

The Effects of 9/11 and Terrorism on Human Resource Management: Recovery, Reconsideration, and Renewal

Jack N. Kondrasuk¹

The United States suffered an unprecedented loss of life on September 11, 2001, from what was labeled a “terrorist attack.” Mainly on the basis of data from professional association surveys and government agencies, it was found that the United States and many other countries of the world have been significantly affected by the events and aftermath of that morning’s events. As an unprecedented attack on a country not usually affected by external terrorism, it allows a unique study of how terrorism can affect countries in the world. As a result of “9/11” there were significant changes in the U.S. economy and society that, because of the global economy and politics as well as the international war on terrorism, certainly have international consequences. Changes also occurred in most areas of human resource management as well as producing a much greater emphasis on having an overall business crisis management program. However, many of the initial changes appear to have diminished over time. The resultant changes, and lack of changes, produce rich questions for further research.

KEY WORDS: terrorism; terrorist attacks; 9/11 effects; human resource management.

INTRODUCTION

“U.S. Under Attack” was a typical headline in papers across the United States of America (USA) the day after three commercial airliners were used as bombs to destroy the World Trade Center twin towers as well as part of the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 (September 11 News.com, 2002). Another hijacked U.S. airliner crashed in Pennsylvania, supposedly intending to crash into the White House in Washington, DC. The United Nations, Interpol, and many individual countries reacted strongly against the terrorist attacks of “9/11” (as the day of the attacks is usually referred to). Since then the USA has experienced anthrax-infected mail, bombs in mailed letters and packages, and many threats of other terrorist activities such as bridge bombings and Internet incapacitation. Airlines, hotels, and the insurance industry were expected to post tremendous losses as a result of 9/11. Significant increases in security provisions have occurred at airports in the United States and around the world as well as at large public gatherings (Gibbs, 2002; Nussbaum, 2002; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2003b). It would be helpful to look at, and learn

¹Dr. Robert B. Pamplin Jr., School of Business Administration, University of Portland, 5000 N. Willamette Blvd.; Portland, Oregon 97203; e-mail: kondrasu@up.edu.



Fig. 1. 9/11 World Trade Center attacks.

from, the events of 9/11 and their effects on the USA, human resource management, and other countries of the world (Fig. 1).

PURPOSE AND PLAN OF PAPER

We would like to look at terrorism from an international perspective. However, length restrictions and paucity of data from all countries preclude that tact. Because (1) 9/11 was

the largest international terrorist event in history (U.S. Department of State, 2002), (2) it occurred in a country that had been relatively immune to prior external terrorist harm, and (3) it apparently was caused by a group that has produced damaging terrorist events in other countries (Hosenball *et al.*, 2002), it seems appropriate to study the events and effects of 9/11.

In this paper we will look at terrorism and its effects after 9/11. We will start with a global view, go to the USA, and then focus on the effects of 9/11 on a specific area of interest—human resource management (HRM) in employer organizations. We will end with suggestions for further research in this area. There have been many general articles in the popular press with their authors' opinions about terrorism and the effects of 9/11. However, there are few empirical, objective research articles—especially about the effects on employers and HRM. This paper is an attempt to bridge that gap.

TERRORISM IN THE WORLD

The term *Terrorism* is frequently used in government and mass media communications. However, those in the group being assailed, and their supporters, may view themselves as “freedom fighters” or by some other less pejorative terms. Therefore, it is helpful to define the term clearly. *Terrorism* is defined by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to force the terrorists' political or social views onto a government or its citizens to influence them to change in some way (Terrorism Research Center, 2003). A similar definition is offered by U.S. Code Section 2656 (d) (Pelton, 2000). We will use the FBI definition in this paper.

Terrorists have a myriad of potential targets in the world. They could attack any and every facet of our lives such as where we work or recreate, our transportation systems, water systems, communications systems, utilities, and computer systems. They are thought to be more likely to attack high-profile landmarks, crowded public places with low security, targets that would hurt their enemy's economy, and anywhere they could kill the maximum number of their enemy's citizens (NBC Nightly News, 2002). It should be noted that not all terrorist activity is perpetrated on the home soil of the terrorists' enemies; much is on foreign soil where it is more difficult to protect the country's interests—for example, against a country's embassies in crowded inner cities of poorer nations.

