Exploring the Value and Application

of HRM Best Practice Theory

within a Third Sector Micro-Organisation

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Abstract

This paper is written based on the research findings of a Masters dissertation in Human Resource Management. The findings have been thought provoking for both HR practitioners, academics and professionals within the voluntary sector, and therefore this paper aims to share some of the research to the benefit of others in the field.

The paper considers the different Human Resource Management (HRM) best practice tools available, then uses Jeffery Pfeffer's best practice tool applied to a case study organisation in order to consider the need, value and application that the practices have for them.

The research findings suggest that despite the size of the organisation, or its sector, that specific practices have a positive impact for employees and volunteers which ultimately impact on the organisation. The most valued practices taken from Pfeffer's 7 include;

1) Selective hiring and selection processes;
2) Training and development opportunities;
3) Self-managed teams and team working;
4) Reduced status distinctions and barriers and
5) Employee involvement, sharing of information and worker voice.

The aim of this paper therefore is to share the findings, with the understanding that although the research was specific to one third sector micro-organisation, they appear to be useful and representative to other third sector organisations.

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An Introduction to the Study

The research specifically considered micro-organisations in the third sector, and a specific model of HRM practice. The research took place within a case study organisation, which was a small local charity operating in the voluntary/third sector. The terms 'voluntary' and 'third sector' are used interchangeably, because there is little agreement on the definition of the voluntary sector (Blackmore, 2004 cited in Parry et al. 2005:589) and because there is no legal definition (Butler and Wilson, 1990 cited in Parry et al,. 2005:589). Organisations in this sector are independent; not established to generate income (although they might do) and set up to '…promote a shared interest' (Parry et al., 2005:589). As a registered charity, the organisation is involved with '…charitable activity' and all outputs are to be of benefit to people within the community (Parry et al., 2005:589).

The significance of using this particular charity as a case study organisation was because of the recent transformation from an informal group to a registered charity. This now involves legalities such as employment terms and conditions, as well as meeting standards as set out by the charities commission; none of which were previously required when operating as a voluntary group. No one within the organisation had any specific experience of HR issues, and it was becoming apparent that as the organisation continued to grow, so did the need for an understanding of Human Resource Management practices. Academics studying HRM in the voluntary sector (such as Butler and Wilson, 1990; Lloyd, 1993 and Parry et al., 2005), evidence that traditionally, this sector lacks sophisticated HRM approaches. HR does not, for example, receive the recognition that service delivery does (Zacharias, 2003). Cunningham (2000a; 2000b) provides survey evidence to suggest that at the start of the early 2000's, there were double the amount of

employment tribunal cases within the voluntary sector than from public or private organisations. This study was not about exploring the causality of HR practices in terms of legal implications, but this is evidence to suggest that small voluntary organisations lack sophisticated HR practices, and that as a result, there can be serious consequences. Potentially therefore, there is reason to spend time understanding such implications.

Overall Aim of the Study

The dissertation research for this study, aimed to look at the need for HRM practices and the value that an understanding, commitment and application of such practices could have for this charity. Potential findings therefore, could provide universally applicable concepts for other micro-organisations operating in the third sector.

An Overview of Existing Literature

As Blumberg et al., (2005:107) wisely suggest, '…isolated knowledge has no value; the value of your contribution increases if you relate it to the existing knowledge'. Before the paper can begin to discuss the research findings, it is important to understand what HR best practices are, why Pfeffer was selected as a tool over any other models to apply to the case study, and to understand the existing arguments about best practice HRM.

HR Best Practices

For the purpose of this paper, 'HRM Best Practices' refer to what different authors describe as; high performance work practices; high performance work systems; high commitment HRM; best practice HR; and Universal HRM practices. There is agreement by such authors that the purpose of HRM best practices, are to '…select, develop, retain and motivate a workforce' (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Becker and Huselid, 1998; Luna-Arocas and Camps, 2008:32). Edgar (2009:221) argues that '…every organisation practices HRM, consciously or unconsciously'. Parkes (2007) and Armstrong (2001) would add to that argument that it's about how HRM practices are implemented and the quality of them that are important. The roots of this

philosophy can be taken back to the behavioural science movement where leading writers such as Maslow (1954); Likert (1966); and Hertzberg (1957) all propose that how people are treated will impact on their effectiveness.

Arthur (1994); Huselid (1995); Boxall and Purcell (2003); and Wang et al., (2008) all identify that HRM practices can lead to '…sustained competitive advantage for organisations' (Akhtar et al,. 2008:15) through the use of human capital, especially when applied in conjunction with the organisations strategy (Schuler and Jackson, 1995).

Bundles of Practices and Universal Application

Literature suggests that not only can HR practices have a positive impact for organisations if understood and implemented well, but that there is reason to suggest there is an ideal, complimentary set of HR Practices (Miles and Snow, 1984; Tsui et al., 1987; Schuler and Jackson, 1987; Armstrong, 1992; Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995; Delaney and Huselid: 1996; Appelbaum at al., 2000; Gould-Williams,

2004:63). Authors suggest that exclusive use of just one practice is not sufficient, and that a minimum bundle of practices must be applied (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005:83; Melian-Gonzalez et al, 2006:29), where together, the effect is '…greater than the sum of its parts' (Macky and Boxall, 2007).

