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Strategic frameworks for contract management excellence in global energy HR operations

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Abstract

The energy sector relies heavily on effective contract management to navigate the complexities of global HR operations. This paper explores the strategic frameworks necessary for achieving excellence in contract management, emphasizing the challenges unique to the industry, such as regulatory compliance, cultural diversity, and risk mitigation. Key components of robust frameworks—compliance, stakeholder alignment, technology integration, and governance—are analyzed, with insights drawn from industry standards and successful case studies. Additionally, the paper highlights best practices for aligning contract management with organizational goals and HR strategies, including sustainability and workforce development. Practical recommendations are provided to guide energy companies in implementing strategic frameworks that enhance operational efficiency, mitigate risks, and foster a resilient workforce. The findings underscore the importance of a proactive and adaptive approach, ensuring that contract management addresses present challenges and positions organizations for long-term success in a competitive and evolving global landscape.

Keywords: Contract Management; Global Energy HR; Compliance; Risk Mitigation; Strategic Frameworks; Workforce Development

1. Introduction

The global energy sector is one of the most dynamic and complex industries, characterized by its diverse workforce, technological advancements, and international operations. With the demand for energy constantly evolving, organizations in this sector face challenges in recruiting, retaining, and managing talent across various geographies. Energy companies often operate in multiple countries, each with distinct labor laws, cultural practices, and market conditions. This makes human resource (HR) management in the energy sector both a strategic and operational necessity (Ghasemian et al., 2020).

In addition, the industry's workforce is highly specialized, with roles requiring advanced technical expertise and compliance with strict safety and regulatory standards. As companies pivot to more sustainable energy solutions, HR operations must address the growing demand for talent in emerging fields, such as renewable energy and green technologies, while managing contracts that reflect evolving business priorities. Contract management, therefore, plays a critical role in maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of HR functions within the global energy ecosystem (Gardas, Mangla, Raut, Narkhede, & Luthra, 2019).

Contract management is a cornerstone of organizational success in the energy sector, particularly in HR operations. It involves the creation, execution, monitoring, and optimization of agreements that define the relationship between

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employers and employees or external contractors. Effective contract management ensures compliance with employment laws, protects organizational interests, and fosters strong relationships with the workforce (Bernstein & Peterson, 2022).

Managing contracts efficiently in the energy sector, where projects often span multiple years and locations, can significantly impact operational continuity. For instance, non-compliance with local labor regulations could lead to legal penalties, project delays, or reputational damage. Furthermore, contracts must often address highly specific terms, such as safety protocols, performance metrics, and remuneration structures, tailored to the technical nature of the roles (Al-Balushi & Durugbo, 2020). The increasing reliance on outsourcing, joint ventures, and freelance contractors in energy HR operations underscores contract management's importance. It provides a framework for defining expectations, mitigating risks, and ensuring that all parties are aligned with organizational objectives. The introduction of digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain, has further elevated the strategic importance of contract management, enabling better oversight, transparency, and automation in managing HR agreements (Pan & Zhang, 2021).

The primary objective of this paper is to explore strategic frameworks that enable contract management excellence in global energy HR operations. It aims to provide insights into how organizations can address the unique challenges of managing HR contracts in an industry that is both capital-intensive and highly regulated. By examining best practices, key components, and potential areas for improvement, the paper seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on optimizing HR functions in the energy sector.

Specifically, the scope of this discussion is limited to strategic considerations. It identifies systemic challenges and offers actionable recommendations for improving contract management processes. Key themes include risk management, compliance, technology integration, and alignment with organizational goals. Ultimately, the paper aims to guide HR leaders and contract management professionals in the energy sector to enhance operational efficiency and drive workforce satisfaction. This foundation sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the strategic challenges and solutions discussed in subsequent sections, offering a comprehensive view of what it takes to achieve contract management excellence in global energy HR operations.

