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# APPLIED RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2021

## Submissions



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## ARC 2021

The CIPD Applied Research Conference (ARC) is an annual meeting place for academic researchers and practitioners working in people management, employment policy and related fields. It holds a unique place in bringing together these two communities to hear about cutting edge research in HR and discuss how it can be applied in practice. ARC is an interdisciplinary conference that covers a wide range of aspects of people management, employment, learning and development and organisational development. In all research papers presented, we set out to discuss the practical application of insights to organisational life and labour markets.

This conference proceedings contains the accepted submissions for the ARC 2021 research papers. The papers are grouped into 12 thematic streams and are presented in the order in which they appear in the programme.

ARC 2021 is hosted for the first time entirely online, on 21 January 2021. The programme detail is available [here](#). For more information on ARC, visit [www.cipd.co.uk/arc](http://www.cipd.co.uk/arc)

## Organisational Responses to Crisis

### Global work in pandemic times: The experiences of transnational professionals in MNEs

Irene Skovgaard-Smith, Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour, University of East Anglia (UEA)

#### *Overview*

The aim of research is to investigate the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for global work and cross-border interactions and collaborations in multinational enterprises (MNEs). The study explores how transnational professionals in MNEs experience the pandemic and its impact in this context. As the pandemic escalated and the world went into lockdown, mobility gave way to immobility with borders closed and flights cancelled. Global work became situated in people's homes mediated by virtual communication technologies. While immobility, home-working and virtual interaction created new distance, relational and well-being challenges, the virtual working environment also facilitated unexpected advantages such as a reduction in the importance of location and geographical distances.

#### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

The research focus is the lived experience of transnational professionals in global roles who manage geographically distributed teams and engage in cross-border collaboration, mobility and transcultural brokerage (Levy et al., 2019). The question the study asks is – how has the pandemic situation of immobility and home-boundedness impacted global work and related cross-border collaborations and interactions?

The concept of global work refers to work situations in which managers and staff are culturally diverse, embedded in different national contexts, move across borders through frequent international travel or engage in other cross-border activities and collaborations (Reiche et al., 2019). The research responds to the need for further advancing research on global work and its implications particularly through greater contextualisation (Reiche et al., 2019), such as in this case the context of a global pandemic.

Global processes associated with global work are actualised and lived by the people who navigate and interpret them as part of their everyday life. Among those who live 'the global' is a growing group of transnational professionals that this study focuses on – also sometimes termed global careerists (Suutari et al, 2012) or self-initiated expatriates (Doherty, 2013). While often neglected in the classic expatriate literature, studies on 'cosmopolitans' (Levy et al., 2019; Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt, 2018), 'biculturals' (Brannen & Thomas, 2010) and 'multiculturals' (Fitzsimmons, 2013)

show that this global talent pool is increasingly important for MNEs because of their transnational network ties and competencies in navigating and bridging cultural boundaries (Levy et al., 2019).

### *Research methods*

The research approach is qualitative using open narrative interviewing to generate rich empirical material that provide insight into experience and meaning (Gertsen & Sørderberg, 2011). The interviews were conducted with an 'ethnographic imaginary' (Forsey, 2010, p. 567) encouraging interviewees to talk about their experiences in their own terms (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

20 interviews has so far been conducted (virtually) by the author during the course of May and June 2020. The sample consists of high-level professionals in global roles (e.g. EMEA directors/managers) in MNEs with extensive international experience (10-20 years). The participants are located in a range of different locations (London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Hamburg, Geneva, Liechtenstein, Oslo, Vancouver, Dubai, Perth) working for 17 different companies. They originate from 16 different countries and eight participants have multiple nationality (dual or triple). A majority come from Western European and English-speaking countries, along with India, Brazil, Mexico, Azerbaijan, Romania and Poland. A few participants also have another ethnic or cultural background (Ghanaian, Iranian, South Korean and Phillipian). There is an almost equal distribution of men and women in the sample (11 women and 9 men) and all participants are on local contracts.

### *Research findings or argument*

Global work in MNEs spans cultural, linguistic, spatial, and temporal differences and distances. This means that the coordination of work and the management of people is complex and challenging. This has been further exacerbated by the on-going pandemic as an extreme 'people-based' global crisis that has increased cross-border distance challenges (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

A key aspect relates to unprecedented levels of stress and uncertainty along with the mandate to work remotely from home which all participants experienced. While virtual work is not new for these professionals who manage and work as part of geographically dispersed teams, the pandemic situation produced extreme conditions. The stress and well-being risks associated with working virtually across time zones, and thus having to be available around the clock, increased very significantly for most of the participants as they were supporting teams dealing with crisis situations on the ground related to operational impacts of the pandemic.

However, despite the challenges and the stress, there was no shortage of stories of equally unprecedented levels of commitment, shared determination, creative solutions and hard work from their teams. The participants talked about an increased sense of shared purpose, cohesion and increased meaningfulness of work as everyone shifted to focus on only what mattered, and organisations suspended performance targets and so on. Some talked about how it became easier to get things done and gain access to decision-makers above them in the corporate hierarchy. The home-boundedness of everyone, no matter location and position,

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created new opportunities and increased access, for instance for those normally marginalised by geographical distance from headquarters.

Furthermore, the participants talked about how they felt that work was being humanised through this crisis. They had come to see their colleagues and staff across the globe in a new light and experienced a sense of togetherness across national and cultural boundaries. This was not only because of virtual presence in each other's homes, but also because of the shared global experience of home-boundedness and living through the pandemic with all that it entails.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

One of the key implications of the findings relate to how global work can be facilitated virtually. The findings reveal a wealth of creativity, innovation and learning for making cross-border virtual collaboration work as well as the challenges involved. Most participants were convinced that international business travel will not return to anything near pre-pandemic levels. Organisations have discovered that much more than anticipated can be accomplished virtually and that it also involves some advantages. At the same time however, there were increased problems due to temporal distances as well as unequal access to good and reliable internet connectivity. Staff across the world faced bad connections and low bandwidth, making it necessary to use only audio rather than video calls, and other barriers to participation and interaction. These technical issues relate to home-working specifically and MNEs should therefore not rush to reduce office space. Some participants indicated this is already happening.

Furthermore, there are limits to virtual interaction in terms of relationship building and collaboration. This was particularly a problem if relationships were not already well established prior to the pandemic. The social skills (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011) and ability to engage in transcultural brokerage (Levy et al., 2019) that these transnational professionals have learned through their global careers, were much more difficult to practice. They talked about problems with creating trust and reading people, particularly subtle cultural clues. Thus mobility to facilitate face-to-face interaction will still be necessary to accomplish global work in the longer term.

Another key issue is the health and well-being risks associated with virtual work from home. It is clear that extra support for staff both from HR and from line managers is necessary with respect to the risks of physical problems, such as back and neck pain, as well as stress, burn out and social isolation. Many participants talked about their worries that staff are working too much and that this is unsustainable. In their experience, many people have worked more for a combination of reasons: temporal distances, fear of losing their jobs, fear of being seen not to perform, juggling family responsibilities and because this unprecedented crisis situation instigated extraordinary action and effort.

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## **Managing in turbulent times: lessons from the 2008 financial crisis**



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### *Overview*

The 2007-2009 global financial crisis (GFC) had profound implications for work and employment (Johnstone et.al, 2019). Yet despite excellent evidence regarding restructuring at the labour market level (for example Van Wanrooy et.al, 2013), we have less knowledge of organisational level responses (Johnstone, 2019). Informed by over 60 interviews, the paper presents three in-depth case studies of employment restructuring, and calls for a more nuanced view of HRM strategies in times of crisis (Teague and Roche, 2014). The paper contributes to the limited literature on HR strategies in turbulent times, a topic of great importance given the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

It is now over a decade since the 2007-2009 global financial crisis (GFC) with profound and long-lasting implications for work and employment (Johnstone et.al, 2019). At a macro level the GFC was part of the broader social, political and economic environment in which HRM strategies are devised (Zagelmeyer and Gollan, 2012). However, employment practices at the organisational level are also heavily influenced by the macroeconomy, though employers have a degree of choice in terms of how they choose to navigate crisis (Lai et.al 2016). Yet despite excellent evidence regarding restructuring measures and innovations at labour market level (for example Van Wanrooy et.al, 2013), we have much less insight into nature and dynamic responses of responses at the organisational level (Johnstone, 2019). In particular, we have limited insight into the extent to which organisations act strategically, carefully and deliberately combining HR practices in ways suggested in the existing literature, as well as the tensions between downsizing versus protecting jobs and responsible restructuring (Teague and Roche, 2014). Informed by over 60 interviews in the North East of England this paper presents three in-depth case studies of HRM in turbulent times. It suggests that the divergent scenarios envisaged in the present literature remain useful but calls for a nuanced view. The paper contributes to the limited literature on HR strategies and practices in turbulent times. This is particularly pertinent and timely given the ongoing coronavirus crisis which again induces organisations to adjust HR strategies and policies to deal with a challenging environment.

### *Research methods*

The research draws upon over 60 interviews conducted in three manufacturing organisations in the North of England which were severely affected by economic downturn and challenging market conditions. In each organisation in depth interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders including senior/middle managers, as well as employees and their representatives. Each interview sought to elicit experiences and perceptions regarding how the organisational navigated turbulent times as well the extent to which the crisis acted as a catalyst for the long-term adaption or transformation of HR policies and practices. All interviews were

transcribed verbatim and a thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the primary qualitative data, which were supplemented by additional evidence from secondary sources and the existing literature.

### *Research findings or argument*

The research reveals three different strategies adopted to navigate a turbulent macroeconomic environment in organisations severely affected by challenging economic conditions. Company A chose to avoid any redundancies as part of a long-standing organisational commitment to stable long-term employment. Instead it deployed an extensive range of alternative HR and innovative organisational measures including changes to job roles and working time. This reflects the employment stabilisation perspective proposed in the literature but thought to be quite rare in practice. Company B initially deployed a range of measures to mitigate and delay permanent job losses including short time working and training activity. However, permanent job losses were not completely averted though voluntary redundancies minimised the number of compulsory redundancies. To an extent this reflects the philosophy of responsible restructuring concerned with ensuring job losses are always reserved as a last resort. Company C, which relied heavily on temporary workers, was able to retain the majority of permanent employees but at the expense of a significant but disposable contingent workforce. However, the extent to which the employment model reflected the progressive ethos of responsible restructuring is questionable. Thus while the paper provides some empirical support for some of the potential adjustment measures and organisational scenarios envisaged in the existing HRM literature, it also calls for a more nuanced view in understanding how decisions are made, prioritised, implemented and perceived. In addition to aggregate labour market data, this requires obtaining insights into the decision-making processes as well as the actual implementation of restructuring measures at the organisational level.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

The practical significant concerns the empirical insights into the range of employment practices and HR strategies organisations can adopt as firms seek to navigate a serious crisis. As well as adjustments to employment levels, these can include changes to pay, working time and work organisation. Of particular significance are the policies and choices made to safeguard jobs as a part of a 'responsible restructuring' approach and to mitigate the need for permanent job losses. The paper will increase our understanding of how British workplaces can deal with challenging economic and market conditions, and in so doing will add to the evidence base regarding effective HR management in turbulent times as well as the associated organisational benefits. It also considers the importance of communication and engagement activity, as well as challenges and opportunities in terms of training and talent management. This is particularly important given the HR implications of the current environment which include at the time of writing, the ongoing 2020 coronavirus pandemic and economic recession.

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## **Organisational Learning from COVID-19 – a cross-divisional study on the impact of the rapid shift to home working**

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### *Overview*

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced dramatic adaptations across the country and accelerated many changes within workplaces. The crisis, though unwelcome, has provided a unique opportunity to see aspects of a different future in operation. These potential futures are explored within two separate divisions of a telecommunications company. Capturing the impact of the rapid shift to home working on both groups of employees provided scope for learning so that we can design for unpredictable futures in a much more informed way.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

COVID-19 and the move to home working has provided a research opportunity, if an unwelcome one. This paper looks at the impact across two distinct business divisions within a telecommunications company: both divisions, who through time and role development, have always been wedded to office working but for different reasons. For one division being 'seen' to work is reassuring, in part driven by traditional management practices; for the other division, there is the need to access numerous graphics displaying real time operational data via a video wall. For both divisions, team and individual performance is highly metricated.

This research has allowed us to explore key topics, as well as reveal and ultimately challenge workplace assumptions, including some very traditional ones. What does home working mean for colleagues and what is the impact on the person as a whole? How do team dynamics and knowledge sharing work in this new norm? What has the impact been on motivation and morale? What has the main impact been on our customers as seen through the eyes of those on the front line during the crisis? Greater understanding about the employee's relationship with the organisation has emerged.

Going forward, how do we avoid the retrograde step of "returning to normal"? Which elements do we want to take forward and develop? Do we need to re-assess for our future strategy? In short what has and will be the impact on the organisation.

### *Research methods*

Data collection was carried out via semi-structured interviews held during May to July 2020 with 49 employees from two separate divisions. Interviewees and interviewers were working from home due to the COVID-19 crisis. One group of interviewees were sales advisors and managers, who would have traditionally been contact centre based. The second group would normally be based within a 24\*7 operational development centre carrying out technically challenging network surveillance and support.

The semi-structured approach allowed in-depth exploration and capture of opinions and richness of views (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and the results were qualitatively coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 for example) with an iterative process of agreement across the three main authors to identify key themes. Roundtable sessions with academic partners served to further underpin the findings.

### *Research findings or argument*

The organisation has shown a strong duty of care in ensuring people could safely move to home working. Roles, working practices and technological requirements have proven robust to the changes. Relationships have stood up well with mutual trust. Flexibility had been shown to the vulnerable and those for whom homeworking was impractical. All recommended the organisation as a place to work to others, and this advocacy has been strengthened by recent experience.

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Managers' adaption to the change have proven less robust. They miss the ability to pick up on non-verbal signals and have found 'everything is just harder' in their role, especially their ability to seek rapid feedback and information. Managers have become more aware of team members' personal circumstances and their own role in providing emotional support and providing energy. They are keen to maintain and develop this in the future. The maintenance of, and improvement in some KPIs has proven that being 'watched' in the office is not a future requirement to ensure performance. Furthermore, improved customer satisfaction is evidenced through results from surveys and feedback (Reicheld, 2003).

The overall effect has been to strengthen the social contract between employees and employer (after Mead, 1934). This very valuable asset and the factors revealed – mutual trust, flexibility, empathy – should be nurtured and not lost in the future. This work reveals widely visible proof points which will affect attitudes and discussion around the future of the workplace and leadership.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

Homeworking has been seen to work for many roles previously considered 'fixed' to office life. Employees have proven they are trustworthy and complementary performance and customer satisfaction metrics have shown improvements. Simply "going back" to pre-crisis working practices will be problematic without damaging mutual benefits. Churn, employee advocacy and knowledge retention may be potentially negatively affected.

Future resilience is key. Whether for pandemics or other disruptions, the ability to switch between levels of distributed working will be an asset. This will also enable organisations to flex with evolving best practice and prospective employees' expectations. This will be important to maintain attractiveness to future talent and allows for a more diverse workforce. It also represents a portfolio opportunity – other firms share the same experiences and needs.

The whole person matters, not just the 'employee'. The crisis has revealed home, as well as working lives, to colleagues, and the fragile balance between the two exposed. A new level of awareness amongst seasoned managers has arisen, which in turn generates new trust and organisational commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

The role that buildings play needs review. This crisis has proven many workspaces to be COVID-19 brittle, necessitating home working. Office space is an asset that needs to 'work harder'. Collaboration will become their key purpose, along with training and on-boarding. There will still need to be provision for employees who cannot work from home. A mix of appropriately scheduled fixed and shared workspaces will need to evolve.

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## Employee Wellbeing During COVID-19

### Homeworking, Uncertainty and Well-being in the Pandemic

Stephen Wood, Professor of Management, School of Business, University of Leicester

#### *Overview*

I report a study of the effects on well-being of homeworking and the uncertainty surrounding the C-19 pandemic on well-being. The study included diary surveys and a survey of uncertainty, and covered over 1000 university employees across all occupations, including key workers. The results show that in addition to the standard job-level factors affecting well-being – demands, autonomy and support – homeworking factors such as loneliness, child care demands, juggling work and home tasks, were significantly associated with well-being. So also, were the fluctuations in Covid-deaths and the lack of predictability and clarity about government and employer policies.

#### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Stay-at-home has been a central plank of many governments' response to Covid-19. Understanding the experience of home working is important:

- as an end in itself – it is a central element of the story of how we coped with the pandemic, and particularly for understanding its effect on well-being and work–life balance.
- the pandemic provides us with an opportunity for testing the effect of location on well-being of employees. In the extreme theories based on the demands and resources of employees, location is unimportant or only in so far as its affects any of these.

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- the pandemic's unique, enforced nature – which means both employers and employee may have been ill-prepared and faced constraints on facilitating effective home working.
- the homeworking was in the context of the virus, concerns about its spread and the management of mitigation of this – this means uncertainties and fears of getting the virus may be a source of anxiety, while arrangements for provisions and home schooling may have reduced the capacity of people to fulfil work demands.

In this paper we report research that assesses the four types of factors we have discussed, concentrating on two questions:

- What is the relative importance of job characteristics, the home location, the enforced nature of the homeworking, and the pandemic context on the well-being of employees working at home?
- Which aspects of uncertainty are associated with well-being: future work demands, the university's strategy, government policy towards the virus and the economy influence well-being?