Empirical evidence to back up these beliefs can be found by Macky and Boxall (2007) who explore Guest's (1999) research studies where he found that employees reported higher job satisfaction where a number of complimentary practices were in place. Wright et al., (2003, cited in Macky and Boxall, 2007:541) also report that employees felt more committed to the organisation where evidence showed a number of practices were in place. However identifying what the ideal set of practices are, is a highly '…problematic' (Gould-Williams, 2004:64) and '…contradicted' (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000:1114) area, with much disagreement amongst researchers as to which practices make up a bundle (Becker and Gerhart, 1996; Macky and Purcell, 2007) and the '…precise number and mix is more open to debate' (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000:1112).

Furthermore, building on the discussions of different practices and which ones are the most ideal complimentary practices, academics writing from a resource-based perspective opposed to the contingency perspective, propose that there is a set of universal best practices (Wood, 1995; Thompson 1998; Pfeffer, 1998; Akhtar et al., 2008) '…regardless of industry setting, organisational strategy or national context' (Gould-Williams, 2004:64). These authors maintain that there are '…positive outcomes for all types of firms' (Huselid 1995:644), concluding that there is '…theoretical support for the notion that HR practices (such as Pfeffer's) should operate more effectively when combined together' (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005:82).

Delery and Doty (1996:828) study the impact of universalistic, contingency and configurational approaches and their findings indicate support for all three, with significant support for universalism; '…some human resource practices always have a positive effect'. However, Marchington and Grugulis (2000) argue that empirical evidence only suggest this is true for manufacturing and service industries. Literature suggests that there is little evidence of this within other sectors. The argument weakens further as other authors only claim agreement of universal application for 'some' practices (Wood and Albanese, 1995). Kane et al,. (1999) straddle the two perspectives in that they agree with Tsui (1987) and Hood (1998) that there are various constraints to the effectiveness of the practices depending on the organisational setting, but that they see positive value in the application of some universal best practices.

Marchington and Grugulis (2000) explore the potential problems with the idea of universal best practices considering the lack of consistency in both the meaning and application of practices and of which practices make up a bundle. Their findings indicate that the practices are often '…contradictory' [and] '…not universally applicable' (Melian-Gonzalez et al., 2006:112). Hood (1998) 'banishes' the idea of universalism completely, viewing the context and setting for which the HRM practices operate in, to be of significant importance in determining their impact and that

the concept of a 'one size fits all approach' is not possible. Tsui et al., (1987, cited in Kane et al, 1999:498) propose that the '…constituency approach' which refers to the various pressures and expectations within an organisation and the extent to which they are met are what shape HRM practices. This is aligned with Purcell et al's., (1999:36) view where he refers to the idea of universal best practices as a '…utopian cul-de-sac.' He criticises the idea for being so 'black and white' because as he views it, organisations are '…dynamic and complex' (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000:1116) and require more in-depth research to understand the management practices and theories which lend themselves to the contingency approach. He believes in the value of bundles of practices but also urges researchers to pursue the contingency perspective by digging deeper to understand the situations in which they are applied.

It is a popularly debated matter, with contrasting view points. Despite these arguments for the positive value of soft HRM best practices, and numerous empirically based studies and positive models developed, according to Becker and Gerhart (1996 cited in Kane et al., 1999:496), Legge (1995) and Murphy et al., (2003) '…many organisations fail to take up what are seen to be effective approaches to HRM'. Instead, they appear to be 'adhoc', partially implemented, or implemented as a result of external pressures as Tsui and Milkovich's (1987) model suggests. There is little agreement on what a bundle of practices should be and according to Guest (1997) and Marchington and Grugulis (2000) this is because practices are derived from specific studies of very different organisations, and that they're unique to those jobs and industries. MacDuffie (1995, cited in Marchington and Grugulis, 2000:1112) argue that '…it is the combination of practices into a coherent package which is what matters'. They continue to argue as does Kane et al,. (1995) that it is the organisational structure and circumstances in which best practice HRM take place that are the true determining factor on their impact and value.

In conclusion, the key learning points from the secondary research of value to the primary research case study organisation is that:

1. It is worth exploring the models that are claimed to be universally applicable;

2. The practices should not be considered in isolation, and an exploration of their value alongside other practices would add value to the research;

3. For any practices valued, it's about a conscious behaviour change, and a commitment and engagement with the HR practices from everyone within the organisation (but arguably senior management) that will have the ultimate impact for both individuals and the organisation.

It was decided to explore these key elements in greater depth by using Pfeffer's (1998) practices as a tool. Pfeffer not only argued that these practices are universal, but that when implemented together, they would compliment each other and be more effective for an organisation. Pfeffer is one of, if not the most noted author in this field, and despite the criticism of his model, it was as good as any to focus on and explore in greater detail.

Pfeffer presents 7 HRM best practices which include Employment Security; Selective hiring and selection processes; Comparatively high compensation for organisational performance; Training, learning and development; Self-managed teams and team working; Staff participation and employee involvement; Reduced status distinctions and barriers and finally Sharing information. Each practice is explored in further detail through the discussion of the primary research findings.

Study Methodology

The research for this study was based on an interpretive philosophy, with an inductive approach using qualitative research methods. Having considered the alternatives, these were considered the most appropriate for the study because of the need to enter the social world of the research subjects to

better understand their values, attitudes and perspectives (Bryman and Bell, 2003 and Blumberg et al,. 2005).

