University of Portsmouth and CIPD Portsmouth Group

HR Bulletin: Research and Practice

A regular bulletin for business-focused managers and HR professionals to learn about contemporary research and practice

Contributions from managers, academics and students who wish to share their knowledge and interests

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In this edition...

An eclectic selection of articles is presented by the contributors to this issue of the HR Bulletin. The range of articles includes topics that would typically be considered to be in the HR domain, and others that transcend HR functional boundaries, having resonance in other areas of strategic management. This illustrates how looking through different management and research ‘lenses’ can be helpful in seeing and understanding people management issues.

In the first article, Liza Howe-Walsh, Samantha Page and Sarah Turnbull investigate the academic careers of women in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), and some of the barriers that may be getting in the way of their progression.

Vijay Pereira looks at the people and organisational management practices of an emerging market multinational operating in the UK, providing contrast to the wealth of literature describing how developed market multinationals operate in emerging markets.

David Hall, Derek James and Nick Marsden explore the concept of marginal gains, a performance improvement concept that was behind much of Team GB’s success at the London 2012 Olympics, and consider the implementations of this approach as an intervention at Dorset Fire and Rescue.

Gary Rees and Sally Rumbles present their research findings on employee engagement and well-being; focusing on how the HR function is perceived and the issues this raises for employers. This article builds upon a survey of employees representing 115 organisations.

In the final article, Charlotte Rayner reports on the 2012 conference on workplace bullying run under the auspices of the International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment (IAWBH), where she experienced a life-changing moment. Read the article to find out what it was!

Why not become a contributor – share your story and see your name in print

If you would like to write a ca.2000 word article on a current HR initiative in your organisation or on research you have recently completed, please contact me by e-mail and I will send the HR Bulletin Contributor Guidelines. Also, an article on a management issue or interest that has implications for HR or people management would be most welcome. I will be happy to work with you on a draft article and put it into the house style of the Bulletin.

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Why are women still under represented in senior jobs in SET\(^1\) in academic universities and what are the HR implications?

Liza Howe-Walsh, Samantha Page and Sarah Turnbull

Introduction

Most universities have put the necessary systems in place to ensure gender equality within the workplace. Many have established HR policies and procedures to ensure women have an equal chance as men to access senior posts. Some universities implement gender equality policies to support commitment to institutional equality and diversity strategies. Such strategies outline frameworks, which universities will use to promote gender equality including obligations under the Gender Equality Act.

Athena SWAN Charter

For women in science the Athena SWAN Charter was established which recognises and celebrates good practice on recruiting, retaining and promoting women in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) in academia. Universities must achieve at least a bronze award before individual departments can apply for recognition at bronze, silver or gold level. The rationale is that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for a department to sustain the level of a silver award without university support and underpinning university good practice, policies and processes. Awards are valid for three years. Membership of the Charter can also help universities fulfil their public sector equality duties work towards sustaining equitable working environments. In addition it enables them to identify themselves as employers of choice, not only to their staff, but to students, funders, research councils and industry.

The following principles represent the cornerstone of the Athena SWAN Charter (www.athenaswan.org.uk):

- To address gender inequalities requires commitment and action from everyone, at all levels of the organisation
- To tackle the unequal representation of women in science requires changing cultures and attitudes across the organisation
- The absence of diversity at management and policy-making levels has broad implications which the organisation will examine
- The high loss rate of women in science is an urgent concern which the organisation will address
- The system of short-term contracts has particularly negative consequences for the retention and progression of women in science, which the organisation recognizes
- There are both personal and structural obstacles to women making the transition from PhD into a sustainable academic career in science, which require the active consideration of the organisation.

To become a member of the Charter institutions must provide evidence that they have recognized and addressed these principles.

\(^1\)SET in this article is based on groups used by the Athena SWAN Charter (www.athenaswan.org.uk)
**Gender Imbalance**

In terms of recruitment within academic institutions, selection procedures for academic employees are rigorous and ‘fair’. Every candidate is asked to complete an equality and diversity form. There is a gender balance on recruitment panels and the HR Manager may often sit on the recruitment panel. If a person is recruited ‘fairly’ with all the correct HR policies and procedures being adhered to, surely it is just a matter of time before women move through the ranks and achieve gender equality with men in academia? However statistics show that this is not always the case.

Senior management positions\(^2\) in the academic hierarchy exude male domination. The numbers tell the story. See Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non managers in SET</td>
<td>40 %</td>
<td>60 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior managers in SET</td>
<td>23 %</td>
<td>77 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Table 1.** Percentage of non-managers and senior managers in SET in academic institutions by gender.

Whilst the total number of non-managers in SET account to 94,575 of which 37,685 were female and 56,890 were male as we move into senior management positions the total number of senior management staff in SET in UK institutions totalled 1375 of which 320 were female and 1050 were male, (Equality Challenge Unit 2011:11). This demonstrates that in more senior management positions the balance between males and females is inequitable and that in terms of academic career development, women are still much less likely to become professors than men. According to the Equality Challenge Unit (2011) men account for 85 per cent of professorial staff in SET compared to a mere 15 per cent for women.

**Why are women still under represented?**

The old argument is that women are carers and they have dual roles: academics and mothers and they find it difficult to achieve the often-used term ‘work-life balance’. Literature reveals that employees who attain a positive work–life balance are more productive at work, are more committed to their employers and are less likely to become ill as a result of stress.