### *Research methods*

#### *Theoretical methodology*

We apply Job demand–resource theory to understand how the factors may affect well-being.

#### *Empirical methodology*

The study has a longitudinal design, based on an initial baseline questionnaire, followed during the lockdown in May 2020 by a weekly questionnaire administered over a month and a repeat of this in September, with a one-off survey in July focused on the uncertainty issue. It was administered in two universities and covered all staff. We obtained a sample of over 1000 and yielding over 10,000 observations in the diary study.

A university setting allows research to concentrate specifically on the effects of the changing location of work. The results will not be confounded by a) income decline, b) reduced work demands. Nonetheless, there is significant variability in the degree to which people can do all their tasks at home, work in an identical way to their normal, and histories of homeworking.

#### *Research findings or argument*

The research is ongoing and thus data from only the first diary study are available for this proposal. The uncertainty survey (July) and second diary study (September) are not completed. We are also bound by ethics protocols from putting results in the public domain until after the last diary study. In confidence, initial analysis of the data confirms variables within all the four types of factors are significant, including job demands and autonomy, work–non work conflict, child care constraints, loneliness, the juggling of between work and domestic tasks. The degree of the normality of work, the extent of interruptions from family or work colleagues, degree of prior

homeworking and having a dedicated study were not significant. Disengaging from work and taking breaks were important countervailing forces to stressors.

The spread of the pandemic affects the well-being. The difference between deaths from the previous period and those on the day of reporting is significant, which shows that it is whether deaths were going up or down that is crucial. Also eye catching is that key workers have higher levels on the well-being measure that emphasises the meaningfulness or purposefulness of life.

76% were satisfied with working at home. But people who were less able to work normally, were constrained by the availability of IT equipment or quality of ICT, had to juggle tasks or were interrupted a great deal by colleagues had lower levels of satisfaction. Commuting time was positively related to satisfaction. Well-being was unrelated to satisfaction levels.

#### *Practical importance and implications of research*

The practical importance of the project derives firstly from the uniqueness of the pandemic and enforced homeworking and possible well-being and scaring effects; and secondly from the need for employers and employees to make decisions about the role of homeworking in the future, in the “new normal”.

The uncertainty element of the project is highly distinctive as it has been neglected in well-being research, and the measures developed for this study may have a wider utility.

The results should be generalisable to professional service jobs and not confined to those whose work can be readily done at home, as a sizeable proportion of the sample report that less than 75% of their work is transferable to the home. The theoretical arguments are generalisable to other groups.

Recommendations framework for employers and employees making decisions about home working will be made.

## **Cut hours, not people: no work, furlough, short hours and mental health during The COVID-19 pandemic in the UK**

Ioulia Bessa, University Academic Fellow, University of Leeds

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Senhu Wang, Research Fellow, University of Cambridge



Daiga Kamerāde, Reader in Work and Well-being, University of Salford

Jill Rubery, Professor of Comparative Employment Systems, University of Manchester

#### *Overview*

Drawing on the April and May 2020 waves of Understanding Society COVID-19 Study we examine how far changes in employment status, work hours and involvement in furlough job retention scheme are related to the likelihood of having mental health problems. Our findings confirm that leaving paid work is significantly related to poorer mental health, whereas having some paid work and/or some continued connection to a job is better for mental health than not having any work at all. Those who remain part-time employed before and during the COVID-19, those who are involved in furlough job retention scheme or in transition from full-time to part-time employment are all found to have similar levels of mental health as those who continued to work full-time. Results also show that overall women's mental health has deteriorated much more than men's.

#### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

The unprecedented shock to the UK economy inflicted by government measures to contain the Coronavirus (COVID-19) risked plunging millions of workers into unemployment as businesses were forced to close or scale back activity. To avoid that cliff edge, and the predictable damage to both workers mental health and to the viability of the closed down businesses, the government also introduced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme that allowed for the furloughing of workers. Even so the number of people claiming benefits as unemployed has soared above 2 million for the first time since 1996 and others have been working significantly reduced working hours. Drawing on the April and May 2020 waves of Understanding Society COVID-19 Study the aim of the study presented here is to examine how these changes in employment status, work hours and involvement in furlough job retention scheme between pre-pandemic period (January/February 2020) and the lockdown period (April 2020) are related to workers' mental health. Our main research question in this paper is whether those who experience either furloughing or a reduction in their working hours retain levels of mental health similar to employees, or experience drops the levels of mental health more normally associated with those not in paid work.

#### *Research methods*

To examine how working reduced hours during pandemic is related to mental health, we used data from the first and second waves of the Understanding Society COVID-19 Study collected in April and May 2020. The first and second waves of Understanding Society COVID-19 Study provide an early opportunity to examine how far these changes in employment status, work hours and involvement in furlough job retention scheme are related to the likelihood of having mental health

problems, measured by 12-item General Health Questionnaire. The analytic sample for April 2020 was 7,149 and for May 2020 6,216 respondents. To adjust for complex survey design and unequal non-response rates, we used weighting in all analysis. We run multiple regression models to account for covariates. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models were specified for the GHQ-12 Likert score.

*Research findings or argument*

Our findings confirm that leaving paid work is significantly related to poorer mental health, even after controlling for the household income and other factors. In contrast having some paid work and/or some continued connection to a job is better for mental health than not having any work at all. Those who remain part-time employed before and during the COVID-19, those who are involved in furlough job retention scheme or transition from full-time to part-time employment are all found to have similar levels of mental health as those who continued to work full-time. Results also show that overall women's mental health has deteriorated much more than men's especially when compared to Wave 9 (2017-2019) of Understanding Society.

Both short working hours and furlough job retention schemes can thus be seen to be effective protective factors against worsening mental health. However, the key issue is now how to move beyond the furlough scheme. A v-shaped bounce back is not on the horizon and many sectors will at most move into partial activity. So, the need to avoid a huge further leap in unemployment is just as vital with all the risk to mental health that that would entail. These findings point to the need to move towards sharing work around more equitably, including introducing a shorter working week for all ( except in those sectors under extreme pressure) in order to minimize the risk to mental health and well-being if those on furlough are now pushed into unemployment.

*Practical importance and implications of research*

The evidence is entirely consistent with our expectations based on earlier research: reducing hours does not have an appreciable effect on wellbeing, but redundancies has a very large effect -- almost exactly doubling the probability of being in the highest risk group. It is also important to note that an overall deterioration in mental health compared to pre-pandemic levels had been much greater for women than for men.

The survey mirrors past reports on the stress caused by unemployment. It also highlights options for international policymakers seeking to mitigate the economic impact of Covid-19, including rising treatment costs for the NHS and still more fragile mental health services in lower-income countries.

Both short working hours and furlough job retention schemes can thus be seen to be effective protective factors against worsening mental health. However, the key issue is how to move beyond the furlough scheme. A v-shaped bounce back is not on the horizon and many sectors will, at best, move into partial activity. So, the need to avoid a huge increase in unemployment is just as vital with all the risk to mental health that that would entail. These findings point to the need to move towards sharing work more equitably, including introducing a shorter working week for all

(except in those sectors under extreme pressure) in order to minimize the risk to mental health and well-being if those on furlough are now pushed into unemployment.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.06.006>.

## **Understanding the benefits and challenges of increased remote working in relation to police wellbeing and performance: a diary study in an English constabulary**

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### *Overview*

During the COVID-19 crisis, organisations were forced to adopt new ways of working. This diary study, and supporting qualitative insight, examines the experiences of police employees working for an English constabulary during the crisis. Initial indications from qualitative feedback suggest that remote working was more beneficial for performance than anticipated. As the study is ongoing, we have not yet completed analysis of the diary element. We anticipate the impact of remote working on wellbeing / performance will be distributed unequally across the

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workforce by personal characteristics and circumstances. The findings will have implications for improving remote worker management and resourcing.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

The study aimed to produce a robust picture of the varied wellbeing and performance experiences of an English Constabulary's employees working during the COVID-19 crisis.

The police service is changing, but many traditional attitudes towards hierarchy and control still pervade police attitudes prioritising the physical and re-active nature of the work. The COVID-19 crisis imposed changes to working conditions that had been strongly resisted in parts of the police service. The unusual situation allowed employees to prove their trustworthiness and productivity at home in ways that would not have previously been supported. The organisation in question already had an agile and remote working policy, but also demonstrated a strong culture of employees needing to be present and visible to show commitment. This timely study captured the results of imposed change, to inform conscious choices and learning in the future.

The study asked:

How have changes in working conditions at an English constabulary under the COVID-19 crisis affected employee wellbeing and performance?

What are the benefits and challenges of increased remote and agile working?

### *Research methods*

The mixed methods study involved four stages of data collection: initial scoping interviews with key contacts, a baseline survey, daily diary surveys for 21 days and follow-up qualitative interviews. The initial scoping interviews helped define the context and parameters of the research, allowing the researchers to build a picture of the organisation's crisis response and senior leader intentions. The baseline survey covered personal characteristics, work and caring circumstances, mental health, wellbeing and performance. It was advertised to all employees via the organisation's intranet and endorsed by senior leaders. A total of 183 respondents completed the full baseline questionnaire. The daily diary surveys were shorter, collecting data on daily working hours, use of technology, working relationships and the respondent's ability to work effectively. A total of 1170 daily diaries was completed from 162 people ( $M=7.2$ ). The 38 final qualitative interviews further explored issues of performance, working relationships and communication.

### *Research findings or argument*

Initial indications based on the survey and interview qualitative feedback suggest that remote working was broadly beneficial for performance. This was often reported alongside greater wellbeing – with multiple individual stories of tangible mental and physical health benefits from avoiding the office. We will analyse the diary data to confirm whether this emerging link also held true in the larger quantitative sample, then drill down into more detail on how variables like life satisfaction and

performance vary across diary days. We have access to daily data on interpersonal relationships, technology, job control and risk as potential factors. Guided by the qualitative insight, we anticipate that the impact will be distributed unequally across the workforce according to personal characteristics and circumstances. We will explore the experiences of parents of dependent children, caring responsibilities, those with underlying health issues or other risk factors. We will look into how interaction with members of the public and any perceived risks might impact upon police staff. Finally, we also consider how performance/job satisfaction is impacted by IT.

*Practical importance and implications of research*

The findings will have implications for improving remote worker management and resourcing, because we have enough data (1170 diaries over 21 days) to shed detailed light on the reasons why performance and wellbeing fluctuate over the course of three working weeks. By identifying factors involved in supporting or damaging wellbeing and performance and then combining this understanding with the rich qualitative feedback, we will be able to offer fine-grained insight into the benefits and challenges of increased remote working in relation to police wellbeing and performance. However, a surprising early finding has been the similarity of many of the issues and benefits occurring in policing to issues that could arise in any organisation – pointing away from common claims of police exceptionalism. For this reason, we believe our findings can also inform practitioners across a variety of organisational settings who wish to support the new wave of home and agile workers that will emerge from the crisis.

## **Work Experiences in Challenging Contexts**

### **Alliance Contracting and Experiences of Working in Partnership: Work and Employment Outcomes for Non-Profit Workers on the Front Line**

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**Overview**

In the context of public service delivery and challenging funding environments, non-profit workers often report poor experiences that fail to match their values-led expectations of work. This paper explores Alliance Contracting (AC) and assesses its impact on the experiences of work and employment for non-profit workers. Drawing from three cases of ACs, the analysis suggests that ACs can enable non-profit workers to live out their values at work, but to avoid inequalities in work and employment outcomes, the design of the AC operating model should ensure the coherent alignment, integration, and consistency of HRM policies and practices across the network.

### ***Research focus, rationale and questions***

The role of HRM and its impact on work and employment within the non-profit sector is receiving increasing attention, however there is still limited evidence about how HRM strategies, policies and practices are employed in non-profits and how they affect individual, organisational and community outcomes (Bartram, Cavanagh and Hoye, 2017, p. 1902). Some research reveals a concerning picture about the work and employment outcomes for non-profit workers engaged in the delivery of public services (Cunningham et al. 2014; Milbourne, 2013, Venter et al. 2017). Low pay, work intensification, fragmented working, insecurity, and minimal opportunities for skill development often underpin the experience of non-profit workers. Non-profit workers furthermore report they feel unable to live-out their values at work. These outcomes are frequently attributed to regimes of New Public Management (NPM) where hierarchical contracts, characterised by unequal power dimensions and risk transfer, afford NPOs little choice over HR policies and practices, and little power to redress any poor outcomes for work and employment.

This paper examines how work and employment outcomes in NPOs may differ under the context of a new arrangement called Alliance Contracting (AC). AC has a number of distinct features designed to distribute power between the commissioner and across providers more fairly and promises NPOs greater input in the design of organisational policies and practices. We explore whether non-profit workers are enabled to 'do good' by their service users, while also 'doing well' in the eyes of funders, and we identify the factors that enable this within the AC arrangements.

### ***Research methods***

The research involved three case studies of UK Alliance contracts that deliver health and social services. The research adopted a qualitative approach; in total, three focus groups and eleven individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior managers within the alliance teams. An additional two focus groups and seven individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with those delivering frontline services. The primary data collection was complemented with documentary evidence from organisational government and industry reports. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Drawing from an analytical framework that examines the alignment, integration and consistency of organisational approaches within networked organisations (Marchington et al. 2011), data was coded and analysed thematically using the Framework Approach (Ritchie

*et al*, 2003) to explore patterns within the data. Emerging themes and explanations for differences between the cases were identified.

### *Research findings or argument*

All case studies demonstrated a partnership approach between the commissioner and other public and non-profit sector partners. The establishment of each AC involved significant exercises in trust and relationship-building among partners, achieving an understanding of each other's goals, orientations and values. The partners negotiated the contractual terms and mutually agreed the outcomes for the delivery of the service. They took collective ownership of risk, and shared collectively in successes. All ACs were underpinned by a drive for innovation, approaching service delivery in a different manner that was very unlike conventional hierarchical contracts.

On the other hand, the three case studies were significantly different in terms of the AC's operating model. The analysis reveals that, despite issues emerging around the integration and consistency of organisational approaches across the network, ACs can positively impact the experiences of frontline non-profit workers by offering greater autonomy, flexibility, and reducing barriers towards service improvements. Work and employment outcomes were dependent on the operating model adopted for the AC. Eg., the equity of employment terms and conditions among alliance partners was identified as an issue among some frontline staff which could be unsustainable for the partnership approach. But we found that the strong values shared among frontline staff, and the commitment towards their service users was enough to mitigate these issues for the time being. Overall, non-profit workers perceived the alliance model to enable the delivery of a more impactful and effective service, allowing them to feel they are 'doing good' as well as 'doing well'.

### ***Practical importance and implications of research***

This paper examines a novel contracting arrangement for the delivery of health and social care services and assesses its impact from the perspective of both managers and non-profit workers on the frontline. The underpinning principles of ACs purport to enable more equal power distribution across partners, but as revealed by the case comparison, inequalities across frontline staff still seemed to persist in certain dimensions. If ACs are scaled up, these outcomes may have destabilising effects on the AC arrangements. Marchington et al. (2011) contends that for a network of partners to collaborate effectively, organisational and HR policies across the network need to be aligned, integrated and consistent. Within the context of ACs, principles of *alignment* were enabled by the nature of the contract itself and the process through which the contracts' services were set up and delivered. However enabling organisational and HR policies and practices that were wholly *consistent* and *integrated* was more difficult to implement. Our study shows that the potential faultlines that could transpire from the lack of consistency and integration was mitigated by the type of operating model adopted for the AC, and the willingness of frontline staff to accept the conditions. However should ACs be scaled up for the

provision of larger services, we argue that a fundamental shift in creating a more coherent HR system that addresses all elements of alignment, integration and consistency is required for the network of providers, and that HRM professionals should have an integral role in its design and implementation.

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## **Floundering in anxiety: the role of workplace relationships in supporting each other at work**

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### **Overview**

This paper explores recent research into the role of workplace relationships in engagement and wellbeing in disruptive times to examine the implications for the post pandemic workplace. The research used the SPEaC Happy app to diary interactions with colleagues during extensive change, national and organisational, followed by interviews. We report interim findings about how relationships support employees and the impact of remote working. The paper finishes by using findings to understand how they inform practice as people spend time working remotely and as



they return to the workplace or join organisations only meeting their colleagues virtually.

### Research focus, rationale and questions

This research builds on engagement literature to understand the context that supports engagement, wellbeing and performance particularly in difficult times. This context is characterised by Barton and Kahn (2019) as 'holding environments' where interpersonal relationships give space to people to express and work through issues such as anxiety in order to resume their task work effectively.

By focussing on the role of workplace relationships in disruption it has been appropriate to use Kahn's (1990) concept of personal rather than work engagement (Schaufeli et al, 2002) as it focuses on individuals building on the conditions of meaningfulness, psychological safety, and availability as physical, emotional or psychological resources. Unlike engagement research, that of relationships at work has tended to focus on negative behaviours such as injustice, bullying, ostracism and incivility leaving friendship and supportive relationships under researched in management studies. Kahn, 1998, recognised that relationships shape people's feelings and actions at work, as experiences such as feeling valued by others can mitigate anxiety and feeling destabilised through mutual concern (Sias et al, 2012) and friendship (Cronin, 2014).

