, ISO certification and Human Resource Management**

Over the last two decades, many studies have reported the implementation of ISO certification and its impacts on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) around the world. However, until recently, there have been only few attempts to empirically establish the link between Human Resource Management practices and ISO 9000 certification.

Various reasons for the ISO 9000 drive are identified in the literature [51], [52] and [53]. They include: customer demands and expectations, competitive pressures, a regulatory environment and internal forces. This worldwide push has probably impacted more on smaller organisations than larger ones. Many smaller enterprises face strong pressure to gain certification due to either customer requirements or to maintain their competitive position in the industry when other companies are also moving in this direction. Customers are increasingly demanding that their suppliers be certified [54].

There are several important driving forces for ISO 9000 series certification. Market-related factors, customer service, efficiency and as a 'kick start' for quality improvement all these feature as strong motivating forces [55].

### **3. Objectives**

The research objectives are as follows

- To know the level of HR Practices adoption
- To understand various HR management techniques used by SMEs
- To compare ISO and Non ISOSMEs on various HR practices

### **4. Scope of the study**

The study is confined to mechanical manufacturing small-scale industries in the state of Karnataka. The State has long been recognized as one of the major industrialized states in India with a large number of diversified industries having their presence and base here. Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka has been recognized as a major industrial hub of India with a huge number of both private and public sector industries operating successfully.

### **5. Research sample**

In this study, the unit of analysis is the firm and the population is small mechanical manufacturing firms within the state of Karnataka, India. There are 9583 registered SMEs of this type in the state of Karnataka (as per the record available in Department of industries and Commerce, Government of Karnataka).

### **6. Questionnaires' development:**

Based on the detailed literature review, discussing with various officials' of Department of Industries and Commerce, Government of Karnataka and agencies like KASSIA, KCTU, SISI etc., a draft questionnaire was developed keeping the objectives in mind and a preliminary pilot survey was done for a sample size of 25 firms to get the feedback from the respondents and to fine tune the questionnaire. The draft questionnaire, which is used for pilot survey, was fine-tuned and a final structured questionnaire is prepared and selected for the final survey incorporating some qualitative modifications based on the feedback of the experts as well as firms' owners and concerned industry officials. These responses were further used to calculate the reliability coefficient which is 0.84. Cronbach's alpha value, which is considered adequate for exploratory research

The structured final questionnaire designed for the study was 'close ended' in nature. The final questionnaire consisted of mainly firm's HRM practices

The HR Practices Considered for the study are

1. Human Resource Planning
2. Systematic Recruitment and Selection
3. Training and Development Programs
4. Written Job Description
5. Regular Performance Appraisal
6. Growth Plans and Strategies

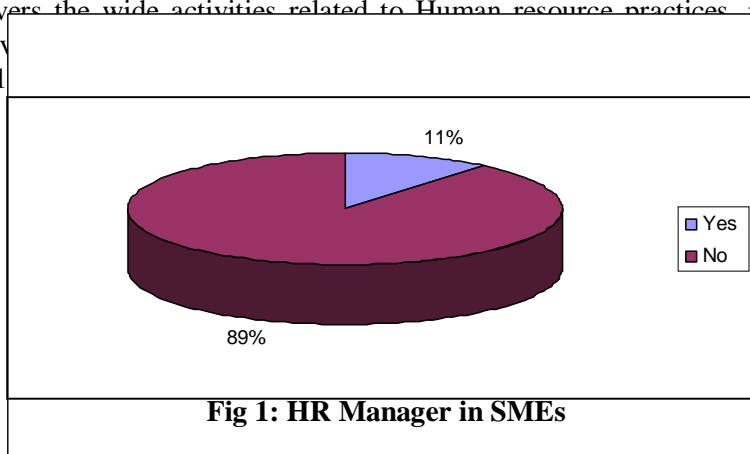
## 7. Data collection

The data was collected through a specially designed the questionnaire administered to the owners of 657 small manufacturing firms. Of the 657 firms surveyed, 233 firms responded of which 217 were found to be valid, appropriate and is considered for the final analysis. The responses of remaining 16 firms are rejected because of illegible, inappropriate and incomplete data.