Data collection was gathered through semi-structured face to face interviews. This enabled a flexible structure in which to "…seek new insights, to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light" (Blumberg et al., 2005:139). Questions were based on concepts adapted from the CIPD's 'Taking the temperature' survey questions, because these are considered well established and according to the CIPD, already '…road tested' (CIPD, 2010) which therefore gave more credit and value to the concepts being explored.

A stratified random sampling method was selected in order to obtain participants. This took into account the different sub groups of people (Staff, Trustee's and Volunteers) within the charity which was felt was significant to separate during the data collection phase.

The researcher was aware of the possible margins of error when collecting data which according to Blumberg et al (2005:446) concern the 'participants' of the study; 'situational factors', 'the interviewer' (bias, stereotypes, interpretation) and 'data collection instruments'. The importance of the interviewer to remain subjective was key.

A Discussion of the Primary Research Findings

Using Pfeffer's tool proved not only successful in terms of testing a well established model, but also in terms of information gain which can then be shared with others to enhance HRM in micro voluntary sector organisations.

The key finding, although not an HR practice, is crucially important and underpins all other HR practices, and it's all about change. US authors Tsui and Milkovich's (1987) propose that the need for best practice HRM is a result of either 'Structural Functionalism', 'Strategic Contingency' or 'Strategic HRM'. Structural Functionalism suggests that the implementation of HRM practice and policy is a result of a growing organisation

that finds itself in a position for needing specialist HRM practice. This is agreed by Kotey and Sheridan (2004) who propose the need for formal documentation, accountability and standardised practices which are inevitable with firm growth. The implementation of Strategic Contingency is seen as a reaction to external pressures on the organisation (such as legal requirements) and finally the purpose of Strategic HRM is to align the day to day operational HRM with the organisations objectives. The latter is also described as strategic fit by Skinner (1969, cited in Wang et al., 2008) and agreed by Huselid (1995); Delery and Doty (1996) and Saunders et al., (2008). They all suggest that practices aligned to organisational strategy encourage positive employee attitudes and behaviours that match the values of the organisation and will nurture success and superior performance outcomes through their motivation and dedication to the organisation.

Kane (1995:10) suggests that '…organisation size tends to be related to the HRM policies and practices in use'. This agrees with Kotey and Sheridan's (2004) argument that micro-organisations are usually informally led with regards to HR practices, favouring attention to innovation and dealing with day to day issues over strategic implementation of formal HRM.

It was clearly evident from primary research that the organisation had been 'informally led' as described by Kotey and Sheridan (2004) but were now understanding the need for something more strategic. The primary research data evidenced that there are both signs of strategic functionalism and strategic contingency, as a result of the move away from an informal group into a formal registered charity. This is concluded because 6 participant interviewees (each identified by a number, I2 etc,) referred to the organisation being "…*in flux*" (I5) at the moment, "…*evolving*'" (I2) going through a "…*transitional phase*"; (I6, I7). One where they are "…*trying to build a structure*" (I4, I5); and are beginning to see the need for a clear "…*strategy*" (I5). It's "…*changing*", (I4, I5), "…*evolving*'" (I8), and all the participants indicated this was because of the recent move in premises to accommodate a growing organisation in a more formal setting. (I5)"…*We've become more official, we've moved to a different*

level….like from a cottage industry to a more of a business" (I5, I8). This is all in agreement with Koty and Sheridan's theory (2004) on strategic functionalism as a result of firm growth and the strategic contingency approach where external pressures were significantly impacting on the practices and policies being implemented. Participants referred to the need "*…to protect the organisation….where as last year I would have said because we have to"* (I5). Even "*…funders are required to look at our policies"* (I5) now. "*…When you start employing more staff, you've got to be careful that you do have the right structures in place"* (I4); "*…to protect [the organisation] as an employer"* (I7) "*…to comply with rules and regulations, and good practice"* (I6); "*…because there is so much litigation around at the moment that you can not afford to, you know, slip between the cracks"*(I4).

Participants clearly understood and could see the need for a more proactive approach to HRM policy and practice in the organisation as it grows and responds to external needs and

the findings endorsed theory as suggested above. It is noted that only 6 out of the 8 respondents identified this, and the 2 with no recognition of the impact that such a transitional phase was having on the organisations HRM were volunteers. This may indicate that they are unaware of the HR practices in the organisation, or that they don't associate some of their experiences as being HR related. Armstrong (1994) argues that HRM is a strategic function run by management, so perhaps it could be argued that the organisation also see it in this light, because it is the staff and trustees that are aware of the HRM implications.

It was apparent that this transitional phase was important for the organisation, and that this actually underpinned any other HR practice that was or wasn't valued. This theme is outside the remit of Pfeffer's practices but because it was so reoccurring within the interviews, It has been interpreted as highly significant and impacting on the implementation and value placed on other HRM practices. There is also reason to imply that this may be the reality for other micro-organisations regardless of industry

sector because it's the size of the organisation and surrounding environment shaping its HR practice. This also compliments the arguments proposed in the literature by MacDuffie (1995, cited in Marchington and Grugulis, 2000:1112) and Kane (1995).