Given our prior definition, terrorism has probably occurred in the world for a long time. There seem to always have been groups that have risen up against those in power and used unlawful means to influence the ruling group. For instance, more recently Palestinian suicide bombers have blown up many structures and killed many people in Israel. However, Interpol only started officially fighting terrorism in 1985 with the passage of a resolution that also created the “Public Safety and Terrorism sub-directorate” (Interpol, 2003b). Although the effects of the terrorist acts of 9/11 have been felt across the globe, this paper will henceforth, for the sake of brevity, narrow its focus primarily to the effects of 9/11 on the United States. However, there will be many implications that apply to other countries.

TERRORISM IN THE USA PRIOR TO 9/11

The U.S. Department of State estimates that 21% of the world's terrorism is directed against the USA (Pelton, 2003). In 1997 the U.S. Department of State started designating

Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs); that 1st year 30 organizations were so listed with 36 on the list for December of 2003 (U.S. Department of State, 2003a). Many parts of the U.S. government are involved in thwarting terrorism; they include the U.S. Department of State, Secretary of State, Attorney General, Secretary of Treasury, Congress, Office of the Coordinator for Counter-terrorism in the State Department, Office of Homeland Security, the FBI, and the Immigration and Nationality Act. The Secretary of State provides Congress with an annual “Pattern of Global Terrorism” report (U.S. Department of State, 2003b). Although there was a relatively small bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 by a foreign terrorist group, the main event catalyzing the reason for this paper occurred on the East Coast of the USA on September 11, 2001.

THE EVENTS OF 9/11

The U.S. Department of State labeled the 9/11 attacks as the worst international terrorist attack in history. There were four separate but coordinated commercial airplane hijackings by 19 hijackers belonging to the Al Qaeda terrorist network. Two fuel-laden planes were purposely crashed into the twin World Trade Towers in New York—subsequently causing the complete collapse of both towers and the death of over 3,000 people. A third airplane was likewise crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Because all the airplanes had just taken off and were filled with jet fuel for their transcontinental flights, their intentional crashes into buildings had the effects of a bomb exploding as the fuel ignited upon impact. The fourth airplane crashed in Pennsylvania—presumably short of its intended target (U.S. Department of State, 2002).

The 19 hijackers on 9/11 were described as terrorists who came from Middle Eastern countries. How did they get into the United States? NBC Nightly News (2002) said the 19 hijackers all entered the United States legally. Compare that to about 50 million people who entered the USA during August of 2001 and the estimate of 8–11 million illegal aliens presently in the USA. With over 6,000 mi of land borders, 95,000 mi of seacoast, and many airports, guarding all possible entrance points into the United States and keeping out any terrorists is almost impossible.

GLOBAL EFFECTS OF THE 9/11 ATTACKS

The United Nations passed a resolution condemning the 9/11 attacks (Columbia University, 2003). Interpol has focused its attention on bringing the 9/11 terrorists to justice (Interpol, 2001); it has organized an 11 September Task Force in response to the attacks on that day (Interpol, 2003a). The attacks on 9/11 in the United States have directly and indirectly drawn many other countries into the fray against terrorists. Other countries in the world, like Yemen, Pakistan, Kuwait, Tunisia, and Kenya, have also had terrorist events supposedly staged by the group responsible for the 9/11 attacks in the United States—Al Qaeda (Hosenball *et al.*, 2002; McGeary, 2002). Palestinian suicide bombers have blown up buses in Israel. Australians were killed in a restaurant in Bali. Terrorists blew up a French oil tanker off of Yemen. France, Germany, and England have made multiple arrests of suspected terrorists. Recently, terrorists blew up a restaurant in the Philippines and killed many foreign tourists (Gibbs, 2002; Nussbaum, 2002). The United States attacked Afghanistan and Iraq (White House, 2002).

EFFECTS OF THE 9/11 ATTACKS ON THE USA IN GENERAL

The 9/11 attacks had a number of immediate impacts on the United States in general. The initial tenor of the populace in the United States was shock, sorrow, and outrage after 9/11. Views of people changed. There was both hatred and acts of discrimination against Muslims and Arabs (Quinn, 2003) as well as a new national inquisitiveness to learn more about Islam (Ghio, 2001). People opened up their hearts and pocket books in an initial outpouring of donating blood and money to help the victims of 9/11. Employees became more concerned with spending time with loved ones and balancing work and home time as well extending more effort to help others in need. The citizens of the United States were drawn much closer together; there was a significant increase in cohesion of the populace (Cohen, 2002).