In academic science, engineering and technology, women often abandon their careers at the level of post-doctorate or researcher. Many authors suggest that this career stage correlates with the time at which many female researchers are having children. As women still carry out the majority of childcare and domestic work, a lack of flexible working provision and opportunities for a career break to care for the child will disadvantage more women than men, as they will be unable to put in the hours required to advance their careers.

However a recent survey conducted in 2012 by the US Association of Women in Science (AWIS), an organisation for women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, concluded that childcare is not the reason why women are underrepresented but that the system is to blame and

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\(^2\) Senior management positions refer to staff with senior management/administrative responsibilities within the institution and include Pro-Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Assistant Principal, Assistant Director, Dean, Head of School, Examinations Manager, Registrar, Head of Administration and Acting Directors.
more focus should be given to addressing the working practices and the organisational settings in which men and women work. Survey respondents were working scientists and researchers who publish in academically across all disciplines. Six percent of respondents were from the United Kingdom.

So, is the problem linked to masculinities and old boys’ networks? Obstacles are seen as men sticking together and women being excluded from discussions or access to resources. Obstacles to accessing resources and networks are held in place, in part, by a normal human preference; people like to spend time with people like themselves. Spending time with similar people enables development of trusting relationships, from which women may often be excluded. The challenges faced by women in SET are not aided by the lack of role models or mentoring opportunities. A number of studies have found that the lack of role models and mentoring for women is a key cause for concern. The shortage of these development opportunities is disappointing given the career challenges that women in SET face.

What are the HR implications?

In order to assess the impact of gender equality policies and procedures the HR department has to review the current situation of the organisation and ensure it is monitored regularly. This can be achieved by reviewing more qualitatively how employees perceive their situation within the organisation. In order to bridge the inequality gap the HR department policies and practices are not enough. Further development to support female members of staff need to be proactive. Based on the findings of recent research undertaken by the authors of this article, there is still room for improvement. Networking opportunities need to be fostered across the organisation to dissipate the sense of isolation some people feel. Targeted courses to support mentoring will add further value to network building. Employees need to be encouraged to take advantage of Continuing Professional Development activities and ensure that these include opportunities to benefit from networking and mentoring.

The authors of this article are currently working with early career female scientists in the UK and Middle East to develop global leadership competencies. They use an assessment tool that enables organisations to evaluate current competencies of individuals and provide opportunities to create effective HR policies and practices for the selection, training and development of globally mobile employees.

Furthermore, they are running a series of workshops in collaboration with a number of academic, research and government organisations in the UK, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to develop Female Global Leadership. In addition to the professional development work undertaken in the workshops, the events have facilitated valuable networking opportunities amongst female participants. If you would like further information please contact sarah.turnbull@port.ac.uk or liza.howe-walsh@port.ac.uk.

Reference:


Vijay Pereira

Introduction

Globalization has transformed the way business and work is conducted. The resultant increase in cross-border transfer of people, ideas, capital, technology etc. has meant stakeholders are affected by work being carried out in geographically different global destinations. This trend has changed global employment patterns and has led to management implications and consequences. China and India have led the way here. China, leading in manufacturing work and India, a major destination for ‘Business Process Outsourcing’ (BPO) and ‘information technology enabled services’ (Its) work.

Activity has grown rapidly for India in recent years, with success in attracting both relatively low skill transactional work, and high skilled ‘professional’ work. This has led to an increased interest in studying the phenomenon from academics, researchers and practitioners worldwide, to understand these new trends and their implications. However, interests in the internationalization of firms from emerging economies, such as Brazil, Russia, India and China (collectively known by the acronym BRIC), have also ascended in recent years (e.g. Boisot and Meyer 2008; Yilmaz, Cooke and DelliOS 2007). Studies that identify and compare the human resource management (HRM) of these emerging markets’ multinationals in developed countries, such as UK, US, etc. though, remain limited. Additionally, the concept of ‘country-of-origin’ has been found to have influence on the multinational corporations’ (MNC) business and HR strategy (e.g. Brewster, Wood and Brookes 2008). Here too, few studies have been conducted to compare MNCs from emerging economies to identify if these ‘country-specific’ factors that may play a role in their business and HR strategy and what wider impacts their strategy may have on the economic and social development of the host country.

This study concentrates on the UK and India. According to various sources, (e.g. the UK Foreign and Commonwealth office website; The Economist, 2011; The Financial Times, 2011), in 2010, bilateral trade between the UK and India grew by 20%, bringing the total to £13 billion. UK goods exports to India grew by 37% and goods imports from India rose by 27%. These sources further state that the UK and India are among the top investors in each other’s economies bringing significant long term benefits to both. In 2011, UK-India bilateral trade grew by 26% bringing the total to £16.4 billion (£13 billion in 2010). In 2011, the UK attracted 81 new projects from India generating 5,454 jobs. India is the 5th largest investor in the UK. In 2011 UK exports to India increased by 29% making India, the UK’s largest non- EU market. The UK aims to double its bilateral trade with India by 2015. India seeks to increase its bilateral trade with the UK to £24 billion by 2015. The UK is by far the most popular business destination in Europe for Indian companies, of the 1200 Indian companies in the EU, 700 are in the UK. Indian companies are playing an increasingly important role in the UK economy.

Case study organisation – Tata

To this end, the paper concentrates on the organisational and people management practices of one large company from India, the Tata consultancy services (TCS) UK operations, part of the large emerging market conglomerate, the Tata group. This longitudinal study was undertaken over a five year period, from 2005 to 2010. The Tata organisation has an immense influence on the UK as they are now the largest manufacturing private sector employer in the UK. They are owners of Tetley (Foods and Tea), Jaguar Land Rover, Corus Steel (erstwhile British steel), Crowne Plaza Hotels etc.,
totalling more than 20 companies in the UK. Additionally, their philanthropic activities include continued donations to the London School of Economics, the British Heart Foundation and Prince Charles Foundation etc., among others.