The different relationships at work have been seen as the informal organisation (Barney in Riordan & Griffeth, 1995), 'white spaces' in the organisation chart (Sias, et al 2012) or Cronin's intersubjective spaces' (2014) and separated into a peer relationship continuum, from information peer, through collegial peer to special peer relationships (Kram & Isabella, 1985). The paper draws on the literatures of relationships, personal engagement and the relational context to support the study objective and questions.

### ***Research methods***

The research strategy had two phases which explored the nature of participants' relationships through understanding their experiences, therefore using qualitative methods. This also mirrored the approaches of the friendship literature and Kahn's original work on both engagement and relational systems (1990, 2014).

The first phase took place in the last half of 2019 and consisted of a diary study using a version of the SPEaC Happy App (HappyApp) adapted in conjunction with its developers to allow logging interactions between different colleague types based on Kram and Isabella's (1985) peer relationships, simple emotion and outcome feelings building on the three engagement conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability (Kahn & Heaphy, 2014) to which participants could add comments. The app allowed continuous collection of anonymous interactions in real time driven by participant's during the three or four weeks of the study. This was followed by in depth interviews finishing in January 2020.

### ***Research findings or argument***

Three large organisations, members of the sponsoring Henley Forum, took part in the research, two government departments heavily impacted by Brexit and a utility undergoing extensive structural change. These interim findings have been derived from some 400 comments from the HappyApp and 25 follow up interviews. This paper focuses on the nature of workplace relationships and their contribution to a supportive context.

Findings highlight the importance of being listened to for feeling significant and affirmed, which reinforces the role of feedback, both formal and informal, especially from respected colleagues and co-workers in enabling people to understand how others see them. Feeling connected and part of something comes from working, sharing objectives, laughter and frustrations with others. This is demonstrated by energetic comments about team working, especially when feeling psychologically safe and genuinely concerned about each other. A sense of shared values and interests lie at the heart of relationships with trust and personal as well as professional respect where focus is on mutuality and reciprocity. Participants feel they can be vulnerable and honest with someone willing to go over and above normal expectations of a colleague contributing to their sense of wellbeing and safety.

Many participants worked remotely from the rest of their team which had both positives and negatives. Technology enabled them to feel connected particularly when sharing issues or 'a giggle' or chats with others but some found it hard working on their own and relied on self-motivation but also being made to feel included by other's behaviours.

### ***Practical importance and implications of research***

Interim findings highlight the importance of workplace relationships for individuals' wellbeing and mental health as well as motivation and engagement which extends into working with others in teams. Relationships enable people to voice concerns, talk through issues to gain different perspectives which contribute to healthy workplaces and emphasize the importance of good people practices such as feedback and employee voice.

The anxiety and uncertainty of COVID-19, brings out the need to translate informal mechanisms that contribute to development of healthy relationships into the virtual world for everyone to feel connected and engaged.

Technology enables remote working but those new to it or the workplace may need help in developing relational support systems, particularly important in integrating new people where they may not physically meet their colleagues. At an individual level developing a culture of reflecting on relationships as well as tasks would support people checking in with each other regularly to stay connected.

Team development could include enabling relational as well as task work, reproducing social aspects and opportunities to develop mutual respect and support. At an organisational level the HR function plays an important role in ensuring

practical processes are in place to support remote working and reconnection on return to workplaces but also for adapting culture.

Management development could include adapting style and communication practices to check in with individuals regularly on how they are feeling as well as performing. Finally organisations also need to monitor mood and enable feedback using tools such as the HappyApp used here.

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## **No one's fault, but I am the one who suffers: experience of surviving the unexpected organisational redundancy**

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### ***Overview***

This paper explores the impact of redundancy on employees' work attitudes, perceptions and motivation through the lens of psychological contract (Bankins, 2015, Rousseau et al, 2018) and drawing upon workplace stress and coping literature (Campbell- Jamison et al, 2001). The impact of redundancy on changed work attitudes is evident in the literature. However, most studies examined the impact within a short timeframe. By drawing a comparison between survivors (N=354) and newcomers (N=147) in an UK manufacturing organisation six years after the redundancy, this study reveals decreased level of motivation, lower level of trust and worsened perception of work relationship among the survivors, but their perceptions of job flexibility and organisational commitment were not different.

### ***Research focus, rationale and questions***

Over the last two decades, many organisations have undertaken redundancy programmes (Gabriel *et al*, 2013). A major workforce reduction is perceived as a breach of the psychological contract between the employee and the employer, with a direct negative impact on work attitudes and behaviour (Arshad and Sparrow, 2010). Many existing studies conducted empirical work in service industries (Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999, Worrall *et al*, 2004). Browne (2005), however, has shown that redundancy rates in manufacturing have been higher than in any other sector. Hence, study in the manufacturing sector is warranted to offer a better understanding of post-redundancy phenomena than generally recognised. Further, while we know relatively more about the impact of redundancy on leavers and survivors, respectively researchers tend to focus on one group of employees in a single

study. Few empirical studies compared the responses of different group of employees, expect Kurebwa (2011) who compared the responses of leavers and survivors. In particular, to our knowledge, no studies have drawn a comparison between surviving employees and newcomers. Lastly, most studies examining the impact of redundancy were carried out within a short timeframe. It is not known whether the damages caused by a psychological contract breach has long-lasting effects or whether some damages are more easily repaired than others.

This study aims to address these limitations. It compares the work attitudes, perceptions and motivation between survivors and newcomers six years after the redundancy in a UK manufacturing organization.

### ***Research methods***

We conducted a workplace work attitude and survey in one of the UK manufacturing organisations (ManufCO). This blue- chip organisation operates in five main sectors with over 45,000 employees globally, it is the market leader in its dominating fields. This survey was distributed to two specific sites in the UK to a total of 1,350 staff (the department had approximately 2,000 employees), resulting in the return of 501 (37%) with valid responses of which 354 were survivors and 147 were newcomers who joined the organisation after redundancy. Five work attitude and behaviour dimensions are tested: work motivation, work relationship quality, perception of job flexibility, trust attitude and organisational commitment, all five constructs are adapted from the existing scales. A series of testing was performed, this included factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling.

### ***Research findings or argument***

Our findings show there was a lower level of work motivation, trust and perception of work relationship quality among the survivors in comparison to newcomers. Organisational commitment and perception of job flexibility, however, showed no difference between the two groups.

Low motivation echoes with other studies (Armstrong- Stassen *et al* 2004, Bacon *et al*, 2010, Campbell- Jamison *et al*, 2001). It is though worthwhile pointing out that despite 6 years after the redundancy, motivation level still scored low among the survivors. Two social interactional dimensions - trust and work relationship quality – were also negatively affected (Armstrong- Stassen *et al*, 2004). Trust encompasses both trust in peers and trust in management. Decreased trust was possibly due to the series of management decisions, business operation practices and constant change of management team after redundancy. Subsequently, survivors also scored lower on the work relationship quality, which could possibly be linked to the change of working teams.

Unlike the social interactional aspects, cognitive views on the job flexibility and organisational commitment showed no difference between survivors and

newcomers. There are two possible interpretations to the commitment level, one is that the redundancy decision was taken due to an unexpected world event. The organisation intended to deploy potential victims and invested resources in retraining people. This all brought in the positive message to the workforce and helped with the repair of the breached psychological contract. Job flexibility involves the notion of workload and capacity (Allen *et al*, 2001), the recovery of which might be linked to the general demand on workload (Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999).

### ***Practical importance and implications of research***

The background of our case study is very similar to the COVID-19 situation: an unexpected world event affected the world, though in a different way. The event hit the economical market and changed the market segmentation. Hence our study illustrates some practical importance of managing the change of individual psychological contract in an uncertain time (Trusson and Woods, 2017).

When managing redundancy, it is vital to consider both the victims and survivors. Despite the majority of redundancy research is focused on victims, survivor syndrome needs to receive more long-term attention. The comparison of survivors and newcomers in this study shows that the syndrome can last as long as six years and even longer-term effect could not be ruled out. Interestingly, the long-lasting effect appeared in the social interactional domain (Schenkel and Teigland, 2016), indicated by trust and work relationship quality, whereas attitudes towards job and the organisation (job flexibility and organisational commitment) showed no difference between survivors and newcomers. This has important practical implications, as the worsened attitudes and perceptions in the social interactional domain could impact the dynamics within the organisation. For example, for teamwork and collaboration, low in trust and work relationship might lead to ineffectiveness of teamwork, low individual involvement and increased individual's stress level. On the positive side, some work-related and organisation-related attitudes (job flexibility and organizational commitment) appeared to be repaired in the researched company. This was possibly related to the broader environmental context in which the redundancy occurred.

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## Performance and Productivity

## How employee voice channels contribute to bottom-up innovation

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### *Overview*

This research paper aims to understand how organizations can give a voice to their employees and thereby tap into their innovative ideas and suggestions. To do so, data has been selected from six case organizations in the UK, collected by the CPWOP in partnership with the CIPD. The findings show how organizations attempt to improve employee voice and illustrate which factors stimulate and constrain employee innovative voice. Moreover, the results reveal in what ways organizations deal with the tensions between human and promotive voice.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Bottom-up innovation represents a process where front-line workers have innovative ideas and thereby contribute to improving collective-level innovation. Many firms are facing an increasing pressure to be innovative, due to economic downturns, increasing competition and technological developments. These pressures have been amplified by the Covid-19 crisis, which has required deep-seated change in many aspects of organizational functioning, many of which require an innovative response. To become more innovative and attain competitive advantage, it is important that organizations manage their employees in a way that they are creative and can develop their innovative ideas (Barney, 1991; Mumford, 2000). Because in the end it is employees who come up with new ideas (Van de Ven, 1986). Their innovative ideas might eventually spur higher levels of innovation outcomes of the organization (Do & Shipton, 2019; Fu et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, research suggests that only a small proportion of the workforce takes part in innovation processes (De Spiegelaere, 2014). Moreover, a recent study into employee voice shows that a significant segment of employees feel unable speak up at work (Shipton et al., 2019), limiting their ability to share innovative ideas and suggestions. For organizations to remain innovative it is therefore essential to take ideas from the bottom-up seriously and to capture insights from front-line workers such as shop floor workers in construction, as sales employees in retail and hospitality,



and nurses in healthcare. Therefore, in this study we want to better understand how organizations can give a voice to their employees and thereby tap into their innovative potential.

### *Research methods*

This research arises from data collected by the Centre of People, Work and Organisational Practice (CPWOP) in partnership with the CIPD. Following a qualitative interpretivist research design, we conducted six case studies in the UK to answer this research question. These cases include larger and smaller companies and reach across different sectors such as construction, healthcare, education and hospitality. Data analysis was based on 71 interviews, and include interviews with senior management, HR, middle managers, and work-floor employees.

### *Research findings or argument*

The literature suggests that managers develop voice channels and mechanisms to encourage and facilitate employees to speak up in their organizations (Morrison, 2014). Understanding the processes how organizations develop voice channels to encourage innovation is therefore important. Employee voice has mostly been studied with an employee perspective (Hickland et al., 2020). However, in this paper we add to the literature by linking employee voice to bottom-up innovation as *perceived by managers* of organizations. This is essential, as research shows that leaders greatly influence employee voice behaviors (Detert & Treviño, 2010). Thereby we combine the micro-level individual actions with the meso-level organizational context (Nechanska et al., 2020) and explore how organizations attempt to improve employee voice and illustrate how they deal with the tensions between employer and employee interests. Specifically, we show how managers need to find a balance between employee voice that is good for the organization (promotive) and voice related to personal issues and concerns of their employees (human). By doing so, we use the term *employee innovative voice*, which represents a state in which voice channels are used to influence work through innovative suggestions, and combines the promotive and human voice. Innovative voice can be related to promotive voice and deplete resources, while it can also be related to human voice and thereby create resources. We illustrate how employers cope with these tensions and our findings further highlight factors that stimulate and constrain organizations to make use of employees' innovative ideas and suggestions.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

This study offers a number of practices implications. First, it shows how organizations attempt to improve employees voice and deal with the challenges involved in this quest. Second, this research uncovers in what ways organizations manage the tensions in creating employee voice, particularly the balance between human voice and promotive voice. Third, this research describes several ways in which employee voice is related to innovation and highlight how managers can use voice to stimulate innovation. To encourage innovation, voice channels should be configured such that they can combine human and promotive voice. The research

shows that it is not sufficient to introduce voice channels; they need to be managed actively.

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**What lessons can we take from the experience of organisational good practice in performance**

## management to secure and sustain the growth in remote working?’

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### *Overview*

Employers continue to plan to increase the number of staff working remotely. In many organisations most, or all, employees will work permanently and full-time away from their normal workplace. This represents a major change in organisational strategy challenging the way people and performance are managed.

Our research fieldwork engaged with over 250 participants to learn from their experience in organisations with a longer history of remote working. Participants described significant challenges presented by remote working and identified the good practice in people and performance management required to secure successful adoption of new arrangements.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Numbers of staff working remotely have grown (Eurofound and ILO, 2017) to a point where it was been suggested that around 70% of the global workforce are already working away from their fixed place of work for at least one day a week (IWG 2019), and we can expect further, considerable, increases. The moves to remote working are supported by the availability of emerging new technology (Felstead and Henseke, 2017).

Key drivers for organisations include the opportunity to reduce expenditure on office accommodation, accessing a wider catchment area for recruitment, and targeting increased workforce flexibility and agility in the drive towards virtual organisations. In balance, employees often seek a greater degree of flexibility in their job (Baruch, 2000).

The transition to increased remote working might suggest a ‘win-win’ for both organisations and employees but there are challenges and concerns, in particular for performance management. Remote working distances managers from their team(s) adding a further level of difficulty (Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano, and Michailidis, 2019). It also restricts the opportunity for informal exchange of information between managers and colleagues, reducing opportunities for

collaboration and sharing tacit information, the organisational 'rules of the game' that help employees to settle and deliver to the best of their ability.

Our research focused on experience in organisations with positive practical experience of remote working. The key research question is 'what lessons can we take from the experience of organisational good practice in performance management to secure and sustain the expected growth in remote working?'

### *Research methods*

The research followed an inductive qualitative method using semi-structured interviews and focus groups, complemented by research workshops. The interview structure was designed to invite participants to share learning and experience regarding: their role; the nature of remote working within their organisation; challenges faced; relevant qualities expected of remote workers and their managers; and experience of 'good practice'. The focus groups and research workshops provided an opportunity to review and add reliable and valid data on practice across a range of organisations and industry sectors.

The fieldwork engaged with HR professionals, line managers, and remote workers. To capture an international perspective, our research extended to contacts in the USA, Belgium, Switzerland, Singapore, and Australia.

### *Research findings or argument*

Performance management for any remote worker is influenced by a combination of role complexity, geographic distance, and time. The scale for role complexity extends from replicable tasks following established procedures through to highly professional/technical roles requiring both explicit and tacit knowledge. Geographic distance ranges from easy commutes to overseas assignments. Time spent working remotely may vary from one day a week to several years on assignment.

Organisation strategy, culture, and values have a major influence on the ability to secure the value of remote working. The commitment to remote working must feature in strategy and business planning; and HR policy and practice should address the needs of remote workers.

Line managers, often themselves working remotely, developed good practice in people and performance management. They emphasised regular contact, speedy response to questions and queries, and general approachability. Face-to-face meetings and social events provided opportunities to pick up important cues on employee motivation and wellbeing.

Remote workers can suffer by not having access to the tacit knowledge that would be shared informally between colleagues (Taskin and Bridoux, 2010) and by line managers in 'stop by the desk' conversations (Cappelli and Tavis, 2016). There is also a risk that less visibility to decision-makers may constrain access to opportunities for training and promotion (Bloom, Liang, Roberts, and Ying, 2015; Koslowski, 2016). Remote workers developed their own strategies to increase visibility in the workplace with daily calls to managers, weekly progress reports, in-workplace introductions to decision makers, and networking at social events.

*Practical importance and implications of research*

Remote working is easiest to support and manage for e-working and similar activity where individuals work alone with no requirement for in-person face time (Bloom et al, 2015). The performance management task is more demanding when job level, distance, and time are extended. Organisations must recognise and cater for the performance management demands of their remote working models and practice.

The line manager role is key. Managers must be able to manage performance without the opportunity for regular engagement with employees (Cappelli and Tavis, 2016). Line managers will define role expectations and required deliverables, provide support and guidance, and represent the interests of employees regarding reward and career progression. They must be trusted by employees (Grant, Wallace, and Spurgeon, 2013) and this requires strong social skills alongside business understanding and credibility. Line managers must be people managers (Lautsch, Kossek, and Eaton, 2009): professional or technical skill alone will not be sufficient to meet the demands of managing performance of remote workers.

Remote workers and line managers were broadly consistent in describing the qualities required for success in remote working. Qualities registered included: reliability; resilience; self-confidence; self-management; problem solving; and a performance mindset. Remote workers must also 'be comfortable with their own company'.

The summary challenge for organisations is to demonstrate exactly what they expect of their remote workers and their line management. Good practice will not happen by accident. There must be clear guidance, appropriate communication and training, and regular monitoring of progress and challenges.