Many changes were made at the government level. Greater coordination of the intelligence and law enforcement communities like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and FBI was stressed. Forty government agencies and units were assigned to collect information on terrorism. A cabinet-level department of Homeland Security was formed in the national government (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2003a). Congress created the Transportation Security Administration to hire and employ over 40,000 federal baggage screeners and administer screening of checked baggage at the 429 U. S. airports (Peraino, 2002). President Bush declared "War on Terrorism" and received tremendous public support. His approval rating as President soared to 70% (Gibbs, 2002). There was an incursion into Afghanistan by the United States and its allies to find and destroy those assumed to be responsible for 9/11. Later, there was an invasion of Iraq; Iraq was officially listed by the U.S. Department of State as a sponsor of terrorism (White House, 2002).

The U.S. economy was adversely affected by 9/11 with business spending dropping significantly (Cooper & James, 2002). Oster (2002) stated that terrorist strikes were the single greatest loss for the insurance industry in 2001. The travel industry was also decimated. Many trips were cancelled immediately after 9/11 with the airlines, hotels, and travel agencies especially hard hit. The airline industry declined significantly after 9/11 (Smallen, 2002). Time being screened at airports rose dramatically (Peraino, 2002). State budgets were hit hard after 9/11 (NASBO, 2001). There were adverse effects on U.S. metropolitan economies (Bolger, 2002; DeVol *et al.*, 2002).

Employers were affected by 9/11 in numerous ways. Crisis management teams and plans took on increased emphasis. Disaster plans were either revised or developed. Business travel and meetings away were drastically curtailed. Companies designed high-security meeting rooms for their leaders (Maher, 2002). Increased security procedures led to slower and more costly movement of goods, services, and people. Bernasek (2002) estimated that it would cost the United States an extra \$151 billion a year because of the 9/11 terrorist attacks including an extra \$6 billion for people costs such as extra absenteeism. Employers gave many more leaves of absences and time off to employees in any way troubled by the events of 9/11. Job applicants and present employees shunned work in high-rise buildings or working with mail (Cohen, 2002).

With the passage of time, however, the initial effects of 9/11 declined and life in the United States generally reverted to pre-9/11 behaviors. National surveys have shown little lasting change on the U.S. population and businesses since 9/11 (American Society of Association Executives, 2001; Conway, 2001). The statements regarding the casualties of the 9/11 attacks were deflated significantly from 10,000 deaths initially to the present

statement of 3,030 people killed in the attacks (September 11 News.com., 2003). Bolger (2002) states that the insurance industry has already recovered from the tremendous losses initially estimated as a result of 9/11. An article in a state employment law newsletter stated that a recent survey found 80% of the responding employees said they were at least as productive as before 9/11 (Keith and Symes, 2002). Many of the economic changes that have recently occurred were considered by some to be from the economic conditions existing in the United States before 9/11 and were not the result of the 9/11 attacks (Cooper & James, 2002).

EFFECTS OF THE 9/11 ATTACKS ON HRM IN THE USA

Many executives in HR departments were at the forefront of helping their employees on 9/11. Poe (2001) and Leonard (2001) profiled HR professionals who helped their employees to safety, helped account for those missing, set up communications links for those missing, and brought in employee assistance program (EAP) counselors for on-site help to those with stress problems.

A week after the 9/11 attacks, the main professional association in the human resource management field, the Society For Human Resource Management (SHRM), surveyed 120,000 of its members about the effects of the attacks. There were over 5,600 responses; they indicated a number of changes in their organizations due to the 9/11 attacks. Those respondents stated that 76% of their companies allowed employees to cancel or delay business travel, 62 % allowed employees time off if needed as a result of 9/11, 50% collected money and sent it to aid the victims, 45% cancelled meetings and events, 66% expected employees would be more caring toward one another, 56% expected tighter security at their employer, many employees were concerned with the effects on the economy—especially layoffs, HR departments became more concerned with crisis management plans, and the majority said their employees were coping with the situation about as expected (SHRM, 2001).

A month or two after 9/11 other changes became more important. For instance, Poe (2001) reported that psychological reactions such as depression, posttraumatic stress reaction, and other stress reactions were more frequent among employees. Employees were continuing to rethink their priorities in life and seeking a better balance between their work and off-work lives—allocating more time to the later. More employees were adverse to flying airplanes for business or personal reasons. Layoffs were occurring more. The upcoming holidays were more likely to be seen as being stressful for employees.