Pfeffer's HR Best Practices V's Primary Research Findings

Practice 1: Employment Security

The key practice according to Pfeffer (1998) that underpins all the rest, is around employment security. This is because he ascertains that without the security of employment, employees should not be expected to be committed to their work, offering ideas for nothing in return (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). This concept was explored during all of the interviews. Here is where the methodology proved crucial, because it was important to interview both paid and unpaid members of the organisation. Pfeffer refers to the need for payment in return

for duties, but the majority of people associated with this organisation were giving up their time for free (free labour) which makes this practice more interesting. Pfeffer does not consider this sector in his HR Practice which is demonstrated by the responses of participants who genuinely are happy to give up their time in return for nothing. They do it because they want to, and not because they have to (I7), nor for the financial reward or job security. In fact, respondents implied that they were all in their roles because of the additional benefits it gave them (see theme 3 for further details).

"…Even if you work for big organisations, jobs can still be cut" (I4)

"…it's not something I necessarily think about because 5 years appears to me a very long time…I wasn't even in my last job for 5 years, so that's fine" (I7)

"…I'm still working to get a proper salary for myself"" (I5)
"…take it as it comes" (I1)

Although employment security was not seen as a compulsory HR practice as Pfeffer suggests, respondents implied that it would be advantageous. One respondent summaries the perspectives well by arguing that "…*these are uncertain times*"….that [the organisation] is "… *a very successful organisation as it's above weight. So it's likely to rise the financial difficulties better than some organisations, simply because it's a very attractive organisation to funders. It's immediately recognised as doing valuable work…..it well may lead to greater security than being in a larger organisation of which they are going to be shedding a lot of workers"* (I6).

So far, this practice has been considered in terms of job security for paid employees. Volunteers discussed the benefits *(read practice 3 for participant feedback)* at length of volunteering for the organisation, and what they felt they received in return for their 'work'. Although job security was not directly applicable to them, if the organisation no longer existed, it is significant to note the loss that the volunteers felt there would be.

Based on the primary research data, the researcher would argue that for micro-organisations in the voluntary sector such as this one, who are reliant on funding for their jobs, employment security is not an HR Practice that would be their priority if it is interpreted in the same way Pfeffer implies. Individuals working for the organisation do so for other reasons than job security (see analysis of practice 2) and are fully aware that within organisations like this, and this particular sector, jobs are at risk. However, the research did identify that if this practice was part of a 'bundle of practices' then it would be well received. Even more importantly, the organisation being in existence and providing an opportunity to volunteer was seen as high value for volunteers and it was implied that this itself was their 'security'. So there are arguments for 'organisation security' being a valuable practice but job security as Pfeffer interprets it, is not highly valuable for the case study organisation.

Practice 2: Selective Hiring and Selection Processes

Pfeffer implies that organisations need to use more rigorous processes in order to recruit and select outstanding and committed people for the organisation (also agreed by Saunders, 2008; Delaney and Huselid, 1996). He also indicates that such time and money spent on selection of the right candidate will serve as a '…source of sustained competitive advantage' (Albanese, 1995; Marchington and Grugulis, 2000; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). According to Marchington and Wilkinson (2005), this particular practice can consider both the process of recruiting and selecting candidates and the techniques used. It also has its disadvantages in that being too selective can result in under represented groups. Marchington and Wilkinson (2005:75) refer to the term '…cloning' when they discuss selective processes where by candidates are chosen because of cultural fit and possibly are selected because they mirror people already represented in the organisation. Kotey and Sheridan (2004) imply however, that recruitment and selection (R&S) in small firms is '…largely informal' and therefore dismisses the need for such rigorous practices if small organisations are not going to pursue them anyway.

This theme was greatly explored with all participants because they all had their own story to share about how they came to be part of the organisation. There was a complete mixture of both "…*I fell into it"* (I5); "…I sort of came in through the back door" (I3); "…there wasn't anybody else to do it" (I2); "…I was encouraged" (I4) as well as formal recruitment and selection processes "…I was put through a complete interview process" (I7); It would appear that those newer to the organisation in recent months as it has grown from what they have termed "…*a cottage industry to a business"* (I5 & I8) are the ones that have experienced the more formal procedures. Again, this compliments Kotey and Sheridan (2004) and Tsui and Milkovich's (1987) theory on structural functionalism.

5 out of 8 participants (I1, I2, I3, I5, I6) found themselves supporting the organisation because of "…*moral attachment"*

(Etzioni, 1964 cited in Parry et al., 2005:589). This could be regarded as selection from their part, the actual individual wanting to work/volunteer for the organisation and seeking a position with that in mind opposed to the organisation selecting individuals.

It was noted that particularly for trustees, there was a growing evidence of selective recruitment practices and that the organisation already value the importance of this. There was already an evident progression moving away from informal selection processes such as via *"… friends and acquaintance's" (I2)* and being *"…roped into it" (I2)* all be it they were still selected based on *"…skills and attitude and approach" (I5)*. Recent months have involved an informal 'chat' and sending in their CV – however this would only happen if they *"…came with a recommendation" (I8)*. 2 candidates highlighted that the success of an individual in the role will always be *"…50/50 so why not use people you know?" (I2, I8)*.