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## **Is it 'me' or is it 'we'? When social processes influence the relationship between high performance work systems and employee discretionary behaviours**

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### *Overview*

Most research has adopted an individual lens to explain the association between high performance work systems (HPWS) and outcomes such as employee discretionary behaviours, defined as individual contributions beyond formal role requirements arising from personal choice. In this paper, drawing on HR process perspectives, we turn the spotlight instead on social processes. Referencing a large, international and multi-level dataset (2792 employees in 49 organisations from ten countries), we turn the spotlight on two social processes- reflexivity shared perceptions and reflexivity quality. Uniquely, we examine cultural autonomy, showing that HPWS, far from being universalistic across cultures, may have less bearing on social processes in high autonomy cultures. We discuss the significance of our results in the light of four hypotheses

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Questions about how HPWS, defined as ‘the pattern of planned HR deployments and activities intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals’ (Wright & McMahan, 1992, p. 298) elicit employee discretionary behaviours — have taxed HR researchers for many years. While most scholars have focused on explanations at the individual level of analysis, drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) or human capital theory (Wright & McMahan, 1992), we argue that HPWS influence outcomes through social processes. HPWS send signals that create shared perceptions about what is expected and rewarded (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016). Our reference point is reflexivity (Schippers et al., 2013), a social process associated with a variety of positive outcomes.

Despite valuable insight, the assumption that HPWS influence employees’ attitudes and behaviours through social processes such as shared perceptions of reflexivity remains largely untested. Neither is it clear whether cultural values, including cultural autonomy (Schwartz, 1992) influence the HPWS- quality and shared perceptions association, despite a key idea in the HR literature being that the effectiveness of HPWS depends on fit with the broad cultural values (Rabl et al., 2014). In this study, we draw on multi-source data (2792 employees in 49 organizations from ten countries) testing the mediating role of social processes (such as quality and shared perceptions of reflexivity) in the association between HPWS and employee discretionary behaviours. We also explore whether cultural autonomy as posited by Schwartz (1992) influences the relationships in question.

Our research objectives are two-fold.

1. To examine the role of social processes (shared perceptions of reflexivity and reflexivity quality) in the association between HPWS and employee discretionary behaviours (OCB and innovative behaviours).

2. To consider whether cultural autonomy moderates the mediating effect of social processes in the association between HPWS and employee discretionary behaviours

### *Research methods*

**Respondents.** This multi-source dataset contains the responses of 2792 employees in 49 organizations from ten countries (China, Denmark, Indonesia, Nigeria, Norway, Malaysia, Portugal, Oman, Tanzania, and UK). The organizations were manufacturing, IT, hospitality, finance, including for-profit and non-for-profit organizations. The organizations also varied in size, from small and medium enterprises (SME) to subsidiaries of multi-nationals, ensuring generalisability across respondents. Depending on the size of the organizations, researchers conducted a stratified sampling technique or approached all employees. Employees voluntarily participated in this study. Of the respondents, 47% were female and were on average 34.44 years of age (SD = 9.24).

**Procedure.** An international team of researchers prepared a joint questionnaire, translated into several languages. A group of international scholars from different countries collected data from 100 employees in one organization in their home countries. All the measures used are drawn from validated scales in the literature. HPWS and discretionary behaviours were measured at the individual level. Reflexivity shared perceptions and reflexivity quality are organizational level constructs and were treated accordingly. Affective and intellectual autonomy, derived from the Schwartz Values Survey (1992) were measured at the country level

### *Research findings or argument*

We developed four hypotheses from our model (see Figure 1), first proposing a mediating effect for reflexivity shared perceptions in the relationship between HPWS and organisational citizenship behaviours (H1a) and innovative behaviours (H1b). Although the analysis revealed support for hypothesis 1a, hypothesis 1b was not supported. This means that while reflexivity shared perceptions explained how HPWS influenced employee citizenship behaviours, this was not the case for the HPWS- innovative behaviour relationship.

In H2, we tested the indirect effect of reflexivity quality in the relationship between HPWSs on OCB (H2a) on one hand and innovative behaviour (H2b) on the other. The results reveal a positive indirect effect of reflexivity quality in the relationship between HPWSs and both outcome variables (OCB and IB). These results provide support for H2a and H2b.

Turning to H3a and H3b, the results show that when autonomy is low (-1 SD), the relationships between HPWSs on one hand and quality and reflexivity shared perceptions on the other is positive (OCB = .42,  $p < .01$ ; IB = .15,  $p < .01$ ). When autonomy is high (+ 1 SD) the simple slope results reveal that there was no significant relationship between HPWS and reflexivity quality/ shared perceptions of reflexivity. This means support for hypotheses H3a and H3b.



We also tested a moderated mediation model in which autonomy played a moderating role in the indirect relationships between HPWS and both types of discretionary behaviour (OCB and innovative behaviours). Our results show that the mediating effect of reflexivity quality in the relationship between HPWSs and OCB and HPWS and innovative behaviours is valid in low but not in high autonomy cultures (H4a ) (see Figure 2a). This was also the case for H4b (reflexivity shared perceptions) (see Figure 2b) .

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

Our research reveals that two social processes – reflexivity shared perceptions and reflexivity quality, inspired by HPWS- have varying effects on the two different types of discretionary behaviours considered in our model. Intriguingly, while reflexivity quality – that is, higher aggregate levels of reflexivity within an organisation encourages employee citizenship and their innovative behaviours, this is not the case for reflexivity shared perceptions. This suggests that organisations have to think very carefully about the kind of social processes they wish to inculcate through HPWS. If HPWS are very strong, that is, there is little variation within the social process, this may inhibit employee innovative behaviours. It might impede peoples' willingness to respond to signals suggesting that there may be new and different ways of approaching a work problem, for example. On the other hand, this situation may be extremely effective in inculcating organisational citizenship behaviours, which rely on conveying signals to support extant ways of working.

Whether an organisation wishes to encourage employees to think and feel similarly (induce shared perceptions) – or instead to develop climate quality (i.e. achieve high aggregate scores) depends on strategic intent. Our results suggest that to create an environment where employees exhibit both citizenship and innovative behaviours requires that HPWS are deployed in a way that fosters a higher climate quality, rather than high levels of agreement about that climate.

Another important and intriguing finding is that employees in countries where cultural autonomy is high may be less susceptible than low autonomy counterparts to the effect of HPWS on social processes such as shared perceptions and climate quality- indeed, high cultural autonomy holds back the effect of HPWS on both social processes we measured. According to Schwartz (1992; 2006) in high autonomy cultures, individuals are seen as autonomous entities and are expected to pursue their interests, capabilities and preferences. Organisations in high autonomy societies (e.g. New Zealand, Portugal, UK, Greece, the Netherlands) allow individuals freedom to pursue personally meaningful experiences. Individuals from high autonomy cultures may be less susceptible than low autonomy counterparts to the messages conveyed through HPWS, impeding their effect on social processes such as reflexivity. Hence, our research points to the importance of HR and senior managers taking account of cultural context in the design and implementation of HPWS.

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## Responses to Wellbeing & COVID-19

### Proposing a Theoretical Model to Improve the Remote Workers' Employee Engagement and Well-being

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#### *Overview*

**Purpose:** An analysis of the current job resources and job demands that influence the engagement and burnout levels of the knowledge worker working remotely.

**Design:** A systematic review of the literature was carried out generating seventy-eight relevant articles which provided key variables and inter-relationships.

**Findings:** The key variables to improve employee engagement are managerial support and job design (job resources) and the ones contributing to burnout are

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technological overload and blurring work-home boundaries (job demands). The external and internal context and HRM practices are key influencers.

Implications for Practice: A new theoretical model is proposed for to improve employee engagement and prevent burnout in remote workers in the Covid-19 era.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Research Question: What are the key variables that influence the Employee Engagement and Well-being of Remote Workers in the COVID-19 era?

Research Focus: To carry out a systematic literature review to recommend a new theoretical framework to improve engagement and well-being in remote workers.

### Research Rationale:

The workplace transformation created by the Covid-19 pandemic has forced millions of employees to work from home (Aitken-Fox et al. 2020, ONS 2020, Dubey and Tripathi 2020). Many organisations have had to make fast and agile changes to facilitate remote working for business continuity (Arora and Suri 2020; Jaiswal and Arun 2020; Coffey and Dayaram 2020).

Felstead and Henseke (2017) highlight that while remote working is associated with higher organisational commitment and job satisfaction, these benefits come at the cost of work intensification with a greater inability to switch off, blurring the work-life borders. Current research could connect more strongly with practical concerns for today's organisations (Fletcher, Bailey, Madden & Alfes, 2019), the engagement and well-being of the remote worker is one such concern.

Recent research (Arora and Suri 2020; Prasad et al. 2020, Wood, Oh, Park and Kim 2020) report the effect of work intensification in terms of longer worker hours in remote workers, implying that careful design of remote work options is required. Hence. the author is proposing to close this research gap by providing a theoretical framework to improve the engagement and reduce burnout in the remote worker.

### Research Objectives:

To explore existing literature for concepts and frameworks that influence the employee engagement levels of knowledge workers working remotely.

To analyse engagement levels and the impact on work intensity as a result of the sudden change to e-working during the Covid-19 pandemic

To recommend a theoretical framework for businesses to improve employee engagement and to balance work intensification and well-being for the remote worker.

### *Research methods*

A systematic review of the literature was carried out for remote e-workers' employee engagement and well-being at work. An initial literature review revealed the key words relevant to the study- Employee Engagement, Job Demands, Job Resources, Well-being, Remote Working, Work Intensification. A search strategy using the

PRISMA technique (Prisma-statement.org 2020) was created and academic peer-reviewed journals and business /statistical reports were accessed. A set of clear explicit statements called inclusion criteria were applied to assess each study and assess if it actually does address the reviewer's research question and objectives (Petticrew and Roberts., 2006, Charalampous et al.,2018). The inclusion criteria covered articles relating to knowledge workers working remotely, focussing on remote working after the lockdown measures imposed in March 2020. Databases such as ScienceDirect, Sage, Emerald, Business Source Complete and ProQuest were scanned. Seventy-eight relevant articles were identified that employed quantitative, qualitative or mixed method design meeting the inclusion criteria. Out of these 17 related to the COVID-19 crisis and sudden increase in the number of knowledge workers working remotely. The quantitative and qualitative evidence (Walker, 2012) were interpreted to provide a narrative synthesis, that provided the key variables and inter-relationships for the construction of the theoretical framework as recommended by Saunders et al (2016) and Blaikie and Priest (2018).

### *Research findings or argument*

As recommended by Arora and Suri (2020), in the post Covid-19 workplace, managers must consider how to strategically balance job resources and job demands to improve employee engagement. There is evidence that improving engagement correlates with improving business productivity and this has been evidenced in a number of studies (Macleod and Clarke 2009; Engage for Success 2010; Radda et al.2015; Court-Smith 2016). The Job-Demands Resources Model (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2002) and Saks Antecedents and Consequences Framework (2006) are the key frameworks that provide a number of relevant variables to understand the process of engaging employees and preventing burnout. Various authors previously highlighted concerns in the costs of engagement, in terms of work intensification, well-being and work-life balance (George 2011, Jenkins and Delbridge 2013, Sewell and Taskin 2015, Felstead and Henseke 2017). Currently, there are some negative aspects of remote-working which are highlighted in various reviews (Felstead and Henseke 2017, Charalampous et al., 2018, Prasad et al. 2020, Wood, Oh, Park and Kim 2020) mainly work intensification, blurring of work and family life, social and professional isolation and perceived threats in professional advancement. Busse and Weidner (2020) recommend that leaders and managers play an important role in providing guidance to people to perceive a clear and transparent working environment, which will have a positive impact on their well-being, motivation and continuous engagement.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

To ensure work engagements levels and well-being are high in remote workers is a practical concern for today's organisations, especially in the current situation where 49.2% of adults in employment were working from home (ONS, 2020).

Remote work for the knowledge worker is presumed to continue in the foreseeable future. Current findings highlight high levels of work intensification and professional isolation in remote work. In an attempt to maintain desired levels of productivity and efficiency, employees are overworked, resulting in higher levels of stress (Jaiswal &

Arun 2020; Prasad, Vaidya & Rao, 2020). Further stress can be attributed to the inability to reach the right person for troubleshooting resulting in professional isolation (Jaiswal and Arun 2020). Careful thought needs to be given to work intensification in the form of technological overload and professional isolation (Jaiswal & Arun 2020; Charalampous 2018).

According to Singh and Kumar (2020), there is a need to consistently engage, monitor and promote an inclusive, collaborative growth culture (Shaik & Makhecha (2019) for remote employees supported by digital infrastructure to enable work from anywhere. The outcome from this research will be in the form of a theoretical framework providing recommendations to improve engagement levels for professional services staff in the remote environment.

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## **Tackling the Issue of Occupational Stress and Employee Burnout in the Work From Home Context during COVID-19**

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*Overview*

Aim of this study is to explore the emerging issue of burnout and work stress among the ICT-ITES (Information and Communication Technology-Information Technology Enabled Service) employees working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown period in Bangalore, India. It focuses on the rapidly altered organisational characteristics and individual factors that contributed to occupational stress leading to burnout among the employees working from home. Using an inquiry approach in the qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the employees and managers, this study identifies the potential stressors and its impact on employees working from home. Results revealed that the lack of institutionalised work-from-home policies, work allocation, unrealistic expectations and stringent deadlines pushed employees to work for unreasonably long hours leading to chronic stress, exhaustion and burnout. On the personal front, the uncertainty related to job security, poor lifestyle triggered by erratic food habits and sedentary lifestyle due to excess workload and conflict with family members had a detrimental effect on mental health and well-being of some employees.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

COVID-19 has compelled both the workers and organisations to adopt work from home (WFH) for which many were least prepared for. The extant literature on workplace stress and burnout has primarily focussed on workers whose work life revolved around the formal office or work space (see Oyeleye et al., 2013; Hatch et al., 2011). However, with the rampant spread of the COVID-19, many of the ICT-ITES organisations had to prematurely ask their employees to start working from home and less is known about what new challenges, in terms of occupational stress and burnout issues could arise due to this transition. This research article therefore, seeks to understand occupational stress and burnout in the WFH environment. It also provides viable insights from the employee's viewpoint that can be leveraged by organisations and business practitioners to design more pragmatic WFH policies that reduce the instances of stress and burnout. The broad research questions that this paper addresses, (i) How the issue of stress and burnout is similar or different as experienced by employees in a formal office setting? and (ii) How do the employees perceive stress and burnout in the context of WFH? and their opinion on how should their organisations tackle the same? The research used Maslach & Leiter (2016) symptoms of burnout to evaluate potential (i) physical and mental exhaustion, (ii) cynicism and (iii) inefficacy among the research participants.

### *Research methods*

This study empirically assesses the issues of stress and burnout in the context of work from home (WFH) among the Indian employees engaged in the ICT-ITES sector in Bangalore, India. This empirical study is based on 42 qualitative semi-structured interviews from the employees (non-managerial cadre) working in various ICT-ITES firms in Bangalore (the IT capital of India). Bangalore ranks first in Tholons (2016) listing of world's top outsourcing destinations and houses millions of ICT-ITES workers, who were given WFH assignment post COVID-19 lockdown (Agarwal, 2020). In addition 13 managers responsible for work allocation and overseeing the delivery were interviewed to ensure triangulation of experiences related to working

from home as well as understanding their/organisational viewpoint and challenges on leading a virtual workforce. The interviews were conducted through telephone or online (Zoom) meeting platforms and were transcribed and analysed using ATLAS-ti to arrive at the key themes discussed in the findings section of the paper. Further, the study also analyses the WFH policies of some ICT-ITES organisations to check whether the formal policy framework accommodates the 'work-life balance' aspect of their employees within its scope.

### *Research findings or argument*

The findings reveal five key themes when it came to ignitors or stressors in the WFH context. The themes were (i) Lack of institutionalised (longterm) WFH policies (ii) Personal circumstances (iii) Unrealistic expectations (iv) Toxic management and (v) Uncertainty. Several participants revealed a high level of stress, fatigue and burnout symptoms due to the work design (high work pressure to meet deadlines) and unrealistic performance expectations. Specifically the issue of presenteeism along with conventional micro-management command and control work culture, honed during pre-CoVID-19 office set up was extended to the home setting with impractical and exploitative performance targets. A large number of online meetings along with stringent deadlines (harsher than in office set-up) and demotivating feedback were found to be key factors in igniting stress and burnout symptoms among the research participants. The findings reveal that a large number of respondents faced chronic fatigue affecting their cognitive and physical ability and overall productivity, while several others reported a feeling of disengagement and detachment due to the supervisor/manager's callousness. Perception of supervisors on managing a workforce working from home, reported a persistent decline in performance outcomes as compared to the initial days of the transition along with lowered motivation levels among their employees. In addition, factors such as balancing family, children and household chores further added to the increased stress levels, bearing serious implications for women professionals who were interviewed as part of this study. Most of the participants with families at home wished to resume work from office, to avoid the challenge of tackling multiple and competing personal priorities and professional obligations. The design of work and 'guilt' triggered by unrealistic expectations, led many employees to remain logged in for extended hours (overtime), taking fewer breaks and neglecting their routines like time invested in exercising, meditation or activities that promote overall health. Yet another major source of stressor was job security as lay-offs in the firms were used as a disguised threat tactic to bargain for longer working hours and meeting stringent deadlines, which was not experienced by employees earlier. These work stressors when combined with personal life stressors created a synergistic effect that took a toll on the mental health and well-being of majority employees in the participant group. The condition was further observed to also cause confrontations in both work and personal life of affected employees. Rearranging workflow and managerial expectations with some assurance of job security along with acknowledgement for need of recreation and recuperation time (family and personal needs) could prevent and alleviate the symptoms of burnout among the professionals in work from home (WFH) set-up.