## 8. DESCRIPTION OF FACTS AND FIGURES

### 8.1 Human Resource Manager in SMEs.

The study covers the wide activities related to Human resource practices, presence of HR manager, and v 217 SMEs is as shown in Fig 1

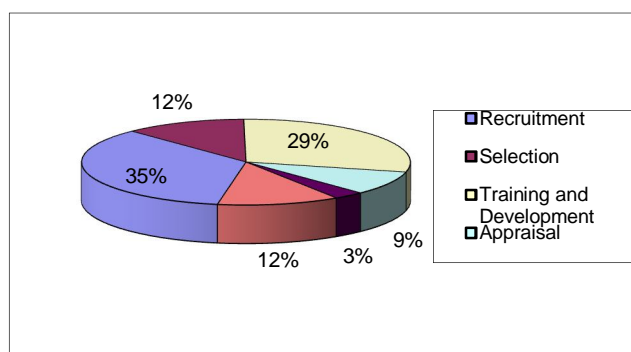


**Fig 1: HR Manager in SMEs**

From the sample of 217 firms surveyed, 193 firms accounting for 89 percent do not have a Qualified HR Manager in their respective firms while only 24 firms (11 percent) have a qualified HR Manager to take care of their firm's HR activities. Overall, the Presence of Qualified HR Manager is significantly low among the surveyed firms.

### 8.2 Using Consultant for HR activity

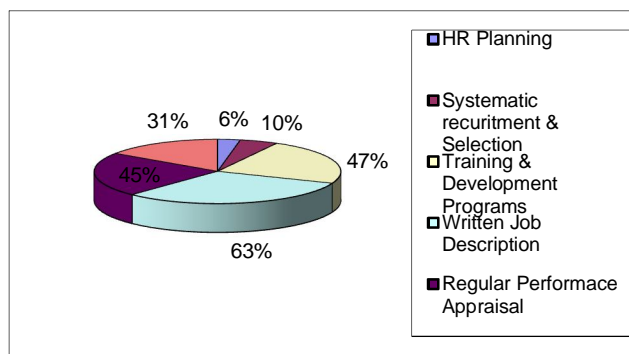
Five different HR activities are considered in this study, the SMEs using HR consultant for Recruitment, Selection, Training & development, Appraisal, Compensation activities are as shown in Fig 2.



Recruitment (80 firms), Training and Development (66 firms) followed by Selection (26 firms) and Appraisal (20 firms) have emerged as the major activities that firms consult a HR consultant in the absence of HR Manager in their firms.

### 8.3 HR Practices Followed by SMEs

The six various HR practices followed by 217 SMEs are as shown in Fig 3.



**Fig 3. : HR Practices followed by SMEs**

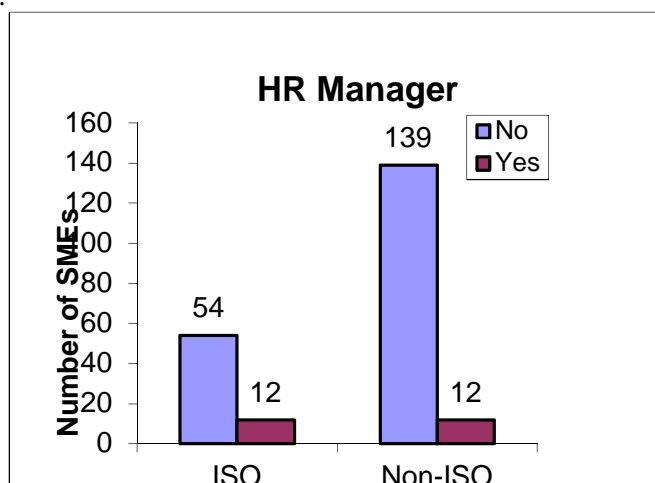
Written Job Description (136 firms), Training and Development Programs (101 firms) followed by Regular Performance Appraisal (98 firms) and Growth Plans and Strategies (68 firms) have emerged as the major HR Practices.