That said, all trustees and staff interviewed, recognised the need for more formalised recruitment processes that are selective and that although their skills and interests are still high on the agenda, they are also now chosen for their *"…expertise" (I5)* – *"…we particularly are looking for someone with financial experience at the moment" (I6)* and not just from their own contacts. This demonstrates both a needs analysis of what they need, and attention to selective recruitment to fulfil that need. It links back to the earlier discussion about HOW recruitment and selection takes place, as well as the commitment and engagement to such practices.

The researcher prompted further for the criteria used to recruit new people to both identify if they used any strategic HR tools to select candidates and to establish what they were and whether they were consistent. The results indicated that *"…commitment to our values"* and *…an understanding of the purpose of what we do (I2 and 5)* because *"… if they haven't got an interest in that…. then that will make it difficult for them to necessarily stay interested" (I5)*. *"…skills' (I2, I5)* and *"…contacts" (I2)* were also

particularly highlighted because of the impact they could potentially have on future growth and opportunity (strategic HRM). These were valued by all Trustees demonstrating their significance in application.

For staff, there was no evidence to suggest that skills and contacts were valuable assets. However, the commitment to the organisations values and understanding of hearing loss still applied. Through the carefully considered recruitment process, these aspects are judged to ensure that the most suitable candidate gets the job.

"…*although she perhaps expected to get the job, it certainly was by no means an agreed deal. It was very equal…*" (I5).

"…*I had to go through the process and I really did feel that, if I didn't, had someone been better than me, that they would have accepted them*" (I7).

"…*Our youth participation worker post was advertised twice. We didn't find the right candidate the first time*"(I5).

One can conclude that both Trustees and staff value a thorough recruitment process, "…*in fact I feel better now, now that I've got the job because I know that they really did scrutinise me against all others*'" (I7).

Interestingly, both the volunteers that were interviewed (excluding trustees) became part of the charity through word of mouth from people already within the organisation (I1, I3). This has both positive and negative aspects with regards to selective recruitment. Positive in that they will have a true understanding of what the organisation does and what volunteering for them is truly like. Negative in that there may be a tendency to only select people that are known through others, who may also be very similar to existing people in the organisation, therefore creating a false culture where everyone is connected in some way, and the risk of 'cloning' as referred to earlier by Marchington and Wilkinson (2005:75).

In conclusion, against the viewpoint expressed by Kotey and Sheridan (2004) of small organisations having informal

recruitment procedures, the charity has clearly identified the need and value of selective recruitment practices in order to recruit suitable and appropriate individuals to serve the client group they are working with. This is very much aligned with Pfeffer's and others (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000; Guest, 2001; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). The difference however is whereby Pfeffer uses selective recruitment practices as a source of competitive advantage. The charity would argue that it is to respond to the needs of the organisation, being knowledgeable and specialist. At no point during the data collection was it referred to or implied that the charity wanted to be in front of their competitors. Perhaps this again acknowledges, the difference in sectors that this study is taking place in.

Practice 3: High Compensation for Organisational Performance

This practice signifies the notion of reward for performance. Not only this, but reward above the average than that of other organisations. Again, similar to the explanation of job security, and being rewarded by pay for work, Pfeffer implies that workers require some kind of superior remuneration for their performance.

Firstly, the charities work is for an "…*emotive cause"* (I4) and is about the "…*reaction of the beneficiaries"* (I5). Because of this, many of the reasons that participants gave are linked into their values and morals "…*a belief in what the charity wants to do"* (I8) or personal connections with the client group and subject matter;

"…*to do something worthwhile"* (I1, I3, I4);

"…to make a contribution to my local community" (I6);

"…*to give back" to* society (I5).

This was particularly echoed by those with a personal connection (I1, I2, I5, I6). It's about a belief in the cause and the reason as to why the charity has been established. A moral connection with its mission and vision which is lived in the values of the organisation and people "…*can see a direct benefit of what they do"* (I5), that they "…*can make a greater difference"* (I6).

Others expressed gratitude that they could "…*get involved in everything and anything*" (I7). For others it was about access to development opportunities (I1, I5, I7, I8 and practice 4); specifically work experience opportunities, CV building, opportunities to be creative, how it looks to other professionals and the development of transferable skills (I2, I3, I5).

Ultimately it's about being part of a small, local (agreed by all interviewees) organisation that has built up from scratch which is "…*quite exciting*" with a director who *"…herself is very motivating and charismatic"* (I6) and *"…passionate"* (I7) as well as being able to see the direct benefits of what one does. It comes down to motivation of individuals, and as the literature suggested, it links closely to the behavioural sciences. This is useful for management to understand because a motivated workforce can and will directly impact on performance resulting in more response of "…*I want to come to work*" (I7).

In conclusion, it would be fair to argue that participants are rewarded for their performance but that this is not their primary reason for volunteering / working for the charity. As per the conclusions for practice 1, reward for performance is not required, but if there are benefits and incentives as part of the bundle of practices, these wouldn't be rejected. Pfeffer implies that this practice is about monetary value, always getting something in return for performance. The charity dispute the practice on the grounds that people want to volunteer for the organisation, their morals and values drive their performance and do not expect anything in return. However, the findings imply that understanding what the individual's needs are and ensuring that they are met is valuable.