TCS is one of India’s main indigenous BPO providers and grew rapidly over the period of the research, currently the largest private sector employer in India. TCS is among the leading global information technology consulting, services and BPO organisations, offering services to clients across fifty five countries. It is headquartered in Mumbai, India. Most revenues derive from the United Kingdom and United States, with the banking, financial services and insurance industries providing the largest sectoral sources of clients. TCS started its BPO operations in 1968 and is a component of one of Asia’s largest business conglomerates, which currently employs some 350,000 persons worldwide. It focuses on delivering technology-led business solutions to its international customers across varied industries: it offers a comprehensive range of information and communication technology (ICT) services, to seven of the top ten Fortune 500 companies and a growing number of other firms. It is today a $6 billion Indian MNC- the overall Alpha group being worth $62 billion (Tata, secondary source documents). As of 2010, it employed approximately 162,000 persons, from over thirty nationalities; the firm has offices in forty two countries. Having been established in the UK since 1975, TCS today is well-placed among the world’s top 10 IT consultancy firms, offering technology consulting, IT services and business process outsourcing. Across its network of 16 offices in the UK and Ireland, 5,090 consultants work with more than 159 enterprises in the commercial and public sectors. Having discussed the case study organisation, in what follows below, a varied, but brief account of its organisation structure, culture and people management practices are discussed. This portrays the type of business philosophy TCS projects through its people and organisational management practices, policies and strategies, in the UK.

**Company Culture**

At TCS employees are called associates. Their mission statement states, “Our mission reflects Tata Group’s commitment to providing excellence”. Accompanying this is its corporate values, which state that it must be ‘leading change’; have ‘integrity’; show ‘respect’ etc. To ensure this happens, management connects with associates regularly with business updates, giving everyone the opportunity to ask questions and have a voice in decision making. The business has identified its top five HR priorities to be talent management, employee retention, cultural and organisational change, leadership development, and diversity.

**Innovation and Creativity**

For TCS, innovation meant maintaining its market position in the form of extracting value from ideas by bringing them to market before competitors. In doing so, the organisation has developed a systematic approach to innovation and an environment that fosters creative thought. It is centred on the Tata Group’s annual innovation contest, ‘Tata Innovista’, a platform for associates to showcase innovations and ideas. Ideas such as improvements in business processes, benefits to customers, business models, products, services, etc., as well as areas that could contribute to making society and the world a better place, such as initiatives to tackle global warming, climate change, quality of life, work-life balance etc, can be presented.

**Pay and Benefits**

TCS’s reward philosophy is very much holistic in nature, that is, it does not focus purely on being top payers in the industry, but includes investment in learning, growth and career development as an integral part of the reward philosophy. Associates’ package is a combination of salary, benefits and
TCS’s profit-linked bonus scheme, all of which are benchmarked annually to ensure it is in line with market rates for all associates. The performance element of pay is calculated against how individual objectives align with the organisations’ through a balanced scorecard (BSC). Individual performance is assessed through a (digitised) appraisal process. Team performance is rated against set goals and is measured through the BSC. The overall performance of TCS is measured against organisational objectives. Both hard goals and softer attributes (elements such as communication and teamwork) are factored in while evaluating the performance of an associate.

Career Development

As TCS has an acknowledged global presence, and has invested in a range of technologies and practices, associates have the benefit of working on challenging assignments and a variety of roles in different countries and on the latest technologies. They provide multiple options and guide associates to shape their career path to optimally blend personal, business unit and eventually organisation goals. In their performance review and goal-setting process, associates can discuss and agree career directions, identify related training requirements and the benefits to TCS. Apart from technical and domain skills, TCS provides lateral transfer and global rotation opportunities, so associates may gain a broader range of general management skills. Foreign language learning is encouraged through a combination of in-house and external programmes to enable associates to explore different cultures as part of their international experience. Promotion is performance-driven and merit-based. Associates are thus encouraged to take on varied and challenging roles.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Since its inception in 1968, TCS has been committed to what it calls ‘building society’ and it drives actions in line with Tata’s 143-year heritage of ‘building the nation’. This includes funding initiatives that address the United Nations millennium development goals via the Tata Trust ownership of the company. Tata distributes some US$70 million (£45.2 million) to good causes annually. TCS claim that CSR in the UK is being directed in four areas: marketplace, workplace, community and environment. The first involves driving ethical customer solutions and suppliers’ supply chain management improvements. The second supports associates and families through programmes beyond legislation e.g. TCS operates a proven diversity policy. The third involves working with the Department of Education to build UK talent in readiness for employment, such as through work placements and schools programmes. The fourth involves setting environment targets. For example, these included reducing carbon footprint and waste generation by 10%, electricity and water consumption by 2% and paper consumption by 10%, for the year 2011-2012. It also intends, in future, to increase its solar water heater capacity, and harvest rainwater. It has a target to reduce waste paper sent to recycling by 10%.