2. Strategic Challenges in Contract Management for Energy HR Operations

2.1. Common Obstacles in Managing HR Contracts Globally

Managing HR contracts on a global scale presents challenges stemming from the complexity and diversity inherent in international operations. One of the primary obstacles is ensuring compliance with the wide array of labor laws and regulations across different jurisdictions. Each country has its own employment standards, tax laws, and labor protections, which can vary significantly (Berman, Bowman, West, & Van Wart, 2021). For example, European Union member states enforce strict regulations regarding worker rights and safety, while some emerging markets may have less stringent requirements but pose challenges in terms of unclear or evolving legal frameworks. Navigating these differences while maintaining organizational consistency is a constant struggle for HR and contract management professionals (Bratton, Gold, Bratton, & Steele, 2021).

Cultural diversity is another critical factor that complicates global HR contract management. Contracts need to account for cultural nuances, such as expectations regarding work hours, benefits, and dispute resolution mechanisms. Misalignment between corporate policies and local cultural norms can lead to dissatisfaction among employees and contractors, ultimately impacting productivity and retention rates. For instance, North America's effective compensation and workplace hierarchy approaches might not resonate in regions like Asia or the Middle East (Baruch & Rousseau, 2019).

Language barriers also add a layer of complexity. Contracts drafted in one language must be translated accurately to ensure clarity and mutual understanding. Misinterpretations or ambiguities in translated contracts can lead to disputes, affecting trust and the overall effectiveness of HR operations.

Another common challenge lies in managing the risks associated with external contractors and freelance workers. The global energy sector increasingly relies on a contingent workforce for specialized tasks. However, the lack of standardized regulations for these workers and varying definitions of employment status across regions can expose organizations to legal and financial risks. Ensuring that contracts address these nuances while remaining adaptable to project-specific needs is essential but often challenging (Katan & Taibi, 2021).

2.2. Sector-Specific Issues in the Energy Industry

The energy industry faces unique challenges that amplify the complexity of contract management within HR operations. One of these challenges is the sector's heavy reliance on long-term, large-scale projects that span multiple countries. These projects often involve a workforce composed of permanent employees, temporary staff, and contractors, each requiring tailored contractual terms. For instance, contracts must account for project timelines, safety compliance, and the environmental conditions of remote or hazardous locations, such as offshore oil rigs or desert-based solar farms (Andoni et al., 2019).

Safety and compliance are particularly critical in the energy sector, where employees and contractors often work in high-risk environments. Contracts must explicitly outline safety protocols, training requirements, and liability clauses. Failure to address these aspects can lead to accidents, legal disputes, and reputational damage. Moreover, regulatory bodies worldwide impose strict safety standards, and non-compliance can result in significant fines or project shutdowns. HR contracts must be meticulously crafted to ensure alignment with these regulations (Gozman & Willcocks, 2019).

Another pressing issue is the rapid transition toward renewable energy and sustainability. As energy companies diversify their operations, the need for specialized talent in emerging fields like wind energy, solar power, and battery technology has grown. Contracts must adapt to these changes, addressing new job roles, skill requirements, and performance metrics. The inclusion of sustainability clauses, such as carbon reduction commitments, is becoming increasingly common in contractor agreements, reflecting the industry's broader environmental goals (T. Ahmad et al., 2021).

Furthermore, geopolitical factors and market volatility create additional layers of uncertainty. Energy companies often operate in politically sensitive regions where labor laws can change suddenly or where social unrest may disrupt operations. Contracts must be flexible enough to address such uncertainties while protecting organizational interests. For example, force majeure clauses are frequently included to account for unforeseen disruptions caused by political instability or natural disasters (Bouoiyour, Selmi, Hammoudeh, & Wohar, 2019).