It is clearly understandable how this practice might not be universally applicable, but because this case study is a third sector organisation, and because it is a specific cause, it has additional motivations for those that are involved. This is what Pfeffer does not acknowledge, and as a result, the findings disagree to the universal application of this practice.

Practice 4: Extensive Training, Learning and Development

Described by Boxall (1996:67) as '…human process advantage' and by Marchington and Wilkinson (2005:76) as '…outstanding human talent' this is about ensuring that the individuals that were recruited to the organisation (using selective recruitment processes as a practice), remain knowledgeable and skilful. Again thus enhancing the potential to be the lead and most competitive within the marketplace through the people that make up the organisation (Huselid, 1995; Delery and Doty, 1996; Wood and Albanese, 1995). It's about the organisations approach (Guest, 1997) to training and development and ensuring that there are opportunities for career progression (Saunders, 2008). Pfeffer (cited in Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005:76) puts great emphasis on the use of the term 'learning' because it signifies the willingness of the organisation to contribute to the employee's future development, rather than just training.

Marchington and Wilkinson (2005) analyse the difficulties with measuring the impact of training and development. They report that many studies try to analyse the financial and quantitative contributions of training and that they should rather consider the quality and relevance of the training provision.

The primary research findings agree a need for this practice, but not for competitive advantage as Delery and Doty (1996) and Wood and Albanese (1995) state. Instead, the focus for the charity is on upskilling staff and ensuring they are confident and competent in their roles. It is very much concerned with the individual.

"…encourage volunteers and my members of staff or me to go on these courses in order to keep our skills updated or in order to gain new skills…" (I5).

It "*…also improves our skill set within the organisation so that we can get even better at what we do. I think it's good for motivation" '* too (I5).

Similarly, the literature explains that Koty and Sheridan (2004) think that training and development in small organisations is informal and happens on the job so they don't see the need for this practice. The researcher uncovered that the charity have, and can apply for funding to train the workforce. *"…for the funding applications that I put in, I can include training because I think it's a really important part of the organisation"* (I5). This completely contradicts Koty and Sheridan's (2004) view, and even more so when 6 respondents all spoke about the need for training and development and imply that they are keen to embrace a learning culture *"…it's really important that we have a skills audit and a skills training plan"* (I5), the director *"…will give you the opportunities if she can…..if she thinks [it] will help you in your role"* (I7). Agreeing with Koty and Sheridan's (2004) perspective, *"…there isn't always the recognition that it is needed"* (I5) and yet actually, *"…it's crucial"* (I5).

It was implied that to date, although *"…there have been opportunities"* there has not been the time (I2, I5), resource or speciality in the organisation to give training and development the recognition it needs (I5). This is also demonstrated by 3 others who were not aware of training provision on offer. This also evidences a lack of communication and/or involvement that they have within the charity, to fully appreciate what opportunities there are.

"…I don't know that we have a training programme at all? I think it would be something that would be very useful to have…..something that we ought to be considering" (I2)

"…I think it would be valuable if there could be on a slightly more formal basis, some kind of induction" (I6)

"…There is no training programme at the moment but it would be beneficial" (I8).

"… somebody is going to be looking into training for volunteers, so when that erm is researched, I can see what it relevant for me" (I1).

6 out of 8 participants spoke about this being something for the future and welcomed a programme of training events (I1, I2, I3, I5, I6, I7). The researcher proceeded to ask interviewees why they valued training and development opportunities, in order to challenge the relevance of Pfeffer's practice. As already seen, they indicated it was "…*crucial*" (I5) and good for skills development. "…*training is always advantageous….you should always try and improve your knowledge*" (I2), "*...beneficial…..a good idea*" (I8). Participants felt that training opportunities already taken gave them a "…*greater understanding*" (I5) and awareness. (I3) That they have been "…*invaluable*" (I7).

To conclude, the findings support the work of Pfeffer and his particular practice on training, learning and development. All participants valued this practice as a supportive tool to develop themselves and the organisation. It is important to note however, that "…*if they don't want to do it* [the training], *they wont do it properly*" (I2). This therefore evidences the importance of conducting a thorough skills/training needs

analysis (as was already being thought about), and consider what that identifies together with what the individual wants and needs for their role, in order to provide something that will benefit both the individual and the charity. This was a practice that had clear universal application regardless of industry sector or size. The important factor to consider for this organisation, leading back to the earlier discussion is that there are developmental opportunities available but the charity for whatever reasons are lacking the full commitment and engagement that is required.

Practice 5: Self Managed Teams and Team Working & Practice 6: Reduced Status Distinctions and Barriers

The findings are difficult to separate out practice 5, 6 and 7 around team working and how the team is managed including a closer look at the hierarchy and structure of the team as well as employee involvement and sharing of information. This is because they are so closely interlinked and perhaps adds to the literature argument about bundles of practices and why it's so difficult to determine what makes up the bundle in order to best

benefit individuals and organisations (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). To bring together the analysis of the findings, practice 5 and 6 have been considered together as one practice.

Participants were questioned about the management structure and make up of the organisation to evaluate their perspectives on the day to day management practices, and perceptions of a structure within the organisation. This is an important practice for voluntary organisations because as Cunningham (2000b:227) reveals, this sector has a distinctive culture based on joint decision making and employee involvement which can lead to greater support and commitment to an organisation, and is backed up with the primary research analysis.