Conclusions

As was evident from the discussion above, organisational and people management practices, policies at TCS were mostly strategic, innovative, paternalistic, holistic and futuristic in nature. This is also in line with the wider Tata group business philosophy. It is thus interesting to learn how a large emerging market MNC translates, adopts, adapts and transfers its culture and practices to a developed country such as the UK.
References:


*Tata Consultancy Services website*


Marginal gains: Olympic lessons in high performance for organisations

David Hall, Derek James and Nick Marsden

Introduction

A concept known as ‘marginal gains’, an approach to performance improvement in elite sport came to prominence during the London 2012 Olympics when Team GB cycling won a record eight gold medals. Since National Lottery funding was awarded in 1997 to develop British cycling, the ethos of making aggregated small gains in many areas to improve overall performance has been central to its success. The concept of marginal gains is not new and the approach is used in many sports, where it has contributed to individual and team achievement at the highest level. Some examples of marginal gains and their development in sport are outlined below. A management perspective is provided which considers the implementation of a marginal gains approach in a Fire and Rescue Service organisation.

Team GB cycling

Dave Brailsford, British Cycling Performance Director appearing on BBC Breakfast on the final morning of the Olympic track cycling competition, explained the concept of marginal gains as: “The whole principle came from the idea that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike, and then improved it by 1%, you will get a significant increase when you put them all together”. In other words, it is the aggregation of a number of small gains that result in a large gain in overall performance, which can be significant in terms of achievement and outcomes. Brailsford sums it up: “Put simply... how small improvements in a number of different aspects of what we do can have a huge impact on the performance of the team” (Slater, 2012).

In addition to his role with GB cycling, Brailsford is also the principal of Team Sky Pro Cycling who came second in the 2012 Tour de France team competition, and team member Bradley Wiggins became the first ever Britain to win this iconic race before going on to win a gold medal in the time trial event at London 2012 – his seventh Olympic gold, a feat only equalled by Sir Chris Hoy of Team GB cycling.

Marginal gains in other sports

Many sports adopt a marginal gains approach to improving performance - we will focus on those where this method has been widely publicised. Many marginal gains in cycling have their origins in technology, e.g. frame, wheel and other component design in terms of the bikes. Technology also influences what riders wear and their diet. Bike technology has been heavily influenced by Formula 1 (F1) racing with the use of computational fluid dynamics (CFD) and carbon fibre, to design and manufacture the lightest and more aerodynamic machines possible (Hargrove and Bradley, 2012).

The world of F1 is dominated by marginal gains, as regulations on the specification of racing cars drives the teams to eke out the smallest performance advantages they possibly can, which has led to the use of energy transfer systems, changing down force and the use of telemetry (collection of real-time data from a car as it is driven). McLaren Applied Technologies in Surrey, UK is the R&D organisation behind McLaren F1 racing and is utilizing its technology in other sports such as sailing and cycling, developing racing bikes tested by 2011 Road Race World cycling champion, Mark Cavendish.
The England rugby team won the World Cup in 2003 under coach, Sir Clive Woodward, who describes the importance of ‘critical non-essentials’ (CNe’s) as part of his strategy to develop England into a World Cup winning team (Woodward, 2004). CNe’s were the small things in the detail of everything the team did in its preparation and playing that could be improved to set the England team apart from its rivals, and create a winning mindset which would influence players’ behaviour. Woodward’s interest in the concept of CNe’s was influenced by the work of Australian Dr Paddi Lund (Lund, 1998) who Woodward met while working in Australia before he became England coach. Ironically, England defeated Australia in Sydney in the final.

The first recorded application of marginal gains in competition takes us back to the 19th Century in the game of chess, when Wilhelm Steinitz (1836-1900) became the first official world chess champion in 1886. Steinitz was the first player to develop a scientific approach based on the accumulation of small advantages, which became known as Steinitz’ Accumulation Theory. The success of this approach lay in the ability to analyze and understand the position of pieces to be able to accumulate advantages to gain dominance against an opponent (Landsberger, 2006). For ‘accumulation of small advantages’ read ‘aggregation of marginal gains’.

High performance organisations

To compare the use of marginal gains in sport with performance in business, it is helpful to consider the principles which underpinned GB Team cycling’s 2012 Olympic success. Dave Brailsford provides insight into the systematic management approach applied at Team GB cycling: “Firstly, you need a team with the skills and motivation to succeed. Secondly, you need to understand what you want to achieve. Thirdly, you need to understand where you are now. Then, you need to put a plan in place to see how you can get from where you are now to what you want to achieve.” (BBC Breakfast, BBC1, 7th August 2012). This quotation captures the strategic and systematic management approach taken by Brailsford and his team. Understanding where Team GB cycling is now and planning future performance is based on the sophisticated application of metrics to track marginal performance gains. Marginal gains are sought from every aspect of Team GB cycling’s activities that that contribute towards performance, including the technology that enables collection and analysis of real-time performance data. Performance improvement across such a range of areas demonstrates the holistic management approach taken by Team GB cycling.

Brailsford states the first requirement is a team with the skills and motivation to succeed. One cannot underestimate the interventions to meet this requirement, e.g. talent management, but the strategy of marginal gains in terms of elite competition starts when the team is in place under Brailsford’s performance management specialists. Theories in performance management and high performance teams/organisations suggest that people need to be highly skilled and motivated to perform well (Katzenbach and Smith, 2005). Elite sports teams are high-performance teams that are shaped by a high-performance organisational culture. The HRM literature describes the application of specific and integrated (‘bundling’) of high-performance work practices (HPWPs) in high-performance work organisations (HPWOs) to aggregate gains (Lawler, 2005). Team GB cycling has successfully embedded continuous improvement practices in all aspects of its operation to realise aggregated marginal gains and, in doing so, is effectively managing change and performance.