### 8.4 HR management practices in ISO and Non ISOSMEs

The study covers the wide activities related to Human Resource practices, presence of HR manager, and various HR practices followed. All these factors considered for the study are compared between ISO and Non ISO firms.

#### 8.4.1 Human Resource Manager in ISO and Non ISO SMEs

The presence of HR manager in 217 SMEs and the comparison with ISO and Non ISO firm is as shown in Fig 4 .

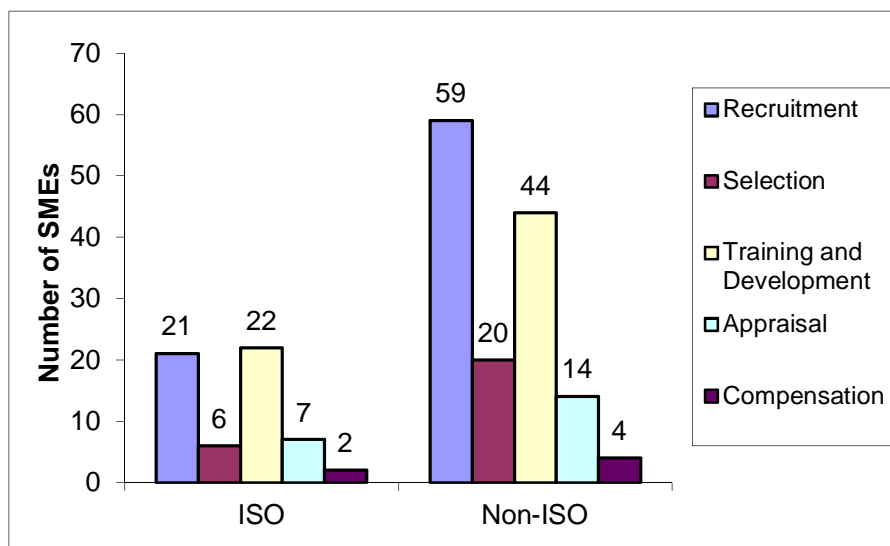


**Fig. 4: HR Manager in SMEs**

Among 66 ISO firms, only 12 firms (18.18 percent) have a qualified HR Manager to take care of their firm's HR activities. Out of 151 Non ISO firms, 12 firms have HR Manager accounting for 7.9 percent.

### 8.4.2 Using Consultant for HR activities in ISO and Non ISO firms

Five different HR activities are considered in this study, the SMEs using HR consultant for these activities is as shown in Fig 5.

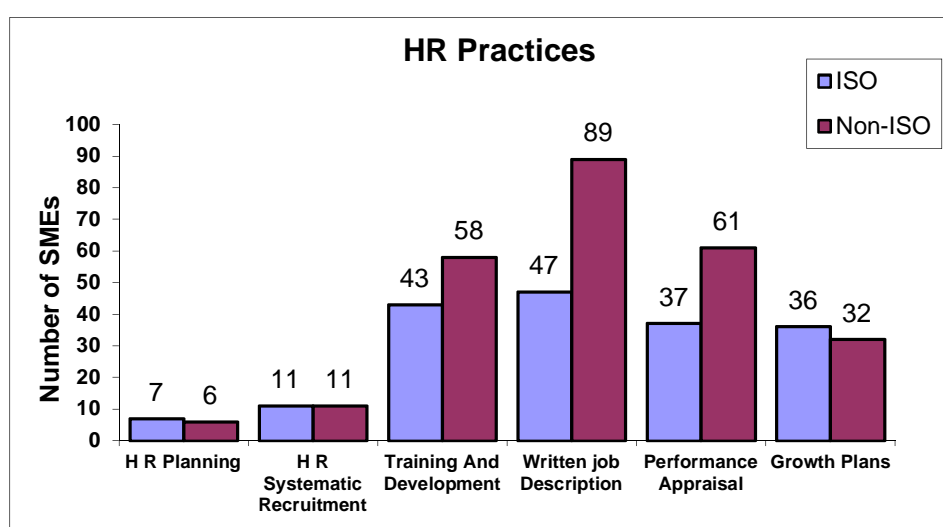


**Fig. 5: Using Consultant for HR activity**

Training and Development (22 firms), Recruitment (21 firms) followed by Appraisal (7 firms) and Selection (6 firms) have emerged as the major areas that the ISO firms consult HR consultant. Among 151 Non ISO firms Recruitment (59 firms), Training and Development (44 firms) followed by Selection (20 firms) and Appraisal (14 firms) have emerged as the major areas that the Non ISO firms consult HR consultants.