*Practical importance and implications of research*

From the viewpoint of employees, to reduce the instances of stressful conditions in WFH context, four themes were prominent, (i) Formal/Institutionalised WFH Policy (ii) Realistic target allocation (iii) Job security (iv) Avoidance of micromanagement. It was noted from the study that the managers allocating work, were setting unrealistic targets/expectations from a day's work (e.g. number of work tickets to be resolved) which led the employees to even overshoot normal working hours. In addition, the constant and looming threat (latent or manifested through lay-offs) added further pressure on the employees to work hard, till the employee reached or was on the verge of breaking down or quitting. It was also revealed that seldom any employee raised their voice against these malpractices, since the complaints/grievances raised to managers were unfruitful.

The research has practical implications for HR practitioners and line managers who are struggling with designing employee friendly WFH policies. The research proposes a model for analysing the issues of stress and burnout symptoms in WFH scenario and argue for a better work design with realistic performance expectations, which could possibly boost both the morale and productivity of the employees. The recommendations of the research could help them in managing the performance of the employees, without pushing them to the brink of burnout. For the larger benefit of organisation and employee well-being, firms can also consider identifying these stressor elements internally and design proactive and preemptive steps to minimise the negative impact. By checking on their wellbeing and taking regular feedback from subordinates, along with involving them in designing WFH policies, could go a long way in reducing the occurrences of occupational anxieties, stress and burnout symptoms.

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## **Wellbeing as an organizing principle: Establishing and sustaining organizational wellbeing through practice**

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### *Overview*

Employee wellbeing is a key organizational priority, although it may sometimes be at odds with other organizational imperatives. Whilst organizations themselves are increasingly approaching wellbeing as a strategic concern, academic and practice guidance still tends toward frameworks for supporting employee wellbeing that are individual-focused and treat interventions as the focal point of analysis. However, this approach fails to accommodate how wellbeing is integrated as an organization-wide priority. Drawing on organizational theory that sees wellbeing as a practice – something people do, we report on a qualitative multiple case study of exemplar organizations who prioritize employee wellbeing. Practically, this research shows how wellbeing practices are established and are sustained and developed through reinforcing processes. We offer a framework, which emphasizes the organization as the focal unit of analysis and has wider potential for understanding how organizational wellbeing is achieved in practice.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Current literature on employee health and wellbeing tends to be focused on discrete interventions and individual health and wellbeing outcomes underpinned by rational

models of planned behaviour. To date, there has been little consideration of the organization as anything other than a field or context in which health and wellbeing practices (HWPs) take place (Fridrich, Jenny & Bauer, 2015). Whilst this research has highlighted the importance of context and factors external to wellbeing interventions this understanding has not adequately been taken forward to develop an integrated understanding of wellbeing as part of the organizational system. Moreover, this understanding of HWPs is out of step with how organizations are starting to understand and support wellbeing in a more strategic and holistic sense, with wellbeing acting as an organizing principle. A practice understanding of wellbeing highlights the role of multiple organizational actors (practitioners) and the importance of wider influencing factors beyond the organization (context) in determining how practices are put in place drawing on wider organizational activity, processes and structures (organizational praxis) (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). We apply this practice lens because it can move on understanding and application of HWPs in organizations. The development of organizational approaches to wellbeing depends on the embedding and sustaining of new or evolved practices around wellbeing. We address the following question:

How do organizations put in place sustainable wellbeing practices using wellbeing as an organizing principle?

### *Research methods*

The analytical strategy was a multiple case study (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) applying qualitative methods. The purposeful sample comprised six organizations who identified themselves as prioritizing wellbeing: one large and one small/medium organization in each of the construction, professional services, and care sectors. Recruitment was made via a call for interest by the research team. Data were drawn from a total of forty-eight semi-structured interviews with organizational actors representing leaders, managers / functional professionals and workers, and organizational documentation. Interview guides were directed at eliciting data: contextual drivers, wellbeing approach (what, why, how) driving and constraining forces and how these were overcome. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. Data were triangulated between accounts and organized into case study narrative synthesis. Within and cross-case analysis focused on explanatory processes and mechanisms for how wellbeing is put into practice and sustained when it is an organizational priority.

### *Research findings or argument*

As an organizing principle wellbeing shapes HWPs differently. The extent to which approaches to wellbeing fit with existing structures and process (organizational praxis) determines how this intersection plays out in practice, which we characterize in three ways: i) Fracturing, breaking with established ways of doing things, this may be essential and unavoidable in contexts where an ingrained culture is harmful to employee wellbeing and needs to be actively challenged. ii) Grafting, building on

existing processes and structures, such as utilizing a strong safety framework to develop wider support for employee wellbeing. iii) Gestalting, the process of making sense of differing interests, for example, in implementing a more wellbeing orientated managerial approach, managers may lack the requisite skills, or question the reason for this change, but training and dialogue can resolve this. These processes are not mutually exclusive, for example a strong safety culture may enable grafting, but this may also be interpreted by employees as overly bureaucratic or controlling leading to fracturing, resolution may come through engagement activities and workshops that facilitate gestalting. Whilst the findings reveal a necessary and unavoidable diversity in HWPs we identify three reinforcing processes of learning, adaptation and continuity, that act as mechanisms embedding sustainable HWPs across organizations.

We synthesize our findings into an explanatory framework setting out how HWPs can be embedded and sustained where planned or emergent activities focused on wellbeing must be met alongside other organizational goals. Thereby, we expand the field of research into HWPs to the organizational level of analysis.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

Our study is grounded in a practice perspective that focuses on how wellbeing-oriented change is put to action when wellbeing is a principle for organizing, which serves to guide practitioners in several ways.

The narrative accounts provide insights into how organizations actually put in place practices when wellbeing is a principle for organizing. We offer illustrative examples of these practices and how organizations navigated enabling and constraining forces to achieve sustainable wellbeing. We show practitioners how the integration of mechanisms for learning and adaptation and continuity help to sustain wellbeing and are therefore an important consideration. These examples can be used as practice-based exemplars for other organizations seeking to embed wellbeing in organizations and enhance their understanding of how this can be achieved. We identify three ways in which wellbeing as an organizing principle can intersect with existing organizational praxis, fracturing, grafting and gestalting. Understanding how a wellbeing agenda fits with other organizational processes and structures in practice is essential in successfully embedding wellbeing practices. This understanding is therefore important for informing an organization's approach, which may then explicitly seek to develop practices that graft onto existing ways of doing things or be adapted to negotiate tensions or inconsistencies.

Overall, our framework and narrative accounts show how the integration of wellbeing as an organizing principle shifts the focus from wellbeing as something that is done, to something we do. As such, our findings and framework serve as a template for practitioners who are setting out to effect organization-wide wellbeing.

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## Race and Intersectional Studies

### Workplace resilience: An intersectional approach

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#### *Overview*

There is a dearth in research examining workplace resilience from a socio-cultural, gendered, historical and race perspective. The study fills a gap in resilience research by adopting an intersectional perspective to examine the working lives of the Windrush nurses within the NHS. The Windrush scandal in early 2018 highlighted the importance of preserving the legacy of the Windrush generation of Caribbean migrants, particularly their support for the NHS and the transmission of values to younger generations. Twenty-five nurses were interviewed followed by a dramatisation of the nurses narratives to bring life to their lived experiences in the NHS. Key study themes include career motivations, workplace challenges, resilience strategies and reflections on the NHS. Substantive and practical implications for HRM research and practice include the development of workplace resilience and the amelioration of systemic and structural discrimination particular for BAME employees.

#### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

The Windrush generation was recently at the centre of the Coalition Government's hostile environment immigration policy to reduce migration targets in the UK. This resulted in the 'Windrush Scandal' where some members of the Windrush generation, who were granted the right to remain in the UK, were threatened with deportation, made unemployed, wrongly detained and denied public services including healthcare, benefits and pensions (Wardle and Obermuller, 2018). The term Windrush generation was given to Caribbean people who arrived in the UK

from commonwealth countries between 1948-1971. The eruption of the 'Windrush Scandal' exemplifies the systemic injustices, instances of discrimination and the shortfall within the area of equality, diversity and inclusion in British workplaces.

Furthermore, workplace resilience represents an important concept in research, practice and policy development in terms of employee wellbeing (Centre of Resilience for Social Justice, 2017, Hollywood & Philips, 2020). While there is extensive research on resilience, it is important to understand and define this concept between different cultures and races (Southwick et al, 2014). Against this backdrop, the study adopts an intersectional approach to resilience research encompassing race, gender, cultural and historical values. The study examined the challenges, coping strategies along with the contribution of the Windrush nurses in post-War Britain's labour market. The impact of the Windrush nurses legacy for successive generations of people from African Caribbean descent was also explored. Key study themes include career motivations, workplace challenges, resilience strategies and reflections on the NHS.

### *Research methods*

Qualitative methods were used to capture the voices of 25 nurses from a range of socio-economic backgrounds who migrated from various Caribbean islands and worked within the NHS in the past 70 years. First, biographical recorded interviews on the Windrush nurses were used to capture the role, resilience contribution and legacy of their working lives in the NHS. Secondly, a verbatim theatre approach was adopted where the interview transcripts were played by professional actresses to bring life to the nurses lived experiences of structural discrimination, coping strategies and resilience. This approach helps represents the voice of marginalised groups who are often overlooked (Anderson, 2007).

### *Research findings or argument*

Initial findings from nurses interviewed revealed gendered and cultural dimensions in relation to entering the nursing profession. Study also revealed their motivation to enter nursing based on pro-social influences, barriers to career progression, the degree of segregation within the clinical hierarchy based on rigid status differences and experience of workplace racism. The findings revealed the robustness, strong work ethic and coping strategies of the Windrush nurses in the face of systemic and structural discrimination within the NHS.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

The study shows the importance of commemorating the Windrush nurses who dedicated their working lives and made a valuable contribution to the NHS. The findings have important implications for diversity researchers, HR policy makers and managers in terms of developing interventions based on socio-cultural values (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008) particularly for BAME employees. Moreover, the study has implications for future Windrush generations in terms of how they can develop workplace resilience as a result of discrimination. Finally, practical implications include how to identify and ameliorate systemic and structural discrimination which

currently exists within the NHS and affecting the wellbeing and mental health of BAME employees.

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## **Inequality regimes in medicine: gender, class and racio-ethnicity in medical careers**

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### *Overview*

In 2016, the then Secretary of State for Health commissioned 'an independent review on how to reduce and eliminate gender pay gaps in the medical profession'. Using review data from doctors at various stages, this paper analyses 30 in-depth career history interviews to examine factors that have enabled and constrained career (and thus pay) progression. Acker's (2006) inequality regimes framework starkly evidences how gender, class and racio-ethnic inequalities intersect to impede doctors' career progression. The paper presents findings and recommendations relevant to other professions/sectors.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Within the remit of examining gender pay gaps (GPG), this paper explores patterns of career progression that underpin the continuing under-representation of women at senior

levels of the medical profession. Women have comprised more than half of those entering medical schools for over 20 years (Miller and Clark, 2008). Women comprise nearly 60% of medical school intake (Moberly, 2018) and nearly half of all qualified doctors (General Medical Council, GMC, 2019). Yet GMC (2019) data demonstrate entrenched vertical and horizontal segregation. Fewer women reach consultant level and they are clustered in lower status (and paid) specialties. Careers in medicine have been under-explored (see Miller and Clark, 2008, Oikelome and Healy, 2013 for exceptions). This is an important knowledge gap for two reasons. First, that (career) equality is central to a fair and equal society (Tassabehji et al., 2020). Second, that the UK risks a considerable shortage of doctors. Enabling women to progress their medical careers is vital.

In developing much-needed insight, we move beyond notions of ‘rhetorical choice’ (Pringle et al., 2017) that position responsibility for lack of career progression at the individual level (e.g. women have babies, want to work part-time) to argue that structural and institutional forces within and without the organisation shape careers. While our starting point was gender, the influence of class and racio-ethnicity quickly emerged and we draw on Acker’s (2006) inequality regimes to ask:

- What factors enable and constrain career progression for doctors?
- What role does the intersection of gender, class and racio-ethnicity play?

### *Research methods*

Thirty volunteer participants were contacted via calls from the British Medical Association (BMA) and the GPG Review Twitter account. Our random sample was stratified for gender; women (21) and men (9) and career stage. Junior medics illuminated contemporary experiences while mid/senior career medics offered insight into longer progression periods and the extent of change (Kenny and Donnelly, 2020). A variety of participant specialties broadened the insight (Pringle et al., 2017). We did not explicitly aim for a class and racio-ethnically diverse sample. However participants spoke to these issues and informed our decision to include them in analysis. Interviews generated rich, qualitative reflections on career (Essers and Benschop, 2009) offering insight into how doctors explained their careers and progression and making ‘visible the invisible’ (Khilji and Pumroy, 2018). We carried out thematic analysis using NVivo; first order codes on gender, class and racio-ethnicity; second order on components of inequality regimes.

### *Research findings or argument*

Findings are tabulated below. The paper explores intersections of gender, class and racio-ethnicity and how these serve to constrain career progression for women doctors, particularly if not also white British and middle-class.



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Components of inequality regimes/bases of inequality	Gender	Class	Racio-ethnicity
<p><b>Organising processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· <b>Recruitment and selection (R&amp;S)</b></li> <li>· <b>Flexible working (FW)</b></li> <li>· <b>Career progression (CP)</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>R&amp;S</i> processes operate to disadvantage female applicants e.g. geographically</p> <p><i>FW</i> positions women as 'less than'</p> <p><i>CP</i> more difficult for those with caring responsibilities; inflexibility of training paths and career structures</p>	<p><i>R&amp;S</i>: processes apply exclusionary (masculine) middle-class norms</p> <p><i>FW</i>: access influenced by hierarchical status</p> <p><i>CP</i>: influenced by patronage, typically for white, male, middle-class doctors</p>	<p><i>R&amp;S</i>: processes operate to disadvantage BAME applicants</p> <p><i>FW</i>: higher threshold applied to BAME women</p> <p><i>CP</i>: higher bar for BAME women</p>
<p><b>Visibility of inequality</b></p>	<p>Privileged fail to see inequality; claims of a level playing field</p>	<p>Gate-keeping of what constitutes professional appearance as per middle-class norms</p>	<p>Visibility of ethnicity, modes of dress, hair, behaviour; participants marked as 'other'</p>
<p><b>Legitimacy of inequality</b></p>	<p>Not legitimate. Covert and/or reinforced by HR practice e.g. flexible working policies and capitalist norms e.g. women as caregivers</p>	<p>Legitimate dominance of middle-class norms</p> <p>Power and resources legitimately clustered at higher levels of organisation hierarchy</p>	<p>Not legitimate. Covert.</p> <p>Embedded in systems and processes</p>
<p><b>Compliance and control</b></p>	<p>Forms:</p> <p>Espousal of gender neutrality</p> <p>Sexual harassment</p> <p>Women exercising internal control and complying with male norms</p> <p>Commitment to work/profession</p>	<p>Control via hierarchal status; male-dominated</p>	<p>Forms:</p> <p>The need to fit in</p> <p>Labelling as troublemakers</p> <p>Appearance deemed non-professional</p>

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

The research will inform the next round of doctors' pay negotiations and offers important evidence that serves to explain the under-representation of female doctors at senior levels of the profession. Quantitative analysis in the wider project demonstrated

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widespread GPGs and the career history interviews reported here are an important part of explaining both those gaps and disadvantage created across other bases of inequality.

From this flows the importance of designing processes that challenge the dominance of masculine (white, middle class) norms within the profession, including:

- Awareness raising of the dominant norms in use that perpetuate advantage of white, middle class men and unconscious bias training so that inequality is made visible and de-legitimised
- Review and redesign of HR policies so that these uniformly that promote fairness and equity of treatment and ensure a more equal distribution of men and women of all backgrounds in senior medical roles.
- In particular, a review and redesign of recruitment policies that equally support all groups on merit into appropriate roles
- Implementing truly flexible training schemes that equally support all into consultant roles
- Implementation of more effective flexible working policies to encourage a culture where flexible working is embraced for all.
- Rigorous enforcement of interventions that challenge disadvantage due to gender and other protected characteristics e.g. class and racio-ethnicity

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## Diversity in Mentoring; A case of Women of African Origin in the UK

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### Overview

The ongoing global tensions ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainties, civil unrests around racial clashes resulting in deaths, and the re-examination of unresolved historical occurrences, has led to the need to focus even more on issues concerning diversity and inclusion at the global, national and organisational levels. Therefore, this paper explores the concept of mentoring for women of African Origin. It draws on empirical evidence provided by 30 such women working in the UK. The paper highlights results from their varying experiences as mentors and mentees that suggest implications for diversity and inclusion research and organisational practices.