Managing improvement at Dorset Fire and Rescue Service

Dorset Fire and Rescue Service (DFRS) have a proud history of high achievement that has been widely acknowledged by external bodies and the public, but there is a continuous need for improvement and to reshape the organisation, particularly in light of recent poor financial settlements
and an ever gloomier economic forecast. To respond effectively to these challenges, major destabilising change may be required in some areas, but this needs to be complemented by small evolutionary change in other areas. However, the desire for evolutionary change (marginal gains) may sometimes be obscured by more revolutionary strategic debate, rendering continuous improvement passive rather than being driven by strategic intent. It is this context that has sparked an interest in the concept of marginal gains as representing an opportunity to be more proactive, more empowering and more organic.

Like many organisations DFRS is sometimes surprised by the impacts that small positive interventions can make. Allowing on-call firefighters to text in their availability rather than having to visit the station has led to a massive increase in fire cover across rural Dorset. Applying bar-code readers to manage assets has led to significantly improved legal compliance and management of over 30,000 traceable pieces of equipment. Changing station shift systems in tandem with increased managerial flexibility has led to a more productive working day. Less prescription over work routines has allowed adaptable and responsive services being applied to changing community needs. All of these things in themselves are small changes but together have led to some considerable improvements to community and firefighter safety through aggregated marginal gains.

Whilst these changes are proactive, they often lack a strategic and holistic drive, and a framework for marginal gains to be more clearly recognised, identified and exploited. As a strategic management team, DFRS are now interested in this approach to join up these smaller activities into larger programmes of work that are more strategically focused, allowing them to be fully recognised alongside the appetite for bigger revolutionary change. DFRS have identified three key areas as a focus for discussions taking this forward:

1. **Leadership gains**: small changes in overall strategic leadership and management that provokes new thinking in managers, and innovation within and between departments that improve efficiency, effectiveness and increased morale.

2. **Technological gains**: introducing low cost, undisruptive ICT or equipment changes that improve customer and service delivery experiences.

3. **Process gains**: changing processes through LEAN thinking and application, along with the improved use of metrics to focus resources on the things that really make a difference and from which marginal gains can be determined.

To take a more strategic and proactive position on marginal gains, DFRS management believe that there are a number of common challenges to organisations. There may also be some that are more relevant to public sector organisations where the ‘bottom-line’ is more complex than profit, or in the case of sport, quickest time or points accumulated on the board.

**Resetting the culture**

One of the key challenges is to mindfully recognise ‘margin gains’ within the overall strategic discussion and debate regarding continuous improvement. This must start with a discussion on the cultural norms that an organisation wishes to develop and promote. The focus needs to be ‘we’re good, how do we get better?’ and ‘our people are good, how do we make them better?’ Adopting this position sets a fundamentally different starting position from one that may often be focused on gaps and weaknesses. Although both approaches are focused on continuous improvement, the former is more likely to positively inspire, support higher levels of trust and allow empowerment to flourish. An example could be adoption of a strengths-based leadership approach to the development and
management of our leaders that could produce the marginal improvements in personal performance and maximise talent.

**Corporate coordination and focus**

Inherent to this debate is the tension between the creation of an enabling environment with bottom-up empowerment and the need to corporately focus limited resources to maximise the opportunities for marginal gains in key and prioritised areas. If this is not considered then positive marginal gain in one area could cause an unintended consequential impact in another unless some coordination is in place or boundaries for managers set.

**Not everything needs to be measured**

It is important that resources are fully accountable and used to their full potential and metrics are clearly important when indicating areas for marginal gains and measuring their success. However, whilst metrics are very important, organisations can often sleep-walk into an approach whereby gains need to be fully justified and accounted for or, potentially, may be dismissed. Introducing measurement frameworks and metrics may lead to innovation more focused on meeting targets (because individuals are held to account) than a more creative culture where managers are encouraged to innovate and to find marginal gains in all areas of their work.

This may be particularly relevant in the public sector where outcomes and outputs are sometimes less tangible and, it may need to be accepted that not everything can or needs to be measured. There is the danger that intended marginal gain may be quickly eroded by the bureaucracy needed to measure it. Sometimes it may take courage to allow the gain to be ill defined; irrational, but emotionally valid. For instance, a feeling of self-efficacy in managers through greater empowerment is essential in creating improved performance is very difficult to measure.

**Conclusion**

It is argued that the notion of marginal gains could offer a more proactive, less passive approach to an organisation’s desire for continuous improvement. Such a gradual approach offers benefits in terms of managing change, i.e. more involvement and less resistance, and developing an organisational culture that supports high performance behaviours. However, central to this must be a mindful debate and intent to recognise that many small gains can add up to something bigger in terms of individual and group performance for an organisation.

The concept of marginal gains has had an impact in sport and, it is interesting to wonder why this approach seems to be recognised more in sport than in business. Perhaps part of the London 2012 Olympic legacy will be that we reflect on the success of Team GB’s athletes and appreciate the significance of marginal gains in their achievement?

**References:**


Employee engagement and employee well-being – who really cares?

Gary Rees and Sally Rumbles

Introduction

Academic literature has questioned the changing role of the HR/Personnel Function over the last five decades. Many organisations now follow the Ulrich model of the HR Business Partner, focussing upon HR adopting a strategic role in order to demonstrate added value. To what extent has the HR function “sold its soul” in order to take its place at the corporate board and abandoned its caring nature and employee champion role? Strategic imperatives may dictate that the (people) resource is simply an issue of utility; there for management to manipulate for the sake of competition and possibly survival.