### 8.5 HR Practices Followed by ISO and Non ISO firms

The six various HR practices followed by 217 SMEs are compared with ISO and Non ISO firms and is as shown in Fig.6 .



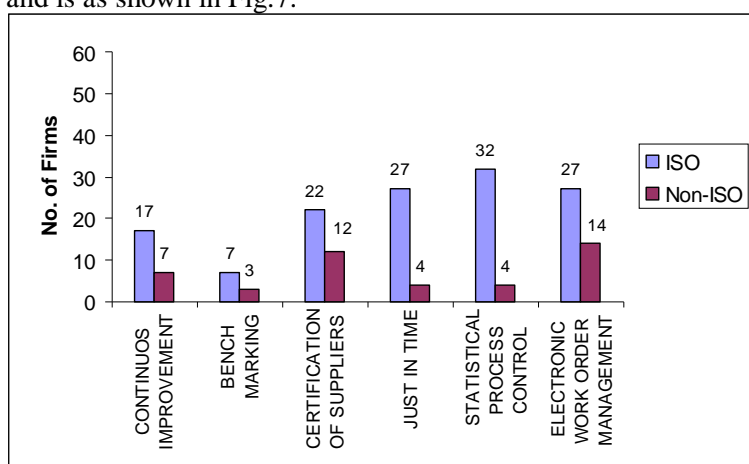
**Fig 6. : HR Practices followed by SMEs**

Among 66 ISO firms Written Job Description (47 firms), Training and Development Programs (43 firms) followed by Regular Performance Appraisal (37 firms) and Growth Plans and Strategies (36 firms) have emerged as the major HR Practices followed.

Among 151 Non ISO firms Written Job Description (89 firms), Regular Performance Appraisal (61 firms) followed by Training and Development Programs (58 firms) and Growth Plans and Strategies (32 firms) have emerged as the major HR Practices followed.

### 8.6 Use of Management Techniques and ISO Certification

The six various management techniques followed by 217 SMEs are compared with ISO and Non ISO firms and is as shown in Fig.7.



**Fig.7 : Use of Management Techniques and ISO**

Use of Statistical Process Control (50 percent), Just In Time, Inventory Control (46 percent), Electronic work order management (44 percent) and Continuous Improvement (34 percent) have emerged as the major management techniques used among ISO Certified firms. Here again, it is very clear that the use of above management techniques is very significant in the case of ISO Certified firms when compared to firms without ISO certification. This clearly illustrates that ISO certified firms place more emphasis on using different modern management techniques than firms without ISO certification.

## 9. ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

### 9.1 Relationship between management practices and ISO and Non ISO Certification

Table 1 presents details of the Management practices of ISO and Non ISO firms and also the  $\chi^2$  values for testing the association of ISO Certification with management practices.

**Table 1: ISO and Non ISO - Certification and Management Practices**

Sl. No.	Management Practices		ISO	Non ISO	$\chi^2$ Value	Significance Level
1	Continuous improvement	Yes	17	07	20.829	1%
		No	49	144		
2	Bench Marking	Yes	07	03	7.762	1%
		No	59	148		
3	Certification of supplier	Yes	22	12	22.400	1%
		No	44	139		
4	Just in time Inventory Control	Yes	27	04	54.903	1%

		No	39	147		
5	Statistical Process Control	Yes	32	04	69.728	1%
		No	34	147		
6	Electronic work order Management	Yes	27	14	29.99	1%
		No	39	137		

From Table 1 the following are observed:

Continuous improvement program is significantly associated with ISO Certified SMEs. Bench marking program is significantly associated with ISO Certified SMEs. Certification of supplier is more prevalent in ISO Certified SMEs and it is significantly associated with the ISO Certification. Just-in-time inventory control is significantly associated with the ISO Certification in SMEs. Statistical process control is significantly related with the ISO firms compared to NON ISO firms. Electronic work order management is significantly associated with ISO Certification when compared to NON ISO firms.