The findings led back to the 3 distinct groups mentioned earlier in the methodology of Trustees, staff and volunteers (I1, I2, I4, I5, I6, I7, I8). The Trustees "…*oversee everything we do*" (I4, I5, I6, I7), and "…*have a responsibility to the charities commission*" (I4). The Director reports to them with any decisions, questions and opportunities (I2, I4, I5, I7). Members of staff keep the organisation going on a day to day basis and volunteers support all of the daily activities.

In terms of management, as discussed earlier, the organisation is still '*evolving*' and this has a clear impact on the management practices. Since the move to a more formal office base, and a closer look at HR within the organisation, they established that "…*everything and everybody*" (I5) reported to the Director which wasn't manageable and so needed considerable attention (I2, I5). On the contrary, one participant recognised that there were advantages to this, "…*because you want to have clarity about whose role it is in what*" (I6). Because it's a small organisation, they indicated that it was "…*a healthy point of contact*" (I6). Other participants shared their perspective in that "…*staff are fairly equal but I respect X as a Director*" (I7). The researcher took that point back and embedded it into a question to the Director to which the response was "…*the leadership and management area is very new to me*" (I5). A different participant

commented "…*I don't see any hierarchy at all….I find lack of hierarchy quite bewildering….I can imagine that it could create chaos"* (I3).

The findings displayed completely contrasting comments where there was no evidence to suggest any structured work practices, no clear leadership and management and a lack of authority other than the distinct groups of people within the organisation who report into each other. This very much agrees with Pfeffer's practice of reduced status distinctions and barriers but the comments also suggested a need for a more effective structure. A lack of hierarchy was referred to, however as feedback was generally positive about the reduced status distinctions, this suggests that what they need is a better use of self managed teams rather than the implementation of a hierarchical structure. This would also agree with Cunninghams (2000) perspective on a culture of joint decision making and employee involvement.

Clearer leadership and management would also be advantageous (I5) and because of the Trustees concerns with the current structure (I2, I5, I8) they have already decided to establish a new structure "…*where staff feel responsible for their own areas, and I'm giving them the expectation that they are capable of managing their own areas…and workload"* (I5); It will also "…*empower employees to take ownership"* (I8). This will also help to improve the situation where volunteers feel under utilised; "…*sometimes we come in and we don't necessarily know what we're going to do and you can be waiting around to be given something"* (I1), because both themselves and the person managing them will have clearer roles and be delegated the responsibility to feel they can fulfil those roles without relying on others. It would appear that the organisation has already recognised the need to use self managed teams more effectively and that the intentions are already in motion to implement this.

Whilst the introduction of more effective self managed teams may be advantageous and help the organisation to achieve more because people are clearer and more efficient in what they

do, it may also reduce team working across the current hierarchical levels. It was felt that currently, people work well together (I7), but that in terms of Trustee's mixing with staff and volunteers, self managed team working may enhance this separation. The findings implied a degree of separation between different groups, where people are working in silos. "…*I have no contact with volunteers at all*" (I8); "…*Some trustees might never not meet the volunteers….it might be nice if everybody met up*" (I4, I5, I7); "…to know who everybody is….know the people that are being talked about…and what they do" (I1).

In summary, the people within the charity work very well together, with little status distinctions or barriers which fully supports practice 5 by Pfeffer. There is recognition that the Director has and should have more responsibility than others but that currently, every decision that requires higher authority is given to her. The charity have already acknowledged the value in reviewing its structure and its intention is to increase the use of self managed teams which

empowers groups of individuals, opens up clearer management structures but without a structured hierarchy and implementation of layers and status distinctions. This again would suggest agreement with Pfeffer's 5th practice, but at the same time it is understood that the introduction of self managed teams has the potential to isolate groups of individuals and increase the lack of communication and separation of those groups.

Practice 7: Employee Involvement, Sharing of Information and Worker Voice

According to Pfeffer, there are 2 distinct aspects to this practice. The first being about involving employees in both the operational and strategic work of the organisation. The second part of this practice considers the need to encourage employees to share their ideas for the organisations growth, and by having critical information on which to formulate their suggestions will give sound financial context as well as trust in the information shared. Marchington and Wilkinson (2005) also imply that it supports the ethos of a team working culture, of openness and trust where sharing information and worker voice is significant.

It is clearly indicated from the primary research findings, that all those involved in the charity are encouraged to share their views, "…*I think I've been able to influence with the things I'm doing now*" (I1), that there are continuous communication channels so that information can be shared, and ample opportunities to respond. "*…I think we're all involved with everything*" (I7). This is completely aligned with Pfeffer valuing practice 7, employee involvement, sharing of information and worker voice in his bundle of practices for organisations. The comments also provide support for practices 5 and 6 as respondents felt encouraged and confident to contribute their views suggesting an open environment where there are no status distinctions or barriers. Parkes et al., (2007:306) reason that employee involvement in the organisations work provides a '…greater sense of fulfilment and control' and supports their commitment to the organisation if implemented effectively. The research findings completely agree with this perspective.