Technology also plays a dual role in the energy sector, acting as both a challenge and a solution for contract management. While digital tools can streamline contract lifecycle management, the rapid pace of technological innovation requires contracts to remain adaptable to new systems and processes. Additionally, data privacy regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe, necessitate stringent measures for handling employee and contractor information, adding another layer of complexity to contract management (Li & Kassem, 2021). Lastly, workforce mobility is critical in the energy sector, as projects often require employees to relocate across borders. Contracts must address relocation packages, tax implications, and visa requirements, ensuring compliance with both home and host country regulations. This is particularly challenging when managing a diverse workforce with varying expectations and legal constraints.

3. Key Components of Effective Contract Management Frameworks

Effective contract management frameworks are fundamental to achieving operational efficiency and strategic alignment in global energy HR operations. These frameworks serve as structured systems that address the complexities of managing diverse contractual relationships, ensuring compliance, mitigating risks, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Organizations must prioritize specific components to achieve excellence in this domain, including compliance, risk management, stakeholder alignment, technology integration, and governance with performance measurement mechanisms.

3.1. Essential Elements of Contract Management

The foundation of any robust contract management framework lies in its ability to ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations. Compliance encompasses adherence to labor laws, tax codes, and industry standards that vary across jurisdictions. In the global energy sector, non-compliance can result in severe financial penalties, project delays, and reputational harm. An effective framework includes processes for continuous monitoring of regulatory changes, ensuring that contracts remain up to date and legally enforceable (Orozco, 2019).

Risk management is another critical element, particularly in the energy industry, where projects often face uncertainties ranging from fluctuating market conditions to geopolitical instability. Contracts must include clauses that anticipate and address potential risks, such as force majeure, liability, and indemnity terms. Organizations can safeguard their interests

while maintaining operational continuity by clearly defining the allocation of risks between parties (Chernov & Sornette, 2020).

Stakeholder alignment is vital for the successful implementation of contract management frameworks. Global energy HR operations stakeholders include internal departments (e.g., HR, legal, and procurement) and external parties (e.g., contractors, employees, and regulatory authorities). Misalignment can lead to contractual disputes, inefficiencies, and mistrust. Therefore, effective frameworks emphasize stakeholder collaboration and communication, ensuring that all parties understand the contract's terms and objectives (Stahl, Brewster, Collings, & Hajro, 2020).

3.2. Integration of Technology in Contract Lifecycle Management

Technology is transformative in enhancing contract management frameworks, offering tools and platforms that streamline processes and improve accuracy. Contract lifecycle management (CLM) software is particularly valuable, providing a centralized repository for drafting, reviewing, and storing contracts. These platforms facilitate version control, reduce manual errors, and ensure that all contractual documents are easily accessible to authorized stakeholders.

Automation is a key technological advancement in CLM. Automated workflows can handle repetitive tasks, such as sending reminders for contract renewals or flagging compliance deadlines. This reduces administrative burdens and allows HR and legal teams to focus on strategic priorities. Additionally, advanced analytics capabilities enable organizations to extract actionable insights from contract data, such as identifying patterns in contract performance or highlighting areas for cost optimization (Suri, 2022).

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) are also revolutionizing contract management by enhancing the ability to analyze complex contractual language and predict potential risks. For example, AI-powered tools can identify ambiguous clauses or inconsistencies within contracts, reducing the likelihood of disputes. Furthermore, AI can assist in drafting contracts tailored to specific roles or jurisdictions by analyzing historical data and regulatory requirements (Abioye et al., 2021).

Blockchain technology has emerged as a promising solution for ensuring transparency and security in contract management. In the energy sector, where trust and accountability are paramount, blockchain's decentralized ledger system can verify the authenticity of contracts and track their execution in real-time. This technology is particularly beneficial for managing contracts with external contractors and suppliers, ensuring that all parties have access to the same information (Valdivia & Balcell, 2022).

3.3. Role of Governance and Performance Measurement

Governance is the backbone of effective contract management frameworks, providing oversight and accountability throughout the contract lifecycle. A well-defined governance structure assigns roles and responsibilities to relevant stakeholders, ensuring that contracts are managed consistently and in alignment with organizational policies. This includes establishing approval hierarchies, defining dispute escalation procedures, and maintaining a clear audit trail for all contractual activities.