### Research focus, rationale and questions

This paper explores how and why women of African origin within UK organisations engage with mentoring and the relevance of diversity in mentoring for talent development. The paper brings together three themes- mentoring, diversity and talent development. We acknowledge and agree with arguments (Ely & Thomas, 2001) that emphasise the relevance of diversity in the workplace. We draw on the resource-based theory that considers organisations have a variety of resources (Yang & Konrad, 2011) women employees being a part of this resource. While we see a rise in the number of women in the workplace, there are still challenges concerning women of African origin advancing to the top of managerial hierarchies

Within the context of understanding the challenges of career advancement for women of African origin in the UK and the debates concerning the existence of institutional racism, we explore the role of mentoring as access for career advancement. We draw on Ragins (1999), who indicates mentoring is a career resource for employees in organisations. This involves relationships where parties involved are committed to providing support, formally or informally. This support can be towards career development to help facilitate advancement within the organisation or the sector, psychosocial function focusing on the emotional, interpersonal, and competence aspects that underlie the mentoring relationship, and role modelling (Higgins and Kram, 2001). Our overarching questions are: how and why do women of African origin engage in mentoring in UK organisations?

### *Research methods*

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 women to address our research questions. The interviews typically lasted for 30 minutes, and the selection method used was purposive sampling. We recruited volunteer participant from friends and acquaintances in work organisations, and from social and religious networks.

We applied thematic analysis to examine the narratives of how and why these women engage in mentoring. Using Braun and Clarke (2006), we define thematic analysis as identifying and reporting themes within data to interpret the research topic. We derived these themes by identifying critical points from the narratives, significant to addressing the research questions. We applied conventions for representing prevalence in thematic analysis, using the word 'majority' to indicate the participant numbers per theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, we aligned the themes with mentoring outcomes from theory (Ragins, 1999; Higgins & Kram, 2001).

### *Research findings or argument*

The participants are from several industries and employed in varying roles. Some organisations are significantly male-dominated like the oil & gas and construction sectors, while others work in more gender diverse contexts such as the higher education sector. Participant roles include engineers, project managers, accountants, academics, HR professionals and administrative jobs. This mix of industry context and participant roles provides a useful range of contexts for exploring the process and functions of mentoring.

The data analysis is currently ongoing. However, some early indications suggest that the findings will be of interest and value. These indications include a dominant focus on psychosocial functions rather than a balanced focus on the three functions identified by Higgins & Kram (2001) and Ragins (1999). This suggests that identifying clear outcomes concerning mentoring, such as access to career development opportunities for women of African Origin in the UK, is likely to be more of a challenge unless mentoring is tailored to that objective. This may be related to an additional indication, which suggests that the role modeling function is mainly

from the experience of the participants themselves. The exception to this is mentoring formally organised as part of an organisation's talent development.

An additional early indication suggests that most participants perceive the existence of institutional biases but do not necessarily conclude racial or gender biases prevent career advancement. There are also indications participants do not depend on formal organisational talent development to experience mentoring, thereby suggesting gaps in workplace diversity and inclusion policies and practices.

*Practical importance and implications of research*

Within the context of the findings still being emergent at this point, it is possible to say that the lack of formal role models to perform that function within mentoring in organisations will have adverse effects on the career development of women of African origin. This, in turn, will mean that organisations are not able to fully exploit the talent available to them from these groups of employees, and thus not maximise the potential for competitive advantage from their potential talent pool.

Also, the indication of the use of formal vs. informal mentoring suggests positive benefits for both employer and employees from formalised mentoring within talent development programmes. This seems to be evident in the experience and career benefits of women, both mentoring and being mentored within formal programmes. The indication is that these women experience enhanced career development as compared with those women involved only in informal mentoring programmes. This is an important consideration for employers who wish to maximise the talent of women of African origin and the associated organisational benefits.

Finally, the findings suggest that the participants are not wholly dependent on formal organisational mentoring support. This is perhaps a lesson for all employees in that this group of participants demonstrates the possibilities and benefits of informal mentoring organised through social, friendship and other informal networks. The findings also suggest a need for more research from an employer perspective on the pros and cons of formal and informal mentoring in the careers of women of African origin.

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## **HR Approaches & Influence**

## **HR STRENGTH: PAST, CURRENT AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

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### *Overview*

Within the domain of HR process research, one of the most prominent theories to explain how HR practices influence organizational performance is Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) HR strength model. Based on the covariation principle of Kelley's (1967; 1973) attribution theory, HR strength explains how three meta-features of an HRM system—distinctiveness, consistency and consensus—influence employees' collective responses to the HR system. While Bowen and Ostroff construed HR strength as an organizational-level construct, it has mainly been studied as employee perceptions of the three meta-features. In this paper, we discuss three previous reviews of HR strength and examine the validity criteria of 41 empirical quantitative studies of HR strength.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Although for many decades human resource management (HRM) scholars have focused on the effect of (bundles of) HR practices—such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal and rewards—we still do not know the exact mechanism by which HRM contributes to (firm) performance (Boon, Den Hartog, & Lepak, 2019; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Bowen and Ostroff developed a framework for “understanding how HR practices as a system can contribute to firm performance by motivating employees to adopt desired attitudes that, in the collective, help achieve the organization's strategic goals” (Bowen & Ostroff, p. 204). Instead of focusing on the content of HR practices, they pay attention to the HR process and introduce the concept of ‘Strength of the HR System’, which they define as: “the features of an HR system that send signals to employees that allow them to understand the desired and appropriate responses and form a collective sense of what is expected”. They borrow the features of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus from Kelly's attribution theory (1967; 1973) and assume that these (meta) features of the overall HRM system lead to a strong organizational climate under which employees share a common interpretation of expected behaviors that ultimately leads to higher firm performance (see also Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Sanders, Shipton & Gomes, 2014). In this paper, we discuss three previous reviews of HR strength and examine the validity criteria of 41 empirical quantitative studies of HR strength.

### *Research methods*

In order to acquire (both published and unpublished) studies of HR strength beyond those covered in previous reviews, we adopted a multimethod approach. First, we conducted a keyword search of online databases, including PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct, and ABI-Inform / ProQuest using a Boolean search

string. Second, we conducted a cited reference (forward) search on key papers on HR strength, including theoretical papers and review articles and measurement papers presenting the development of new HR strength scales. Third, we undertook a manual search of leading journals in management and human resource management. Fourth, we acquired unpublished “grey” literature by contacting authors of previously published studies on HR strength, searching the ProQuest Dissertations and Abstracts database for unpublished theses, searching through the conference proceedings from the Academy of Management (AOM), and disseminating a call for papers via the AOM HR Division listserv and the HRMProcess Google Group. Our search yielded a total of 143 relevant journal articles, book chapters, conference papers and master and PhD theses.

### *Research findings or argument*

In this review we had a closer look at the quantitative articles in terms of validity issues (internal, external, construct and statistical conclusion validity). The most important conclusion seems to be that the HR strength field can be further improved through the adoption of research designs that permit stronger conclusions about causality. Increasing the validity of research designs is important, as strong research methodologies make it possible to address challenging problems and produce findings that contribute to a robust body of knowledge (Bainbridge et al, 2017). Practitioners are increasingly advised to pursue evidence-based management and utilize the best HR research to inform decision making (Barends & Rosseau, 2018). This development requires researchers to produce results from strong research designs (multi-actor, multi-level, multi-waves, multi-methods data). The relatively high number in the HR strength studies that aim to explain a direct relationship instead of studies explaining a relationship (mediator studies) or incorporate the effect of boundary conditions (including a moderator) is disappointing in this way. Therefore, more studies utilizing strong research designs are needed.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

The introduction of the HR strength concept has several practical implications. In order to effectively manage people and work within organizations, businesses need to begin to consider individuals' understanding of the 'how' HR is communicated to their employees. Recent theoretical and empirical work suggests that an employee's subjective experience of HR within an organization (in terms of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus) is a key determinant of their response to the organization. Scholars have acknowledged that the key to employees' understanding of the expectations of the organization is the way in which individuals acquire, organize, and make sense of their environment. As such, the covariation principle of the attribution theory (distinctiveness, consistency and consensus) is essential to understanding employees' experience of and reactions to organizational change

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## **Abuse and Discrimination**

### **“It’s not just a private matter”: Developing effective policy and procedure for addressing the impact of domestic abuse in the workplace**

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*Overview*



Despite the ongoing global incidence of domestic abuse, the role that the workplace plays in supporting victims remains little understood. This paper, based on qualitative research on the experiences of 57 union officers supporting victims in the North of England, highlights the benefits in having an effective policy to address its impact in the workplace. Far from being a private matter, our findings reveal that an effective policy, working in concert with other key people management policies, can both support victims but also address abuse related performance and absence issues that, otherwise, are often misinterpreted and lead wrongly to punitive action by management.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

During the Coronavirus pandemic, globally domestic abuse was reported to have risen significantly (United Nations, 2020). Where abuse can be physical, psychological and/or emotional (Strickland, 2013). Currently, the Domestic Abuse Bill is progressing through the UK Parliament. However, for many organisations it is not seen as an issue. Even though in the UK it is estimated that employers lose £1.9B each year through lost productivity (Walby, 2009), and 8 billion dollars in the US is lost in reduced productivity and health care costs (Presidential Memoranda, 2012).

Significantly, in a recent study of 200 HR directors, Westmarland (2017) found that only 5% of the organisations had a specific policy covering domestic abuse. Furthermore, only one-third stated their intention to introduce such a policy in the forthcoming twelve months. This is despite a large majority (74%) of the respondents seeing the benefits of having a policy and 86% recognising their duty of care to employees.

Financially, the existing literature has highlighted poor attendance and performance as key outcomes of abuse (Bell et al., 2002; de Jonge, 2018). Although, conversely, the workplace could be a haven for a victim if the fear of lack of support making them reluctant to disclose at work could be overcome (Reeves and O'Leary-Kelly, 2009; Swanberg et al., 2007). Our aim was to establish how these barriers could be more successfully addressed by asking respondents: how employees disclosed, how effective were organisational policies and how they worked effectively with HR colleagues and line managers in supporting victims

### *Research methods*

A cross-sectoral sample of 57 union officers and representatives from a range of unions and organisations, encompassing all three TUC regions that represent 1.6M union members across the North of England, were interviewed over two periods. The research aimed to establish the support that representatives and their unions were able to give to their members to stay in work whilst experiencing domestic abuse. Having worked previously with the TUC (Trades Union Congress), experience suggested unions were a group to whom a victim of domestic abuse may disclose. Also our methodology was informed by Gregory's (2017) argument that, whilst the voices of victims and survivors must remain central to debates around domestic abuse, there is also a need to learn from the experiences of those from

whom a victim may seek support. Significantly as she further argues, and as some participants in this study revealed, they may have also experienced abuse.

### *Research findings or argument*

There remain real difficulties in persuading employers that domestic violence/abuse is a workplace issue. It is still perceived as a 'private' matter by some managers. Overall, specific domestic violence/abuse policies were found to be uncommon within organisations and may not be effective even where they exist. Lack of awareness of policy and therefore the sensitive support necessary, meant that requiring victims to disclose their abuse as a way of accessing the policy can be counterproductive.

Crucially, our research consistently found that abuse only became apparent when victim's attendance and performance had been affected leading to discipline actions. Furthermore, that partners may continue to abuse staff when at work. Which gave rise to health and safety concerns for both the employee and their work colleagues.

Often it was only when they sought support from the union, and they were in a meeting with their line and a HR colleague, that the real reasons came out. However, from this point in the majority of cases HR, the line manager and the union officer were able to find solutions to effectively support the employee. Conversely, in some cases the employee did not disclose but chose rather to leave the organisation.

Examples of what worked effectively on disclosure included: time off to seek legal advice or manage childcare, making key staff (security, receptionists) aware, a change of work-hours, duties or even location if the perpetrator was coming to their work, counselling, signposting to external services.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

Valuable support exists. For instance, Government and business-oriented support groups have usefully identified the need for action on the part of employers during the Corvid19 crisis and afterwards (GOV.UK, 2020; BITC, 2020; EIDA, 2020).

Our findings confirmed existing studies that due to the absence of appropriate policies, and awareness of how they should be employed, too often abuse related workplace problems are misinterpreted by line managers and HR (EHRC/CIPD, 2013). Crucially, this leads to disciplinary sanctions being a more common first response from their employer (Faichnie, 2010).

Significantly, our research reveals that it is crucial, therefore, that all organisations ensure that existing policy and practice around absence and performance management work in concert, and do not conflict with domestic violence policy and practice. A clear and transparent domestic abuse policy and procedures should be created and integrated into the working of all organisational policy. This it can be argued requires particular expediency given that, in the short to medium term, the 'new normal' will be predicated on the ongoing need for potential victims to seek sanctuary at work, or for others being more at risk if home working is part of that new norm.

In practical terms our research suggests that all employers, following the development of appropriate policy changes, put into place a programme of awareness raising across the organisation. This should be accompanied by specific training on supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse for colleagues such as HR practitioners and line managers, on its causes, consequences and potential solutions.

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## **Age discrimination in work: nature, challenges and solutions**

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### *Overview*

Age discrimination remains an enduring problem in UK workplaces. Drawing on a multi-year mixed method research project examining the enforcement of age discrimination law in the UK and Australia, this paper considers how age discrimination is manifesting at work in the UK, and the implications for employees and employers. It considers ways in which employers can work proactively to prevent and address age discrimination, to achieve a more age-diverse and age-inclusive workplace.

*Research focus, rationale and questions*

Demographic ageing offers both challenges and opportunities for UK employers. Promoting more age-diverse and age-inclusive workplaces will allow employers to respond effectively to demographic ageing. However, age discrimination at work remains prevalent; despite age discrimination laws being in place since 2006, age discrimination is still an enduring problem at work. Effectively addressing and preventing age discrimination is a first step to promoting age-inclusive workplaces.

This paper therefore addresses three research questions:

- How is age discrimination manifesting at work in the UK?
- What are the implications for employers and employees?
- What can employers do to achieve a more age-diverse and age-inclusive workplace?

*Research methods*

This paper draws on a multi-year mixed method research study examining the enforcement of age discrimination law in the UK and Australia. This paper synthesises the results from research methods including: This paper draws on a multi-year mixed method research study examining the enforcement of age discrimination law in the UK and Australia. This paper synthesises the results from research methods including:

- Legal doctrinal, and qualitative and quantitative content analysis, of 1208 Employment Tribunal age discrimination decisions, published between February 2017 and 17 April 2019;
- Semi-structured qualitative expert interviews with over 90 respondents from across the UK nations and Australian states and territories, conducted between March 2018 and July 2020, and including experts from equality bodies, legal practice, age lobby groups, government, unions and academia;
- Statistical analysis of data from public surveys, equality bodies and Acas; and
- A survey of legal practitioners in the UK and Australia working on age discrimination matters.

*Research findings or argument*

This paper argues that age discrimination is manifesting in unexpected ways in UK workplaces. While most scholarship on age discrimination law has focused on the ability to justify direct age discrimination, few cases have turned on this point. Instead, many experiences of age discrimination relate to 'everyday ageism', such as negative comments related to age. This makes age discrimination particularly difficult

to address through legal claims, and means proof of age discrimination is particularly problematic.

This paper argues that a reactive approach to addressing age discrimination through individual enforcement and legal claims is likely to be ineffective. Instead, employers need to proactively promote an age-inclusive workplace, and focus on culture change within their workforce. Culture change might be achieved by increased interaction between employees of all ages; better signalling from workplace leadership about the value of workers of all ages, including through a review of policies which have disparate impacts on different age groups; collecting, monitoring and analysing data about the age composition of the workplace; increased job and role flexibility; consultation; and targeted recruitment of underrepresented age groups.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

These research findings have three key implications for HR professionals and organisational leaders. First, it is clear that age discrimination remains widespread in UK workplaces. This raises legal and organisational risks, including a risk of being exposed to legal action. More broadly, however, age discrimination is likely to undermine employee recruitment and retention and work satisfaction, and therefore also poses a risk to staff well-being and organisational productivity. As a result, it is clear that this is a risk that needs to be addressed.

Second, these findings illustrate that relying on legal claims to identify and address age discrimination is inappropriate and insufficient. Organisations need to proactively address age discrimination at work, rather than reactively waiting for legal claims or measures initiated by individuals.

Third, then, this paper puts forward a number of key initiatives that can be adopted by UK workplaces to proactively identify and address age discrimination. This might include increased interaction between employees of all ages; better signalling from workplace leadership about the value of workers of all ages; collecting, monitoring and analysing data about the age composition of the workplace; increased job and role flexibility; consultation; and targeted recruitment of underrepresented groups.

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## The Gender Pay Gap

### The Gender Pay Gap in Total Compensation

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#### *Overview*

Despite the rich literature on the gender pay gap, how female workers fair in other forms of compensation relative to their male counterparts remains unknown. In this paper, we examine the gender gap in total compensation. Using the Annual Survey

of Hours and Earnings, we estimate gender wage disparities in overtime pay, pensions, cash bonuses, variable pay, allowances and benefits in kind. Our empirical results document high and persistent gender gaps in all these forms of compensation. We further decompose these disparities by occupation and industry, as well as across the income distribution to examine how different income quantiles are affected. Finally, we exploit the introduction of the Gender Equality Act 2010 (an exogenous regulatory shock) requiring British firms with over 250 employees to publish their gender pay gaps. In doing so, we are interested in whether disparities in the forms of compensation not covered by the legislation persist or even increase as employers seek ways to maintain pay differentials between the two sexes. We conclude that the extent of the female labour market disadvantage in compensation is underestimated.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

The gender pay gap has been a prominent theme within academic and policy debates for many decades. Researchers have commonly sought to explain gender pay disparities by examining gender differences in human capital acquisition, horizontal segregation in certain occupations and industries, vertical segregation and the glass ceiling, with the unexplained residual being attributed to discrimination (Polanchek 1981; Blau and Kahn 2017). Yet despite the rich literature on the gender pay gap and some progress that has been made in improving women's relative earnings, very little is known about other routes where gender inequalities in compensation might be occurring and the magnitude of these effects, possibly resulting in the gender labour market disadvantage being underestimated.