The charities approach to their work is to be "user led" (I5) which clearly indicates involvement at the heart of everything they do. This was demonstrated in two data collection examples; one in the recent recruitment of the youth participation worker, where "*…young people interviewed the candidates*" (I5), "*…it very important to us that the young people chose who they wanted*" (I5). The second example, when a trustee was discussing active involvement of a youth member on the board "*…as a trustee*" because the organisation is set up to support them, and true involvement requires them to attend regularly and give their input (I2). This clearly demonstrates a culture and ethos of involvement. The twist on Pfeffer's practice here though, is that it is applicable to everyone involved in the organisation, and not just employees as he entitles it.

With regards to sharing of information, this is closely aligned with employee involvement. It was found that "*…I like to know everything that is going on*"; "*…I feel that we are all well informed….the difficulty is, trying to keep everybody updated with everything*" (I7). "*…if either employees or volunteers have*

thoughts or ideas then they would come to the Director" (I6) or *"...just have a conversation probably with X or X"* (I1, I2, I8). This implies that individuals welcome the opportunity to be involved, to know what is happening, that there are open communication channels although relating back to the structure, it is evident that there remains an issue about who the information is directed to and comes from, and how manageable this is. Within the new set up of teams, with delegated responsibility for management of communications and sharing of information, it will make it easier to manage and ensure that it is not difficult to keep everyone updated and that there are opportunities to involve each individual.

Finally, respondents although agreeing that they had opportunities to be involved and share their views, implied the need to see some action with them. This could either be physical implementation of something or feedback in terms of *"...it's an idea but it doesn't suit us"* (I3). *"...I think there is a big need for respect, to show respect – that what somebody says isn't just forgotten about and dismissed"* (I3).

"...I think people have a lot of good ideas....but seeing these ideas through doesn't always seem to happen" (I1). Participants implied that often information is shared but action is lacking, so linking this back to the implementation of a more effective structure would help to reduce the chances of voices being heard but lost.

To conclude, participants valued the open culture and the sharing of information from both the organisation and those that are involved in it. There are some concerns that information shared from individuals often 'is lost' when shared. This compliments the theory proposed by Patterson et al,. (1997) who consider both upward and downward communication in the hierarchy, and argue that often the upward involvement is lacking. Marchington and Wilkinson (2005) are quick to add that where this is the case, workers are less likely to provide meaningful contributions.

In line with employee involvement and sharing of information, it was identified that *"...feedback is something that [the Director]*

treasures, and finds invaluable" (I7) and analysis of this practice can therefore be shared with her for future improvement. The findings reflected the value for the need to involve people and share information which again agrees with Pfeffer's model.

Conclusions of Primary Research Findings

Out of Pfeffer's 7 HR Best Practices, there is valuable evidence to suggest that the charity would accept 5 of his practices as being valuable for their organisation and that these would work as a bundle. This suggests that as Wright et al., (2003, cited in Macky and Boxall, 2007) propose, there is a need for HR best practices, and that they can have a positive impact on employees and ultimately the organisation.

This case study suggests however, that Pfeffer's practices are not all universally applicable. However, some are, and the charities HR Best Practices bundle would include; 1)

Selective hiring and selection processes; 2) Training and development opportunities; 3) Self-managed teams and team working, 4) Reduced status distinctions and barriers and 5) Employee involvement, sharing of information and worker voice. The last practice however to ensure its relevance to the sector, would not use the term 'employee'. Pfeffer's 2 other practices were rejected because despite his argument for universal application, their meaning was not applicable to this third sector organisation or its volunteers.

For this particular case study organisation, some of Pfeffer's practices were identified as in existence already within the charity but not given the full attention that perhaps they need to be effective. Parkes et al,. (2007) suggest that one potential barrier for this is 'engagement' and commitment of senior management, which as Kane (1996) and Purcell (1994) agree, is central to effective implementation. Secondly, there are concerns that without the knowledge and skills of HRM, practices will not be implemented credibly (Dyer and Holder, 1988; Schuler, 1990; Kane et al, 1996:497). A third barrier of

effective HRM practice implementation as implied by Legge (1995); Kane (1996) Storey (1995) and Huselid (1998); is the lack of evidence to demonstrate long term impact and value of effective implementation of HRM practices.

The primary research identified the value and importance that individuals placed on Pfeffer's HR practices, and earlier it was established from the behavioural science concepts, that how individuals are treated in an organisation will impact on their effectiveness which in turn can be linked to organisational effectiveness. These are clear arguments for the need for skilled and committed management to support effective implementation and sustainability of the 5 HR best practices for the benefit of both individuals and the charity.

In comparison to Legge's (1995) substantial research about HR practices in the private and manufacturing industries, HR literature within public and voluntary sector organisations according to many authors, remains limited (Farnham and Giles, 1996; Boyne et al,. 1999 cited in Gould-Williams, 2004:66; Hays and Kearney, 2001, cited in Pichault, 2007:266; Gould-Williams, 2004; Parry et al,. 2005). Cunningham (2000b:226) argues that there is even less known about people management practices in the UK Voluntary sector and that this is very much a '…gap' within research literature.

It is hoped that from this case study organisation, there is learning (even if only a small amount) to add to the 'gap' in knowledge about HR in the voluntary sector. Hopefully, other third sector organisations can learn from the value that this charity has placed on Pfeffer's tools, and can now take the newly established bundle of HR best practices and implement them successfully within their own third sector organisations. Perhaps further research can establish whether there is a universally applicable third sector bundle of HR Best Practices?

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