Over time many of the preceding changes diminished. SHRM did additional surveys of its members in April (SHRM, 2002) and August of 2002 (Cohen, 2002) with about 4,000 and about 7,000 respondents respectively (see Table I). Seven months after the 9/11 attacks; over half of the respondents stated that the 9/11 attacks made no difference whereas only 11% said they made sweeping changes. Time off for emotional needs related to the effects of 9/11 dwindled from 62 to 35% as judged 11 months later. Cancelled meetings and events dropped from 45 to 25%. Allowing employees to listen to the news on radio or television dropped from 83 to 52%. The SHRM survey immediately after 9/11 had 66% of the respondents expecting employees to be more caring towards others whereas only 43% of the SHRM respondents believed that in August of 2002 (Cohen, 2002). On the other hand, some activities and actions did not change much over time. Blood drives and money donations, expectations of tighter security measures, and having a crisis management plan changed very

Table I. Selected Effects of 9/11 From the SHRM Surveys

Effect	SHRM surveys	
	9/01	8/02
Allowed employees to listen to the news on radio and television	83%	52%
Expecting employees to be more caring towards one another	66%	43%
Allowed employees time off if needed	62%	35%
Had a crisis management plan	50%	90%
Had an Employee Assistance Program	49%	54%
Cancelled meeting and events	45%	25%
Expected increased training in crisis management	35%	19%
Established employee committees on health, safety, and security	34%	14%

little over the year since the 9/11 attacks. However, some changes increased. Productivity, contrary to expectations, actually improved over this time period. It was found that about half the respondents in the initial SHRM survey stated they had a crisis management plan; nearly 90% had one about a year later. We will now look at how the subparts of HRM were affected by 9/11.

Employment

The main effects the 9/11 attacks had on the employment area of HRM centered on call-ups of military-involved employees, screening applicants, equal employment opportunity, and layoffs of employees. The Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act spells out employer obligations to release employees who are in the National Guard or Reserves so that they can perform active duty tasks. This must be done without penalizing those employees in pay, job duties, and benefits. Likewise, those employees must be hired back at equal or better jobs when they return from active duty. There can be no unfair discrimination against those employees (Clark, 2002).

Hiring and terminating employees received more attention. Because the hijackers had so easily infiltrated U.S. society, it forced organizations to look much more closely at whom they were hiring (e.g., as pilots, truck drivers of hazardous cargo, security personnel; Overman, 2001). In the SHRM (2001) survey it was found that 23% expected greater screening for terrorists. There may have been fewer job opportunities for those perceived as Middle Eastern and/or Muslim. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, churches, and leaders in the U.S. government came out strongly against possible unfair racial discrimination and such treatment. After the 9/11 events national news stories told of how some Muslim places of worship were being damaged or harassed. Shortly after that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued a statement condemning discrimination against Muslims and Arabs and noting that it was wrong and such treatment would be viewed as illegal. The attacks, producing significant emotional trauma for victims and relatives of the 9/11 attacks, have raised questions of the rights of those employees under the Americans with Disabilities Act; are those employees considered disabled? Also, do their emotional, or in some cases physical, wounds qualify them for state workers' compensation benefits (Heidrich, 2002)?

Training and Development

A survey was conducted by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) after 9/11. Their study showed a distinct shift to distance learning (by intra- and internet and videoconferencing); training was much more likely to be conducted on the employer's premises and not requiring travel by airplane to a distant city (Cauldron, 2002). It could be expected that more training would now be done to help employees gain skills in recognizing, preventing, and responding to threats of terrorism. Because of the quickly changing terrain of terrorism, continuous retraining would now probably be necessary. In the initial SHRM (2001) survey 35% of the respondents expected increases in training for crisis management and disaster recovery. In the ASTD survey training actually increased in diversity, security, stress management, and change management (Cauldron, 2002). However, over the last year there has been little evidence of an increase in training for detecting or responding to terrorism; the latest SHRM survey stated that only 19% of the respondents expected greater training in these areas (Cohen, 2002).

Compensation and Benefits

The changes expected here would probably involve employee benefits (although one could imagine that certain jobs might now receive additional "hazardous duty" pay for greater threats of terrorism). There was an increase in the number of employers offering EAPs; according to the SHRM surveys (Cohen, 2002), it has gone from 49 to 54% over 11 months. There was more long-term therapy for traumatized and stressed employees (Leonard, 2002). Many present insurance policies exclude payments for death, injury, and destruction caused by acts of war and terrorism; Franklin (2002) says that the insurance companies have seen a huge rise in demand for political-risk insurance (e.g., for terrorism coverage) since 9/11. Terrorism may not be covered now; will it be covered in the future? Other questions arise regarding benefits being related to terrorist attacks. Will employers pay healthcare costs for hospitalization and medical care after a terrorist attack? Who will fund the cost for vaccines and drugs to prevent bioterrorism (e.g., smallpox or anthrax outbreaks)? Will there be more employee travel/accident insurance?