The view that people are an organisation’s most important asset and that their effective development and deployment offers a distinctive and non-imitable competitive advantage is at the heart of the Business Partner model of HR. The emphasis is now placed upon the contribution that HR makes to business and competitive advantage, and not on how such work contributes to parity in the employment relationship and the ethical treatment of employees. An embedded assumption is that what is good for business is good for workers. The emphasis is placed upon HR practitioners providing cost efficient HR services and strategic advice to senior managers in order to deliver business and competitive advantage.

The question then arises as to whether Duty of Care sits within the remit of the HR function. This article builds upon a survey conducted on employees representing 115 organisations, and their reports on how the HR function is perceived by them within their organisation.

The concepts of Employee Engagement and Employee Well-being

Employee engagement is a relatively new concept in the management field and is already considered by employers to be a desirable organisational asset given its promised return of higher levels of organisational performance. According to Truss et al (2012: 219) “Employee engagement has become something of an international phenomenon over the past few years, driven on the one hand by the growing focus within the academic community on positive psychology, and on the other by the ever present quest for organisations to find better and more effective ways of motivating staff towards higher performance levels”. The authors question whether employee engagement has replaced traditional academic motivational theories and approaches to work.

Employee well-being is now becoming a significant business issue, evidenced by recent surveys by Gallup Worldwide and the Business in the Community UK suggesting that promoting employee well-being can lead to improved financial performance for organisations and their shareholders.

There is no universally agreed definition of employee engagement. Kahn’s original definition provides a reasonable starting point in understanding this term. He defines employee engagement as “the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances”. (Kahn 1990:694).

Similarly, there is no agreed definition on well-being. A reasonable starting point is the CIPD’s definition of well-being. The CIPD define employee well-being as “creating an environment to promote a state of contentment which allows an employee to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organisation”. (CIPD 2012)
Pruyne (2012: 4) states that well-being is “a positive state in which the individual is able to function at or near their optimal level, whether defined and measured in terms of physical, mental or social functioning, with significant implications for the individual, their family and community, the organisation and society at large”.

Whilst organisations may operate (or perhaps have recently introduced) an employee engagement and possibly an employee well-being strategy, the question arises as to what extent employees’ engagement and well-being is important and significant to the organisation.

Baptiste (2008) found that effective implementation of Human Resource Management policies and practices by managers can play a key role in developing employee well-being at work. Baptiste (2008) further argues that organisational targets should not just be economic, but should involve employee well-being as well. Conversely, failure to evaluate employee well-being at work in terms of improved productivity, reduced sickness absence or other organisational benefits can hinder organisational sustainability.

The question as to how and who generates maximum employee engagement and well-being in organisations remains paramount.

Survey Methodology

An electronic survey was sent to 3005 organisations which had links with the University of Portsmouth Business School in the UK. In total, 115 organisations provided completed responses to the survey, with 32% from the Public Sector, 58% from the Private sector, and 10% from the third sector (not for profit/charitable sector). From the responses returned, 62% were from non HR functions (for example, Operations Manager, Finance Manager etc.) and 38% from people working in the HR function. The survey consisted of a range of closed questions probing employee engagement and employee well-being in the respondents’ organisation, with additional open-ended questions to provide scope for qualitative analysis and more in-depth responses.

Findings

A mixed-methods approach was used in both the survey design and analysis. Overall, there were varying and sometimes mixed messages in the data generated, and on occasions, contradictory comments made. A range of interesting quantitative results emerged, including:

- 79% said that their organisation is concerned that their employees are engaged
- 75% of respondents said that managers are responsible for employee well-being
- More than 50% of respondents thought that employee well-being was more important than performance
- 57% of respondents stated that employees are generally happy at work
- Less than a third of respondents agreed that well-being is a responsibility of the HR function
- 72% of respondents thought that HR were more concerned with employee well-being issues than performance issues
- 24% of respondents thought that HR was concerned with strategic level rather than operational issues

In reviewing the adoption of the Ulrich HR Business Partner model, only a third of organisations who responded stated that they had adopted it, with only a third of these organisations stated that it had been successful. A third of respondents believed that HR’s primary responsibility is still administrative. The role and function of HR is therefore seen by some respondents as strategic; by others as administrative. The context of job redundancies, tightening financial measures and job insecurity has to be considered, so having a job in itself may render employees happy in their work.
With regards to the qualitative findings, a mixed range of responses emerged. Two particular quotes concisely sum up some of the respondents who had positive reports about their HR function – HR acting as the caring profession:

“We actively promote employee well-being and state that it is everyone’s responsibility, including the employees themselves. The company offers a range of benefits related to employee well-being”, and “HR takes responsibility for well-being in our organisation – no one else was looking at this and we felt this was important for HR to take a lead - mapping it to absenteeism etc”.

On the flip side, some comments presented HR as an uncaring profession:

“The HR department is actively used to get around employee issues and tribunals rather than looking at employee well-being”.

“Employee well-being does not seem to be a high priority at the moment. Staff morale is very low, and everyone is just trying to keep their jobs, not knowing what the future will hold”.

“Our HR doesn’t do enough for employee training, employability or well-being!”

“HR work for the company and have their interests far and above employees’ well-being issues that I’ve seen brushed aside, except in cases of genuine sickness...harassment and bullying, and HR fail to manage effectively”.

With regards to the minority of organisations who had adopted the Ulrich Business Partner model:

“There is a perception we operate the Ulrich Business Partner model, but none of the other practices are used. Old-fashioned bureaucratic/hierarchical systems are in place”.

“Fully committed to engaged employees due to the proven business benefits. We conduct an annual employee survey which measures change engagement for the following year. Managers are responsible day to day”.