Performance measurement is equally important, as it enables organizations to assess the effectiveness of their contract management processes. Key performance indicators (KPIs) can be used to evaluate various aspects of contract management, such as the time taken to finalize contracts, the number of disputes resolved, and the level of compliance achieved. These metrics provide insights into areas that require improvement, allowing organizations to refine their frameworks over time (Akkermans, Van Oppen, Wynstra, & Voss, 2019).

In the context of HR operations in the energy sector, performance measurement extends to evaluating the impact of contracts on workforce productivity and satisfaction. For example, surveys and feedback mechanisms can be used to gauge employee perceptions of contract fairness and transparency. This information can then inform future contract negotiations and policy adjustments.

Moreover, continuous improvement is a hallmark of effective governance and performance measurement. Organizations should regularly review and update their contract management frameworks to adapt to changing market conditions, regulatory landscapes, and organizational needs. By fostering a culture of accountability and learning, companies can ensure that their frameworks remain resilient and effective in the face of evolving challenges (Harris, McCaffer, Baldwin, & Edum-Fotwe, 2021).

4. Best Practices and Strategic Approaches for Excellence

4.1. Industry Standards and Benchmarks

Adherence to industry standards and benchmarks is fundamental to contract management excellence. These standards provide a framework for consistency, compliance, and quality assurance. In the energy sector, internationally recognized standards such as those set by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) play a critical role (Zimon, Madzik, & Sroufe, 2020). For example, ISO 9001, which focuses on quality management systems, emphasizes process standardization and continuous improvement—both essential for effective contract management. Similarly, ISO 45001, which addresses occupational health and safety, informs the development of contracts that prioritize worker welfare and safety compliance (Agus et al., 2020).

Benchmarks offer valuable insights into best practices by comparing an organization's performance against industry leaders. Metrics such as contract cycle times, dispute resolution rates, and compliance adherence can be analyzed to identify areas for improvement. For example, studies have shown that organizations with streamlined contract approval processes are more likely to achieve higher levels of stakeholder satisfaction and operational efficiency. Energy companies can use these benchmarks to establish realistic targets and prioritize initiatives that drive better outcomes in their contract management processes (Al-Shaiba, Al-Ghamdi, & Koc, 2019).

4.2. Examples of Successful Strategic Frameworks

Several energy companies have demonstrated the value of adopting strategic frameworks to overcome the complexities of contract management. These examples highlight the importance of tailored approaches that address specific organizational needs and challenges. One notable example is Shell's approach to contract lifecycle management. Shell employs a centralized contract management system powered by digital tools to streamline the creation, execution, and monitoring of contracts across its global operations. This framework integrates compliance checks, risk assessments, and performance metrics into every stage of the contract lifecycle. By leveraging technology, Shell has reduced contract processing times, improved accuracy, and enhanced stakeholder collaboration (Trevathan, 2020).

Another example is BP's focus on sustainability in its contract management practices. BP incorporates sustainability clauses into contracts with contractors and suppliers as part of its commitment to achieving net-zero emissions. These clauses outline specific requirements for reducing carbon footprints, adhering to ethical labor practices, and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations. This strategic framework supports BP's sustainability goals and strengthens relationships with partners who share similar values (R. W. Ahmad, Salah, Jayaraman, Yaqoob, & Omar, 2022).

TotalEnergies offers another perspective by emphasizing workforce development and local content in its contract management strategies. In regions where TotalEnergies operates, contracts often include provisions for hiring and training local talent, thereby contributing to community development. This approach fulfills regulatory requirements and enhances the company's reputation and long-term viability in host countries (Metta et al., 2022). These examples illustrate that successful frameworks are characterized by their alignment with organizational priorities, integration of technology, and adaptability to evolving industry trends.