Occupational Health, Safety, and Security

The area expected to be most affected by the events of 9/11 is the area of health, safety, and security. It could be expected that this area would gain greater status and higher operating budgets in the future. A recent BNA Bulletin to Management (2002) indicated that in over half of the organizations HR departments were responsible for security in their companies. Although maybe expected to increase dramatically in size and cost, concern over security has increased, but security departments do not seem to have grown much over the last year. Of the growth that did occur, much was window dressing with some of the quick-fix programs already dropped. Also contrary to expectation, threat analyses, considered vital to good security program, have not been done on an increased scale.

The safety and security unit would be expected to place more emphasis on a number of security aspects in companies such as adding metal detectors, more secure building designs, and equipment to screen and treat mail for bioterrorism. Immediately after the 9/11

attacks, 34% of the employers established employee committees on health/safety/security, but only 14% had them about a year later (Cohen, 2002). Employers are legally responsible for the health and safety of their employees under OSHA rules. Conlin (2001) suggests that such responsibility also extends to parking areas and the commute to work. Security outside the company like parking lots, adjoining neighborhoods, proper outside lighting, and emergency call boxes and security cameras are often overlooked. Entry and exit to the premises should gain attention. Overman (2001) stated that employee ingress/egress must be further constricted and separate from that used by nonemployees such as visitors, customers, and suppliers. Metal/explosives/weapons detectors and ID badges should be improved. Security guards, bodyguards for executives, and surveillance cameras should be added. Nonemployees on the premises, such as visitors, should be monitored closely. Mail and the mail room will probably need more security procedures to avoid hazards such as letter bombs and anthrax in letters.

Employee Mobility

HR departments would be expected to help plan how to enable employees to continue work during the threat of, the actual event of, and the aftermath of a crisis or terrorist attack. Succession planning should now include planning to spread out the workforce so as not to wipe out management or a huge operating part of company in case of a terrorist attack. It would also be important to protect management and production staffs during crises by relocating them to secure areas. Company crisis management plans include having concrete bunkers for executives and board members to gather to continue working to run the company. Some company plans provided bodyguards and varied travel routes taken by executives and key personnel—for traveling to/from work or as a part of work. Companies tried to minimize air travel for their employees. Economy.com expected an extra hour's delay at airports for security screening that would cost society an extra \$8 billion/year. Special programs were provided to those traveling on company business for dealing with their fear of terrorism while flying (Bernasek, 2002). Another type of employee mobility, employee turnover and absenteeism, has not changed much—increasing only 2–5% after 9/11. For instance, although about a quarter of the respondents to the August 2002 SHRM survey said there were higher stress levels at work, only 3% reported employees at their firms leaving to take less stressful jobs (Cohen, 2002).

FUTURE RESEARCH AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper has raised a number of questions that will have to be answered by future research. What terrorist events are most likely to occur in the future? When a terrorist event occurs in a country, how might it impact neighboring countries? What terrorist events would have the most effect on the world economy? How enduring are the changes occurring as the result of a terrorist attack? In the specialty areas of HRM, how do terrorist attacks influence employment, training, compensation, and labor relations over the long term? For instance, what specific effects could such events have on the safety, health, and security of employees and employers and will those changes endure? What can an employer do to prevent deleterious effects of terrorist attacks? For those situations where negative effects cannot really be prevented, how is the employer to best respond when they do occur? How

different are the concerns, prevention, and response activities of multinational employers versus those employers situated in only one location? These are important research questions that must be addressed by future research.

CONCLUSIONS

Much of what has been written about terrorism and 9/11 is authors' opinions, reporting of events, and surveys. The surveys have used respondents of convenience; the respondents are not necessarily representative of people in general. With these limitations in mind, there seem to be changes in the following areas as a result of the 9/11 attacks: more employee and citizen attention to and concern over future attacks, more crisis management planning, more employee screening and reference checking, changes in employee benefits such as greater use of EAPs, and more attention to organization security and employee safety. Although we might have expected it, we see very little longer term change in the following areas: stress levels of employees, layoffs due to 9/11, or cancelled meetings or events; in fact, the April 2002 SHRM survey stated that only 11% of the organizations made sweeping changes after 9/11 and many of the initial security changes were abandoned later. We can probably conclude that there were initially strong effects on the U.S. society, businesses, organization human resource departments, and individuals, but many of those effects have not endured. However, terrorism will probably occur again against the United States and other countries unless we resolve the underlying causes. We cannot stop people who are willing to give up their lives to harm others and prove their point.

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