### *Research methods*

We use data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the UK, providing detailed information about the levels, distribution and make-up of earnings. Our empirical strategy employs standard Mincerian wage regression models to estimate gender wage disparities in pensions, cash bonuses, variable pay and benefits in kind and decomposes these by income quantiles, occupation and industry characteristics. We further examine how an exogenous regulatory shock has affected the gender gap in total compensation. In particular, we exploit the introduction of the Gender Equality Act 2010 which requires British firms with over 250 employees to publish their gender pay gaps. In doing so, we are interested in examining whether disparities in the gender pay gap might have declined as a result of the new legislation, and whether disparities in other aspects of pay not covered by the legislation persist or even increase as employers seek ways to maintain pay differentials between the two sexes.

### *Research findings or argument*

Our empirical results document the high and persistent gender gaps in pensions, cash bonuses and other forms of variable pay, as well as benefits in kind. We further decompose these disparities across the occupational, industry and income



distribution to examine how different groups are affected. We conclude that the extent of the female labour market disadvantage in compensation is underestimated.

*Practical importance and implications of research*

In our analysis, we demonstrate that despite the well-documented progress in bridging the gender pay gap, discrimination in total compensation means that the extent of female labour market disadvantage is underestimated. The findings of this paper will be of interest to reward specialists seeking to address forms of gender inequality in their organizations over and beyond the standard approach of tackling pay gaps. Our findings also have implications for the reporting gender pay gaps, not least in demonstrating that reporting should include total compensation, not just pay.

To our knowledge, this is the first paper that provides this type of analysis. Our focus is the UK, but future research should explore the same themes in other labour market contexts.

## **Organisations matter. Explaining gender pay gap in the UK.**

Gabriela Gherghina - Strathclyde Business School

*Overview*

My research project aims to explain the variation in gender pay gap at organisational level in the UK. It uses a mixed-method approach with two components: quantitative analysis from annual reports (previously mandatory) and original surveys on 400 organisations and qualitative analysis with expert interviews from 40 organisations.

*Research focus, rationale and questions*

There is growing concern regarding the importance of economic equality and fairness in contemporary societies. The gender pay gap, calculated as the difference in the average pay between all men and women in a workforce, is one of the challenges faced by policymakers in their attempt to reduce economic inequality. Recent estimates of the International Labour Organization (ILO) show that the mean gender pay gap among high-income countries is around 16% (ILO 2019). Research shows that gender pay gaps have been declining over time in these countries (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2016; Blau and Kahn, 2017), but substantial earning gaps remain in many countries (Drolet and Mumford, 2012), with important variations (Christofides, Polycarpou and Vrachimis, 2013).

Fair and non-discriminatory organisational practices are a legal requirement but also a practice of good management (Website Equality Human Rights, 2020). If an organisation has high gender pay gap, there may be a number of issues to deal with such as fair recruitment practices and compensation schemes, or promotion

procedures. In brief, solutions to address the gender pay gap can be formulated only by understanding its causes.

Little attention has been paid to what explains the gender pay gap variation at organisational level. An analysis at organisational level is relevant because the organisation is often the level where decisions about pay are taken and thus the source of the gap. Moreover, comparisons between organisations allow the identification of what happens within countries and sectors. It presents a big importance that the employers analyse their workforce and pay data, in order to recognise what effective actions are mandatory to take in order to reduce the company gender pay gap. The action taken to reduce the gap at workplace level will help to narrow the gap at a country level. In brief, solutions to address the gender pay gap can be formulated only by understanding its causes.

This research project seeks to understand these causes and aims to answer the following research question: What explain the gender pay gap variation in the UK? The UK is the appropriate setting to carry out this research for two main reasons: 1) it is the country with the third-highest gender pay gap (23.2%) among high-income countries (ILO 2019) and 2) there is a high proportion of organisations in the UK (77%) that have a gender pay gap in favour of men according to the mandatory reporting for 2017 when UK companies (with more than 250 employees) were required to report differences in pay between men and women ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), 2020).

### *Research methods*

To test these effects, this paper conducts analysis at organisational level. The variation of the gender pay gap is explained both across organisations and over time (e.g. 2018 compared to 2017, 2019 compared to 2018 etc.). This paper uses a mixed-method approach with two components: 1) Quantitative analysis (clustered time-series regression) that aims to observe trajectories and patterns. For this analysis, 400 organisations from public and private sector will be selected based on stratified sampling. Data will be collected from the annual mandatory reports, optional reports of managers and original short surveys conducted yearly with two representatives of each organisation. 2) Qualitative analysis is aiming to provide explanations of the statistical patterns identified (expert interviews with top management respondents from 40 organisations - out of the original 400).

### *Research findings or argument*

To explain the gender pay gap variation between organisations in the UK, this paper focuses on several characteristics. To answer the research question, I will analyse organisational factors in terms of flexible working patterns, recruitment and promotion practices and some aspects of pay systems (pay practices) within the organisation.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

The findings of this project bear high scientific relevance and seeks to take the research substantially beyond the state of the art on theoretical, methodological and empirical grounds. At theoretical level, it proposes an innovative analytical

framework that brings together several determinants that have been either explored in isolation or under-explored. Methodologically, it combines quantitative and qualitative insights and primary and secondary sources to provide thorough explanations. Empirically, it is the first cross-section and longitudinal study to account for gender pay gap at organisational level in the UK. Moreover, it is the first systematic analysis to measure gender pay gap on six components: mean gender pay gap, median gender pay gap, mean bonus pay, median bonus pay, bonus proportions and quartile pay bands (Website CIPD 2018).

For the broader discipline, the findings will lead to a deeper understanding of the sources of gender pay gap. Also, the theoretical framework and research design have broad applicability, it is not country sensitive, and can be used by further research. For society, the findings will provide policymakers and organisations with medium to long-term practical solutions to reduce gender pay gap. During the PhD project, close relationships with these two types of stakeholders will be developed and specific policy recommendations will be made based on the analysis, e.g. by drafting reports. For example, once organisations become familiar with the causes of gender pay gap, they will have the possibility to adopt / nuance policies regarding organisational characteristics (recruitment, work flexibility and progression opportunities).

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## HR Professionals

### Legitimacy and professionalisation of HR: A gender-sensitive approach

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#### *Overview*

This research aims to explore HR practitioner and line manager perceptions of the legitimacy and professionalisation of HR and the extent to which these perceptions are gendered. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with HR practitioners and non-HR management, across a range of organisations and sectors. Initial findings indicate that the female concentration and 'feminisation' of HR are significant to participants. Notions of HR being a 'feminine' function within inherently 'masculine' organisations has been noted as a limitation for HR in establishing its legitimacy. This research, therefore, helps further the understanding of HR legitimacy and explores gender as a potentially overlooked factor.

#### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

The aim of this research is to explore the female-concentrated profession of HR to understand how potential gendering may affect the perceptions of HR legitimacy and professionalisation. Gender in organisations has been subject to extensive research and it is well established in the literature that ideals of success and value in the workplace inherently hold ideologies of hegemonic masculinity (Acker, 1990; Witz, 1990). Literature debating the place and contribution of the HR function in organisations has also been longstanding, with the role that HR plays developing significantly over the years. However, despite the HR profession evidently being an exemplar of gender concentration, there is minimal qualitative research exploring any potential interplay between gender and legitimacy in HR. As such, there is limited understanding of the complex interplay between gender and occupational legitimacy in HR. This research seeks to identify potential gendered assumptions of legitimacy and professionalisation that may affect HR.

HR is a valuable setting to study the interplay between gender concentration and perceptions of occupational legitimacy. This is due to the female concentration and extensive attention HR has received in academic and practitioner literature with regards to its value and credibility (Caldwell, 2003; Ulrich and Dulebohn, 2015).

This research seeks to understand:

How is the legitimacy of the HR profession conceptualised?

- What, if any, gendered assumptions are present in this conceptualisation?

Do potentially gendered assumptions of HR as a profession affect the enactment of the HR role, if so how?

#### *Research methods*

This research utilises empirical semi-structured interviews with UK HR practitioners and non-HR line managers. Interviews are ongoing, with 54 HR practitioners and 8 line managers interviewed to date. Participants range from entry-level to HR director; working within the public, private and voluntary sector. Participants were sourced through personal networks, HR forums and subsequent snowball sampling. Questions focus largely on the changing nature of HR, HR's interactions with other functions, HR's involvement in strategic decision-making and HR qualifications/accreditation.

It is recognised that interviewing HR practitioners from various organisations, roles, and seniority levels produces challenges due to differences that may arise. It is therefore proposed to distinguish between roles, organisation size, and sectors in the findings through a table/matrix. This allows a broad insight into the perception and enactment of HR whilst allowing an understanding as to findings specific to certain HR roles.

#### *Research findings or argument*

The female concentration in HR was apparent to all participants. Over half of HR participants, all female, made direct reference to the idea that HR's legitimacy and status was diminished, at least in part, due to the female concentration in the profession. A number of HR participants referred to the notion of organisations being 'inherently masculine' and argued that, whilst this persisted, HR would never be taken seriously. In attempts to push back, several female HR participants made reference to imitating senior male co-workers ways of working.

The prevalence of males in senior HR roles was also referred to by over half of HR participants. This caused annoyance and/or confusion among many female HR participants due to the concentration of females in HR up until the senior levels. Participants referred often to male senior HR practitioners transitioning horizontally from other functions. For many of these participants, this indicated that both females and the HR function were seen as illegitimate at senior, strategic levels. This led to comments that 'the function has to be headed up by a man', but that they cannot be a 'true HR person'.

With regards to understanding how legitimacy and professionalisation in HR are conceptualised, early findings indicate potential differences between male and female HR practitioners. Female practitioners largely spoke positively about CIPD accreditation, the majority of the opinion that mandatory accreditation would positively impact the status of HR. This differed from male HR practitioners who expressed views that accreditation is largely unnecessary for HR roles.

*Practical importance and implications of research*

Whilst there is significant literature on the legitimacy of HR, there is little qualitative research exploring the potential influence of gender. It is established within gender literature that the prevalence of women in an occupation or profession has a detrimental effect on status and legitimacy. HR has been a profession that, despite seeing many shifts in its focus and role, has arguably struggled to fully establish its legitimacy in organisations. This research, therefore, allows an increased understanding as to whether gender is influential in HR practitioners and line managers perceptions of HR. In exploring the potential interplay between gender and legitimacy, this research challenges the hegemony of strategic HRM literature which proposes involvement in corporate strategy as the way in which HR will see changes in status and credibility.

It is proposed that this research will produce a practical contribution in providing a richer understanding of the HR role. Findings will allow practitioners to understand what terms legitimacy may be most successfully pursued. In a time where HR is being encouraged to engage in strategy and being called to account over its contribution to the organisation, the views identified in this research may shed light on whether this is a pertinent issue with regards to HR's legitimacy or whether other aspects, such as gendering, have an impact. In interviewing those within HR and the wider organisation, this research gives a nuanced picture of the HR role, which may then allow HR practitioners to reconsider how legitimacy and professionalism are pursued.

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**The well-being of lone HR practitioners in SMEs: Getting a grip by letting go**

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### *Overview*

Typically, SMEs appoint a dedicated internal HR practitioner (HRP) when the workforce reaches a critical size. Yet the lived experiences of these are often overlooked in the literature. Based on insights from 25 respondents in the extreme case of UK hospices, this novel research study finds that while they benefit from network centrality to implement HR policies rapidly to support employee well-being, HRPs in SMEs are susceptible to neglecting their own self-care. We present a typology of HRPs' responses to self-care in SMEs. Paradoxically, those who prioritize self-care report improved well-being and reduced sense of personal hypocrisy.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

This research seeks to understand the lived experiences of HR practitioners (HRPs) in UK hospices. Specifically, we focus on how HRPs experience and manage their own well-being. HRM literature only recently started to focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (such as the hospices here considered), and research on the experiences of HRPs is underdeveloped (McDonnell & Sikander, 2017; Pritchard, 2010). Furthermore, research on well-being typically focuses on employees, not specifically on HRPs. However, HRPs are in an interesting position since they are expected to promote staff well-being while their own roles are emotionally loaded, especially in the case of emotionally intense workplaces such as hospices. In one of the few papers focused on HRPs' emotion work, Rivers (2019) stresses the need for self-care. It follows that capabilities in self-care might be especially important in small enterprises such as a hospice where a dedicated HRP is susceptible to others transferring their emotional labour to a central figure. Thus, this paper aims to address the following question: how do HRPs in SMEs manage their own well-being while being responsible for employee well-being?

### *Research methods*

This research is qualitative in nature since evidence about the topic is scant. Three complementary methods have been used: an exploratory focus group, five face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and an on-line questionnaire (which followed the approach of a semi-structured interview). The focus group and the interviews provided an initial understanding of HRPs' experiences in relation to their own well-being and feedback enhanced the subsequent questionnaire design. The questionnaire comprised 10 questions and participants could freely elaborate their answers. Questions explored how HRPs perceived their ability to prioritise their own and others' well-being. The online questionnaire was launched at a session facilitated by the researchers during the 2019 national Hospice UK HR conference

on leadership for health and professional growth. This conference was an ideal forum to reach over 100 HRPs, who are active in hospices across the UK. Overall, 29 HRPs fully answered the questionnaire.

### *Research findings or argument*

The data were analysed using the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013) that follows a three-step process. Raw data are first coded into descriptive categories; these are then revised and grouped to create more general concepts, which then feed into aggregate dimensions. All the researchers concluded the analyses independently then compared their findings. Overall, 20 first order concepts were categorised from respondents' direct comments then grouped into eight second order themes. Finally, we identified three aggregate dimensions: the ability to reflect on one's own well-being; the HRP's relations with themselves and others to cope with well-being; and issues of the HRP's autonomy.

In short, our findings show that HRPs are well aware of the importance of their own well-being, and they define it as a relational concept. Most of them actively try to manage their personal well-being, however they also report a very high and stressful workload. Related to this, there is an issue of the perceived lack of autonomy in how to organise their job and better take care of their own well-being. Also, there are tensions between the organisational imperative to take care of well-being, and the scarcity of time and resources (both financial and technological) which would allow that. As a result, we propose a five-fold typology representing how HRPs manage their own well-being in front of organisational demands: (i) 'tough love' professional; (ii) self-interested; (iii) martyr; (iv) employee champion; (v) functional administrator.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

This research improves understanding of well-being strategies for HRPs in SMEs where there is less formal support and few, if any, professional HR colleagues compared with HR departments in larger organisations. Additionally, the empirical study stresses dual needs perceived by HRPs, i.e. autonomy in organising one's own tasks and time, and a more diverse set of strategies, at the organisational level, to support employees. The five-fold typology indicates different approaches with implications at organisational and individual levels. If, for example, having HRPs as "martyrs" might seem functional at the organisational level, this might not necessarily be beneficial to the individual HRP in an SME.

In interpreting our findings, we call for managers to foster an ecosystem where the enhancement of HRP well-being is regarded as a collective activity rather than the isolated responsibility of the HRP themselves. This emphasizes an ethos of shared responsibility among HRPs, management and the wider employee base. We contend that a collaborative ecosystem with action-learning research would lead to direct increases in overall employee well-being with clear organisational performance implications for HRPs in SMEs.



More broadly, this research shows the need for HR professional bodies and university curricula to better focus on small organisations, where there is typically a lack of the required knowledge and technology to support HRPs' work. HR professional volunteers and business school students could work with HRPs in local SMEs, especially social enterprises to allow HRPs to let go of unrelenting daily pressures to focus on HRPs' well-being.

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## **Job Quality and Disadvantage**

### **Employee well-being in low paid work: Findings from the hospitality and social care sectors**

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#### *Overview*

A significant proportion of working age adults are employed in low paid work within the service sectors. However, research into the well-being of these workers is limited. Taking a qualitative approach, this research paper focuses on the experiences of workers in the hospitality and social care sector, and the

management of employee well-being in these sectors. This paper uses a resource-based perspective of well-being to unpack the complex and multi-dimensional issues facing workers.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Research into employee well-being over the last decade has been elevated within the field of HRM. However, the well-being of low paid employees within the service sectors is often overlooked. Low pay remains a significant problem within the UK labour market; approximately 23% of workers are employed in a low paying job, many of which are highly insecure and unpredictable, as the use of non-standard working arrangements are common place in low paying sectors (Clarke and D'Arcy, 2016). Job quality and employment conditions in low paying work remain poor, with limited opportunity for workers to progress into better paying work. Various research has demonstrated the high risk of poverty among low paid workers, and the linkages between the 'low pay, no pay' cycle and recurrent poverty (Maitre et al., 2012, Shildrick et al., 2012). The experience of low wage work therefore has significant consequences for workers that reach far beyond their working lives, calling into question the effect that low wage work has on the well-being of workers.