4.3. Aligning Contract Management with Organizational Goals and HR Strategies

The effectiveness of contract management depends on its alignment with organizational goals and HR strategies. Contracts should not be treated as isolated legal documents but as strategic tools that contribute to broader business objectives. In the energy sector, this alignment is particularly important given the industry's reliance on a highly specialized workforce and the increasing focus on sustainability and innovation.

To align contract management with organizational goals, companies must first ensure that contracts reflect their core values and strategic priorities. For example, if an energy company prioritizes safety and compliance, these principles should be embedded in every contract. This could involve specifying safety training requirements, outlining incident response protocols, and including penalties for non-compliance. The organization reinforces its commitment to creating a safe and secure work environment.

Integration with HR strategies is equally crucial. Contracts should support HR objectives such as talent acquisition, retention, and development. For instance, offering competitive benefits packages, clear career progression paths, and performance-based incentives can help attract and retain top talent. Furthermore, contracts can be used to formalize

diversity and inclusion initiatives, ensuring that the organization meets its social responsibility goals (Rodríguez-Sánchez, González-Torres, Montero-Navarro, & Gallego-Losada, 2020).

Collaboration between HR, legal, and procurement teams is essential for achieving this alignment. These departments must work together to ensure that contracts are legally sound and strategically impactful. For example, HR professionals can provide insights into workforce needs, while legal experts ensure compliance with labor laws, and procurement teams address cost considerations. This collaborative approach ensures that contracts serve as comprehensive solutions to organizational challenges. Finally, regular reviews of contract performance can help organizations identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. By analyzing data on contract execution and outcomes, companies can refine their strategies to better align with evolving business priorities. This iterative process ensures that contract management remains a dynamic and value-driven function (Johnson, Leenders, & Flynn, 2021).

5. Conclusion

Contract management in global energy HR operations is a critical function that impacts operational efficiency, compliance, and workforce satisfaction. The energy sector, which relies on a diverse and specialized workforce, faces unique challenges in managing HR contracts across multiple jurisdictions. These challenges include navigating complex regulatory environments, addressing cultural and linguistic differences, and managing risks associated with large-scale projects.

Strategic frameworks for contract management are essential for overcoming these obstacles. Key components such as compliance, risk management, stakeholder alignment, technology integration, and governance form the foundation of effective contract management practices. Leveraging industry standards and benchmarks ensures consistency and quality, while successful examples from industry leaders demonstrate the value of tailored approaches that align with organizational priorities. Moreover, aligning contract management with HR strategies enhances workforce productivity and supports broader business objectives, such as sustainability and innovation.

The insights gained highlight the importance of a proactive and strategic approach to contract management. By addressing these challenges and leveraging best practices, energy companies can build resilient HR operations that adapt to the dynamic demands of the industry.

Recommendations

To implement effective strategic frameworks for contract management, energy companies should focus on several practical steps:

- Organizations should adopt advanced contract lifecycle management (CLM) tools to streamline processes, enhance transparency, and ensure accuracy. Automation can help reduce administrative workloads, while AI-powered analytics can identify risks and opportunities for improvement. Blockchain technology may also be considered for secure and transparent contract execution, particularly in managing third-party contractors.
- A centralized governance framework ensures consistency across all stages of the contract lifecycle. Assigning clear roles and responsibilities to HR, legal, and procurement teams facilitates collaboration and accountability. Regular audits and performance reviews should be conducted to identify gaps and maintain compliance with evolving regulations.
- Organizations must continuously monitor changes in labor laws and industry standards across regions. Contracts should include clauses that address risks, such as force majeure and liability, while ensuring adherence to safety and environmental regulations. Training programs for HR and legal teams can further enhance their ability to navigate complex regulatory landscapes.
- Contracts should reflect the company's strategic priorities, such as sustainability and diversity. For example, incorporating provisions for sustainability goals and ethical labor practices can strengthen relationships with employees and contractors. Offering flexible terms that accommodate workforce needs, such as relocation packages or career development incentives, can enhance employee satisfaction and retention.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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