## 9.2 Human Resources Management Practices and ISO Certification

Table 2 presents information on various Human Resource management practices and their association with the ISO Certification among the 217 SMEs studied.

**Table 2: Human Resources Management Practices and ISO Certification**

Sl. No.	Human Resources Management Practices	ISO	NON-ISO	$\chi^2$ Value	Significance Level	
1.	HR Manager	Yes	12	12	4.81	1%
		No	54	139		
2.	HR Planning	Yes	07	06	3.587	NS
		No	59	145		
3.	Systematic recruitment	Yes	11	11	4.437	1%
		No	55	140		
4.	Training and Development	Yes	43	58	13.199	1%
		No	23	93		
5.	Written Job Description	Yes	47	89	2.956	NS
		No	19	62		
6.	Performance Appraisal	Yes	37	61	4.550	1%
		No	29	90		
7.	Growth Plan	Yes	36	32	23.745	1%
		No	30	119		

The presence of qualified HR manager is significantly associated with ISO Certification. Human resource planning is not significantly related with ISO Certification. Systematic recruitment planning is significantly associated with firms having ISO Certification. Training and development programme is significantly associated with the SMEs having ISO Certification. Written job description is not significantly associated with the ISO Certification

in SMEs. Performance appraisal is significantly associated with the ISO Certification in SMEs. Growth plan is significantly associated with the ISO Certification. Growth plan is found predominant in ISO Certified firms than the Non ISO firms

### 9.3 Effect of Presence of HR Manager and Human Resource Practices

The data with respect to the presence of qualified HR manager are classified on the issues like type and training, budget for training and various other HR practices in SMEs and are tabulated in Table 3 .

**Table 3: HR Manager and Human Resource Practices**

Sl. No.		HR Manger		$\chi^2$ Value	Significance Level
		YES	NO		
1.	Formal training	08	20	10.022	1%
		16	173		
2.	Informal training	19	171	1.744	NS
		05	02		
3.	Training need assessment method	21	118	6.442	5%
		03	75		
4.	HR planning	01	02	76.060	1%
		13	191		
5.	Training and development	12	89	0.130	NS
		12	104		
6.	Written job description	05	117	3.138	NS
		19	76		
7.	Performance appraisal	16	82	5.039	5%
		08	111		
8.	Growth plan	15	09	12.18	1%
		09	140		
9.	Budget for training	03	08	3.09	NS
		21	185		

Training need assessment method and formal training is significantly associated with the presence of HR Manager in the SMEs but informal training is not significantly associated with the presence of HR manager. Budget for training has no significant association with the presence of HR manager. Formal Training is significantly associated with the presence of HR manager. Growth plan and performance appraisal are significantly associated with the presence of HR manager where as written job description, and training and development have no significant relationship with the presence of HR manger.

### Conclusion

Management Practices like Continuous improvement program, Bench marking program, Certification of supplier, Just-in-time inventory control, Statistical Process Control and Electronic work order management are all significantly present in ISO Certified SMEs.

ISO Certified firms significantly have Qualified HR Managers, Systematic Recruitment Planning, Training and Development Programmes, Performance Appraisal Programmes and Growth Plan, however written job description is followed by both ISO and Non ISO firms. Human resource planning is not significantly adopted by either of the firms.

The presence of HR Manager is associated with Training need Assessment method, Formal Training, HR Planning, Growth Plan however there is no significant association found towards, Budget for training, written job description, and training and development.

ISO Certified firms significantly organize training programmes on Safety, Maintenance and Quality control skill related; Technical skill training programmes are present in both ISO and Non ISO firms.

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