### *Research methods*

This research employed a case study approach, which explored the experiences of low paid workers from the hospitality and social care sectors in depth. These sectors were chosen due to the large numbers of low paid jobs located within these sectors and the limited attention these sectors have received in the literature with regards to employee well-being. Access was agreed with two organisations within each sector. Drawing on 70 semi-structured interviews with senior managers, line managers and frontline staff, this study unpacks the complex experience of employee well-being in low wage work from multiple perspectives, using a resource-based perspective to explain the varying outcomes that exist for employees. Qualitative research was particularly appropriate for the research questions posed, as it allowed for an in depth explanation of the actors and factors at play in the processes of well-being within the specific context of low wage work.

### *Research findings or argument*

Exploring the experiences of low paid workers in these sectors revealed that the issues surrounding well-being are multi-dimensional and highly complex. Situations that may on the surface appear to be straightforward are often far more intricate in nature, as participants juggled a delicately balanced web of resources and demands across their work and home lives. While each organisation had put in place various initiatives aimed at improving well-being, employers often failed to provide an adequate level of basic resources to workers, which created significant challenges for workers in maintaining their well-being. Employees in both sectors were subject to hard forms of HRM, and participants from both sectors had high levels of demands which they had to cope with in their jobs, with often very limited resources that could be utilised, which impacted the well-being of workers. Social support resources were found to be among the most powerful resources for well-being.

Furthermore, line managers have a key role to play in the well-being of workers, as the delivery mechanism through which low paid staff experience well-being related policies and practices. However, line managers are subject to a range of conflicting priorities; they are continually driven to meet key performance indicators or HR metrics, with little incentive to prioritise activities that contribute to the well-being of staff. The performance of line managers is measured on the end result, not the means through which said performance was achieved. However, it is in the ways in which they manage that line managers influence employee well-being.

*Practical importance and implications of research*

There are several practical implications for organisations in light of this research. If employee well-being in low wage occupations is to be improved, a preventative rather than reactive approach to managing well-being is required. While robust policies in relation to well-being are essential, so too are the channels through which employees experience these policies in practice. Line managers have the potential to make a far greater impact on the well-being of their staff through their approach to managing staff, the value of which has perhaps been underestimated. This nuance requires a shift in focus, recognising that policies in practice are only as good as the managers that deliver them, and balancing the reality that managers will focus their efforts on performance that is measured.

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**A future 'fair' skills ecosystem - the rhetoric and reality for the precarious worker**

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### *Overview*

Key workers working in precarious situations through Covid-19 has drawn attention to labour market inequalities. Many of these workers do not enjoy secure or sustainable work, and are unable to develop their skills and contribute to local skills eco-systems (Alberti & Danaj, 2017). Precarious work is uncertain and unpredictable from the worker's standpoint; skills eco systems concern the development of human resources within a region. This paper argues that government initiatives like 'levelling up' and 'skills for all' will contribute to theory and policy that shifts HR towards greater inclusion and sustainability, with a focus on workers at the margins, traditionally excluded from organisations' talent schemes.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Our focus is on the potential contribution of those employed in precarious work within skill ecosystems. We define ecosystems as regional or sectoral social formations in which human capability is developed and deployed for productive purposes (Finegold 1999), and that are crucial in developing sustainable local economies. We argue that HRD must address the challenges of creating local skills eco systems (Barr, 2019) by shaping the demand for skills and produce fair, decent work (Li, 2020).

Precarious workers are less likely to receive training opportunities. Research suggests that 'WEIRD' (Westernised, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic) and 'POSH' (Professional, Official job-holder, Safe from discrimination and High Income) people are the main beneficiaries of training (Thompson & Dahling, 2019). Literature on skills tends to draw an unproblematic association between full time professional employment and training. There is a paucity of discussion about workers at the margins of the workforce; this paper addresses this lacuna with its focus largely on Roma migrants, amongst the most discriminated members of labour markets globally. We argue a continuation of inattention to the confluence of precarious workers and workers future economic viability will hurt Britain as it embarks on its post Covid-19 economic recovery. To that end, we pose three questions:

What are the underpinning antecedent conditions of a sustainable 'fair' skills eco system for marginalised workers?

What is the experience for the marginalised worker in the current skills ecosystem?

What interventions (remedies) might support inclusion of marginalised workers in a sustainable skills ecosystem? What are the benefits, societal and individual?

### *Research methods*

## ARC 2021 submissions

We adopted a mixed methods approach. This included a survey of Roma/Romanian marginalized workers employed during the 'lock down' period in England. The survey elicited a response of 84 – 37% not working and 62% working.

The qualitative study included seven semi-structured interviews conducted during Covid-19 and some data from our previous empirical research of 29 semi-structured interviews with migrant marginalized workers and data gathering through local stakeholder connections e.g. local government and local employers.

We remain committed to co-researching and co-developing with the participants, many of whom are not proficient in English, therefore using Paulo Freire's (1970) reflect pedagogy of the oppressed ensures that their voice and experience is central to informing what we do, how we do it and produce the most useful sustainable outputs.

The work of Lincoln (2010) guided the qualitative analysis process. The transcripts were analysed through a flexible approach of moving backwards and forwards (Mason, 2002).

### *Research findings or argument*

The survey indicated that migrant marginalised workers were not treated well whilst working during Covid-19. A high percentage did not get paid minimum wage (28.8% earned under the minimum wage with a further 19.2% responding that they didn't know) with 39.6% earning less pay than usual, suggesting that some employers took advantage of the situation. Furthermore, as supported in the literature, the workers have little work security with the majority not paid sick pay (73%). This significant economic constraint is a reason for presenteeism, even during Covid-19 (Pichler & Ziebarth, 2020). The fear of economic loss is also a reason for the lack of attendance in training programmes (Li 2020). Finally, 30.8% did not practice social distancing at work, something that we also found in the qualitative research, increasing the risk of contagious disease (Navarro et al 2018).

Evidence from the study highlight the challenge for HRD in respect of sustainable local skills eco-system. These workers tend to find work through their social network (Li 2020) or third party intermediaries and not directly with employers, although they are often working in large multinational, well-known organisations.

In terms of education and skills our findings reflect Torraco (2018) concerning the 'haves' and have nots' and how workers can be trapped in low paying jobs (Jung, Noh, & Kim, 2018). The workers we interviewed possessed many skills but not opportunities to use them and thus remain underemployed (Thompson & Dahling, 2019).

Six themes emerged from the qualitative data:

De-regulation of waged work;

Local labour process;

Use of skills;

Job/Career Aspiration;

Stereotyping and (un)conscious bias.

*Practical importance and implications of research*

It is now time for HRD practitioners to contribute to the call for sustained, fair work opportunities and the understanding of the local skills eco system. For too long workers in Non Standard Employment have been expected to fund their own skills development (Moore & Khan, 2020). A skills eco system challenges this and puts shared responsibility on all stakeholders. Besides hindering the material improvements for marginalised workers, the hitherto ‘conservatism’ of skills agendas can also discourage the development of skills among the very people who need nurturing the most. Quotations such as “skills and college.... it's not for the likes of us” are worrying reminders that systems that only focus on what Thompson & Dahling (2019) call ‘WEIRD’ and ‘POSH’ will cater mainly for their needs and continue to foster skills inequality. With less focus on precarious workers’ situations, millions can go unnoticed in the dark and employers can skulk through the 21<sup>st</sup> century discriminating with impunity. This is even worse for areas such as Liverpool (Houghton, 2020) which already suffer from deprivation (Liverpool City Council, 2020) and high youth unemployment. A broader more all-encompassing and inclusive skills ecosystem might challenge some employers’ views of unskilled precarious workers as homogenous and disposable, and replaced with a view of employees receiving long-term commitment in exchange for their skills. Without investing in skills for the whole labour market, the skills gaps will continue (Khan, 2020). The covid-19 scenario is giving us a preview of what that future will be like.

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## D&I Support

## **Building informal equality alliances: the role of trade union equality representatives in progressing equality and diversity improvements at the workplace**

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### *Overview*

Trade union equality representatives (ERs) are volunteer (unpaid) workplace representatives, who act as sources of specialist support and advice on a range of equality and diversity issues. This research demonstrates how ERs enhance employee voice using a non-traditional avenue, the informal equality alliance. Informal equality alliances are mutually beneficial relationships that can develop between ERs and senior level organisational representatives who are championing equality and diversity on behalf of an employer. Through the formation of such alliances, ERs report being able to give voice to workplace discrimination issues across a range of equality areas; helping to encourage employers to improve their organisational equality and diversity practices in ways that reflect the practical concerns of employees from potentially disadvantaged groups.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Trade unions were encouraged in the early 2000s to introduce ERs into their structures as part of broader policy initiatives to enhance fairness at the workplace which eventually culminated in the passing of the 2010 Equality Act. Although there had been some debate at the time of the Act's passage through Parliament over the benefits of providing statutory support for ERs, a voluntary approach was settled upon, which set the context in which the ER role initially developed (Mamode and Brett, 2015).

This research examines the avenues through which ERs in the contemporary context are able to influence the equality practices of employers. It uses the Activity, Support and Characteristics (ASC) framework (Bacon and Hoque, 2011, 2012) as a lens through which to analyse the factors relevant to ERs' effectiveness at the workplace. Earlier research into the ER role (Bacon and Hoque, 2012) using this framework highlighted the role of ERs in providing individual level representation to union members facing discriminating or harassment at the workplace. Previous research had also suggested a role for ERs in assisting line managers and HR professionals to implement solutions to members' equality related grievances (Bacon and Hoque, 2015; Foster, 2015). This research expands our knowledge about the latter type of activity, focusing on the relationships that ERs make with managerial representatives and seeking a better understanding of how forging informal equality alliances with managers, particularly at senior levels of an organisation, can provide a mechanism for trade union influence outside of formal collective bargaining arrangements.



### *Research methods*

A national web-based survey was distributed to 3,375 union members identified as ERs by their trade union. The survey collected data relating to the activities engaged in by ERs, the support they received from the organisation they worked for as well as from their union and their personal characteristics, alongside their self-ratings of success in influencing their employer's equality practices in respect of six equality strands (gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age). A maximum likelihood ordered probit analysis was conducted on the data derived from the survey that identified a number of factors (organised around the ASC framework) that increased an ERs likelihood of self-reported workplace impact. This quantitative approach was supplemented by a series of qualitative interviews with ERs working in a range of sectors (public, private and not-for profit). A template analysis (King, 2004) of interview data derived from the purposive sample of ERs identified a number of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006) related to the avenues through which ERs reported they were able to positively influence their employer's equality practices.

### *Research findings or argument*

The survey found that almost forty percent of ERs were having at least some degree of impact across all six areas of equality practice. The ordered probit analysis identified that an ER being in contact with managers on a regular basis was a significant factor in predicting the likelihood of an ER positively influencing employer equality practice. The extent to which ERs thought they were valued by managers at their workplace was also found to be a significant support factor associated with ER success.

The template analysis of ER interview data provided new insights into a potential explanation for the association between ER impact and their relationships with managers. A recurring theme in the accounts of ERs who had a high rating for their level of impact on their employer's equality practices was their engagement in informal equality alliances with managerial representatives, enabled by ERs' equality-related expert power (French and Raven, 1959). Informal equality alliances, which are mutually beneficial relationships through which an ER and a managerial representative work together to achieve an equality improvement, were found to exist at two levels: lower level alliances being formed with front-line managers and HR practitioners and higher-level alliances with HR equality and diversity specialists or senior managers who had taken on the role of equality and diversity champions. Through these higher-level alliances ERs were sometimes able to influence, not only day to day line management practices, but the contents of organisational-wide equality and diversity policies.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

Engaging the collective voice of trade unions in developing and implementing workplace equality improvements was highlighted by Dickens (1999) as an important, yet often overlooked element of a tripod of support for equality progress in organisations alongside equality legislation and the business case for change in a

way that all three strands are 'complementary and mutually supportive' (Dickens, 1999:16). This research highlights how the presence of an ER amongst the union representatives at a workplace has the potential not only to enhance the trade union contribution to equality practice but also to strengthen the contributions made by HR and management professionals against the backdrop of the 2010 Equality Act. The research recommends that HR and management professionals seek to work more collaboratively with trade union representatives over equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives where possible and that they consider the opportunities that may be afforded through developing informal equality alliances with trade union equality representatives if they are present within their organisations.

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## **The Importance of Perceived Allyship for Trans Workers' Work Engagement and Life Satisfaction**

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### *Overview*

We examine why perceived trans allyship (a form of social support for trans workers) may facilitate the work engagement and life satisfaction of trans workers. A survey of 196 trans workers in the UK found that perceived trans allyship is connected to trans workers' sense of psychological safety and to experiencing authenticity at work. However, it was psychological safety that mediated the relationship between perceived trans allyship and work engagement, whereas it was authenticity at work that mediated the relationship between perceived trans allyship and life satisfaction. We provide practical recommendations about how to encourage trans allyship in organisations.

### *Research focus, rationale and questions*

Although there has been much progress with LGBT inclusion in the workplace, there remains a significant gap between the inclusion of trans workers compared with gay, lesbian, and bisexual workers. UK workplaces remain far from being trans-inclusive, with many employers unaware of the need to take action, or unclear of how to create a trans-inclusive workplace (Thoroughgood et al., 2020). This is concerning given half of trans people have hidden their identity at work for fear of discrimination and 12% of trans employees report being physically attacked by colleagues or customers in the past year (Stonewall, 2018).

This paper aims to contribute to the impetus for change by demonstrating the value that trans allyship brings to both the individual (in terms of increased life satisfaction) and the organisation (through increased engagement). In short, 'allies are typically non-minorities who use their majority status to enact positive change' (Salter and Migliaccio, 2019). Although the concept of trans allyship is gaining momentum in diversity and inclusion education and practice (e.g., <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace-trans-allies-programme>), there is little academic research that has looked into its potential effects. Therefore we want to see whether perceptions of allyship are indeed related to the psychological experiences of work for trans people and why they might facilitate trans workers' engagement and life satisfaction. We specifically examine two mediating processes that may explain why perceived allyship might facilitate engagement and life satisfaction: i) psychological safety, and ii) authenticity at work. Our hypothesized model is illustrated below and summarises our main hypotheses.



### *Research methods*

One hundred and ninety-six UK trans workers completed an online survey which included the following measures:

- Perceived trans allyship - three items developed by the authors and reviewed by subject matter experts, e.g., 'At work, I feel that my heterosexual/CIS gender colleagues would stand up for me as a trans person'.
- Psychological safety –seven items adapted from Edmondson's (1999) measure, e.g., 'Noone in this organisation would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts'.
- Authenticity at work –six items from van den Bosch & Taris's (2014) measure, e.g., 'I was true to myself at work in most situations'.
- Work Engagement – six items from the UWES-9 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), e.g., 'I am enthusiastic about my job'.
- Life Satisfaction – assessed by the item 'In general, how satisfied are you with your life' (Cheung & Lucas, 2014).
- Control variables: i) extent of transition (1- not intending a transition to 4- completed a transition), ii) overall quality of work relationships (with manager, colleagues, and customers).

### *Research findings or argument*

We used path analysis to test our hypotheses, controlling for the extent to which the individual was undergoing a transition in the way they expressed their gender identity and the perception of the overall quality of work relationships.

There is a significant, positive relationship between perceived trans allyship and psychological safety ( $\beta = .35, p < .001$ ) as well as between perceived trans allyship and authenticity at work ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ). Therefore, hypotheses 1a and 1b are supported.

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Second, psychological safety is significantly and positively associated with work engagement ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ), but authenticity at work is not ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p = .10$ ), thus supporting hypothesis 2a but not hypothesis 2b.

Third, authenticity at work is significantly and positively related to life satisfaction ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ), whereas psychological safety is not ( $\beta = -.01$ ,  $p = .88$ ). This supports hypothesis 3b but not hypothesis 3a.

Finally, we tested the indirect relationships linking perceived trans allyship with work engagement and life satisfaction. For work engagement, psychological safety (but not authenticity at work) is a significant mediator: indirect effect = .04, 95% confidence interval = .001 to .080). In contrast, authenticity at work (but not psychological safety) is a significant mediator for life satisfaction (indirect effect = .04, 95% confidence interval = .005 to .088).

In sum, perceived trans allyship is indirectly related to work engagement via psychological safety, whereas it is indirectly related to life satisfaction via authenticity at work.

### *Practical importance and implications of research*

The findings demonstrate there is notable value in investing in trans allies for the individual in terms of experiencing psychological safety, being able to express their authentic self at work, which in turn help people be engaged at work and satisfied with their life. These are also likely to have positive benefits for the organisation given these psychological experiences are widely evidenced to be connected with organisationally desired outcomes, such as higher levels of performance and lower sickness absence.

There are a number of practices that can support the development of trans allies including:

- formal allies programmes that have a understanding what it means to be an ally in the workplace, and what allyship is not
- education on terminology e.g. gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation
- awareness raising about what being trans in the workplace is like, for example through 'lunch and learn' sessions
- visible signals of support for trans workers such as supporting trans day of visibility

To increase the effect on outcomes, employers can also do more to influence psychological safety and authenticity at work, for example:

- enabling authentic expression of gender identity, such as through ensuring all HR policies, including dress code and family policies, are gender-neutral

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- strengthening psychological safety through anti discrimination and bullying and harassment policies which clearly set out what is unacceptable conduct with examples of behaviours, and the consequences of behaving in these ways

Future research could look more in depth into the subjective experience of allyship using qualitative methods.

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