Some of our findings presented a more coherent and balanced approach to engagement and well-being:

“Our organisation is coming to the conclusion that an engaged and well cared for employee has a positive effect on the bottom line. Therefore, Employee Engagement and Well-being is moving up the agenda”, and

“Engagement has to be driven by senior managers as well as managers at all levels within the organisation. Staff also need to take ownership of engagement themselves!”

The difficulty therefore emerged from who takes responsibility for engagement and well-being. One organisation suggested a professional, integrative and multi-agency approach to tackling engagement and well-being:

“Responsibility for well-being is a combination of managers, HR, Occupational Health, as well as a strong trade union influence. It is usually a discussion between Trade Union reps, heads of departments and the Business Partners”.

Conclusion

Research into employee engagement and well-being is still in its infancy and whilst a great deal more research needs to be conducted on these topics, the critical issue for HR practitioners is how to address these key issues within their organisational context. There may be considerable emphasis
placed upon the impact of organisational culture and how to foster positive employee attitudes and engagement towards their work in order to provide a highly efficient and productive work environment. At the same time, employee needs will have to be addressed.

Legally, morally and ethically, there is a responsibility to care for all employees at work, but this may provide a simplistic base-line approach. Organisations have to consider how far they want to extend working practices to include employees in a sophisticated approach to employee engagement and well-being so that the principles surrounding these important areas become owned by employees and managers alike.

References:


Workplace bullying: The power of diversity in knowledge exchange

Charlotte Rayner

Introduction

This article reports on a 2012 conference on workplace bullying with the purpose of updating readers on developments in the field. Running alongside this knowledge thread is a more convoluted one – that of the ‘story’ of a conference where the blend of academics, practitioners and ‘pracademics’ (who span both areas) hold conversations in a highly supportive environment and where everyone leaves with more. No wonder so many of us return time after time.

The Context

This conference runs every other year under the auspices of the International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment (IAWBH). The Association originated because the conferences became so popular that more professional organisation was needed. Run by an elected and volunteer Board, the fees are low to encourage membership, and it is dedicated to the dissemination of evidenced-based knowledge in bullying and harassment at work (see www.iawbh.org). Around 250 delegates are now the norm, from over 30 countries with about one third being practitioners, the rest academics. Two years ago Copenhagen University won the competition to host the 2012 conference, donating meeting spaces and enabling delegates to tread an affordable path through an expensive city. The Danish government invested in a series of projects (several run by Professor Annie Hogh at the University) to examine the impact of workplace bullying on their economy and the workers involved. After calculating impact, the government have continued funding, seeing it as highly cost-effective beyond their ethical desire to act against workplace bullying. Their largest co-operative project is being completed in the next few months and is a longitudinal study of workplaces of various sizes designed to examine the effect of workplace bullying on members. As such it will lay the base for understanding how to combat this problem in a Danish context. Consequently as hosts they brought a deep level of understanding to the conference which contributed to starting the discussion at a sophisticated level.

The Psychologists

Workplace bullying represents a context with which scholars from various bases can engage. The academic ‘bible’ (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper, 2011) reflects this mix, combining chapters from occupational psychologists, therapists, OD and HR specialists. Many psychologists attend the IAWBH conferences and contribute by examining the individuals involved and their coping strategies for resultant health issues. Professor Dieter Zapf, one of Germany’s most distinguished academics used his keynote speech to provide delegates with a road map for positivists where theory was at the start. There is no ‘bullying’ theory, rather we adopt and adapt existing theory into the workplace bullying context. Hence one can explain the benefits and limitations of Employee Assistance Programmes using the Demand Control Support model from the stress literature (see de Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman and Bongers, 2003 for a review) where EAPs can provide Support, possibly influence Control, but are unlikely to affect Demand in workplace bullying. Zapf’s emphasis on theory was well placed and highlighted the purpose of IAWBH conferences are to unpack, unpick and understand using a range of theoretical frameworks in order that action can be targeted and meaningful.

Within the psychologists’ ranks are clinical specialists who deal closely with the bullied and bullies. Dr Laura Crawshaw, an invited keynote speaker, shared her findings from working with bullies – a
notoriously difficult group to access and study in an ethical manner. Based in North America, Laura’s consultancy practice offers coaching and individualised help to ‘abrasive’ bosses. Like many in the field, she uses the word ‘bullying’ rarely in her work, and through softening the language enables acceptance of the specialised help she offers. Laura brings coaching skills, which together with a strong psychoanalytic theoretical base, provides a framework through which to examine ‘perpetrators’ of bullying. Her speech held surprises as she outlined the contagion of anxiety around bullying – anxiety from those accused of course, but also anxiety in client organisations; bosses and HR practitioners. She reported observing and tracking the swirl of anxiety escalating around and between professionals and through the hierarchy. Such dynamics changed her role from being employed to help sensitise a bully to the effect of their behaviour to a wider remit of assisting many in the organisation to cope with their anxiety. Laura’s comments echoed the opening keynote speaker, Suzy Fox (from the USA) who found that HR and workers have different conceptualisations of bullying.

Applied Academics and Practitioners

Business School academics face an additional need from their institutions which is to apply and suggest interventions. They, together with practitioners and pracademics dominated a burgeoning set of conference presentations around interventions. HR practitioners are associated with high levels of dissatisfaction from employee complainants in studies (Rayner and Lewis, 2011). Suzy Fox’s work parallels a UK study undertaken by Sue Harrington and reported at the IAWBH who found HR practitioners often re-labelled complaints of managerial bullying as aggrieved performance-managed staff, thus immediately problematising the complainant and imposing a new and possibly unfounded set of dynamics which disadvantaged the complainant.

A new area of interest reported by both academics and practitioners at the conference was the use of ‘bystanders’ (those observing or around bullying events) to change the culture of acceptability. Lynn Lansbury from Portsmouth Business School showed the design of her study where she is using Schlenker’s Model of Responsibility (Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy and Doherty, 1994) to help co-workers recognise bullying (event) appreciate they have a role (identity), and a path of action (prescription), and dispel myths of what staff think their colleagues think (audience inhibition). Through strengthening links of responsibility Lynn hopes to show that reductions in bullying can be achieved. She may demonstrate that small micro-interventions by bystanders have the power of macro-level impact if through such work bullying behaviours can be made ‘unacceptable’.

Pam Farmer came to the conference from BT, to showcase their highly successful programme of interventions. BT has worked on bullying since the mid 2000’s, building on a government funded project in which I was involved for several years as a researcher. The academic research underpinning BT’s programme was presented at the 2008 IAWBH conference. Pam’s team first strengthened their policy, making it easier to understand and reviewed how they measured reports of bullying in the staff survey. They raised awareness through a video and poster campaign ‘Cut It Out’ to provide a strong corporate message that bullying was unacceptable. Next they identified ‘hot spots’ of bullying from the staff survey, parts of the company which had peaks of reports. In some instances managers left, but in most situations managers were enabled and helped to behave differently and still achieve results. They have seen reports in the staff survey drop to such an extent that in 2010 they lowered the threshold for being labelled a ‘hot spot’. Their work continues with ‘global conversations’ between experts and managers, keeping the profile of the issue at a high level.
The Definition Issue

That those involved at the heart of a topic turn their attention to definition is perhaps a reflection of the evolving maturity of the field. Suzy Fox proclaimed that unless the definition of bullying was perceived as appropriate by HR, little would be achieved in workplaces. Many delegates disagreed that employers were the right stakeholder group to ask, as standards would vary so much and many delegates suggested employers would avoid clarity. Some delegates pointed out that organisational policies already held employer-based definitions, and this would be true for most UK organisations. Sue Harrington's work described and analysed dynamics which took complaints away from the bullying policy, and anxiety may play a part in this shift if one follows Laura Crawshaw's insights. The lawyers commented that workplace definitions need to be stricter than those in law to keep employers out of court, but as there is no accepted international legal definition for bullying, they could contribute little to the workplace definition debate. Perhaps the most promising set of suggestions for trial came from a group of Australian risk experts. They argued that considering bullying as a risk would keep any definition employee-focussed but also be of interest to corporate insurers, and thus reach its way into the board room. This will no doubt be a thread at the 2014 conference (Milan).

The Diversity Dynamic

A remarkable aspect of the conference is the dynamic of knowledge exchange one observes. Perhaps because people are from so many different countries, and from such a wide range of disciplines and background that subgroups of identity rarely develop, and if they do, it appears these are entirely positive. It is perhaps one of those rare demonstrations of the benefits of diverse group membership working well. At a conference on bullying it is not difficult to establish and achieve the basics of decency and respect - which results in true listening. Role modelling by seniors who reach out to new participants to include their contributions in discussion no doubt sets a strong tone. Nevertheless there is something special about this conference.

In Copenhagen I observed one of those life-changing moments as a group of lawyers emerged from a session where they had been debating the difficulties of unclear definitions. The discussion had apparently been breathtaking due to of the number of countries represented around the table. One delegate told me she has saved herself years of work as she had realised a fatal flaw in her own 'solution'. Far from being dismayed she was alight with enthusiasm and bursting with energy to continue - and this after a 2 hour session as the group de-camped to the nearest bar to continue. An excited lawyer is a pleasure to see, but eight beaming lawyers is a remarkable sight. Their tangible excitement could be well justified as to achieve an internationally accepted definition of bullying in law would move the whole field on.

Conclusion

Sending staff to international conferences is a relatively expensive form of staff development. However the IAWBH conference models the benefits of such activities. Far from enabling a nice tourist trip to Copenhagen, delegates appeared to carry on serious discussion throughout breaks and into the evenings, as well as the formal sessions. One could argue that holding a 3-day event only every other year provides a rarity that is the magic of the 'mix'. If so then there may be a lesson for those of us concerned with staff development and knowledge exchange.

Research in the field of workplace bullying moves at an increasingly fast pace, and without doubt the benefit of learning from the work of others through conferences like these no doubt contributes to such speed. What was apparent is that the area of ‘harassment’ which is also in the title of the
IAWBH is beginning to get attention at the conference, which is a welcome development. Harassment in its various forms may be very similar to bullying, but it is different, and although far less frequent than bullying may start to get the attention it deserves. The IAWBH provides an excellent mechanism to stimulate such endeavours.

References:


Note: The International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment can be found at [www.iawbh.org](http://www.iawbh.org) and is a membership Association of academics and practitioners. Membership costs around £60 pa, and conferences held in ‘even’ years costing around £300-400 for 3 days in fees. There are Special Interest Groups (SIGs) for mid-conference discussions in areas of interest. SIGs host new members at conferences so one starts with people in one’s own area. The next Conference is to be held in Milan in 2014 (May/June).
Why are women still under represented in senior jobs in SET in academic universities and what are the HR implications?

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Employee engagement and employee well-being – who really cares?

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Workplace bullying: The power of diversity in knowledge exchange

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