

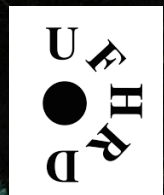
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# The International Journal of HRD:

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In Support of Evidence-Based HRD



*The journal is sponsored by a partnership between the World Federation of People Management Association (WFPMA) & the University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD).*

# About the International Journal of HRD

The International Journal of HRD Practice, Policy & Research is a new peer-reviewed journal which seeks to bring together international practitioner and academic expertise to promote and support the understanding and practice of Human Resource Development.

Much is discussed about bridging the academic practice divide. It is in many ways a false distinction but a challenge nonetheless. Critically, the International Journal of HRD Practice, Policy & Research seeks to approach this challenge from first and foremost a practice perspective. It is a practice centred journal which nonetheless provides the opportunity to synergise practice with theory to develop further insights to inform both disciplines. It offers the critically reflective professional practitioner insight, ideas and understanding on the contemporary issues and challenges facing HRD, its impact and influence. The types of contribution sought are described in more detail in the Contributor Guidelines on our website. Interested contributors are welcome to contact any of the Editorial Board to discuss their ideas.

The journal is sponsored by a partnership between the University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD) and the World Federation of People Management Associations. Formed in 1999 the UFHRD is an

international association for universities, reflective practitioners, and learning oriented organisations. The Forum's mission is to create, develop and inform leading-edge HRD theories and practices by promoting professionally-focused qualifications, co-operative research initiatives and consultancy interventions. The WFPMA is a global network of professionals in people management. It was founded in 1976 to aid the development and improve the effectiveness of professional people management all over the world. Its members are predominantly the continental federations which are made up of more than 90 national human resource associations representing over 660,000 people management professionals.



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# From the guest editor

As Guest Editor my primary role has been to pull together content from contributed materials already accepted for publication by the outgoing Co-Editor-in-Chief, Dr Mark Loon, and contributions submitted prior to the recent arrival of the two newly appointed Co-Editors-in-Chief - Professor Barbara Eversole of Indiana State University (USA) and Dr Janet Firth of the University of Wolverhampton (UK). Hence, there is no specific HRD related subject that provides a single focus to this issue as you the reader might have expected from a guest editor. However, the notion of 'evidence-based HRD' (EBHRD) does provide a common thread of logic that flows throughout the issue. As some of you will appreciate, since the early 1990s I have been a strong advocate of critically reflective, research-informed, and evidence-based practice (EBP) as a means of bridging the much reported 'research-practice gap' in the field of HRD (see Hamlin, Reidy, & Stewart, 1998; Hamlin, 2007; Hamlin, 2016). The notion of EBHRD is consistent with the aims and scope of this Journal; and it was good news to me when the Board of Directors agreed it should become a periodic or even regular theme of the Journal, as discussed in the Perspectives section of this issue. Hence, I anticipate there will be calls from time to time for contributions to future issues that offer perspectives or critical reflections on EBHRD practice. It is likely these calls will be predominantly directed toward evidence based HRD practitioners who wish to share with readers their insights and lessons learned from critically reflecting upon their use of 'best evidence' to inform, shape, and/or critically evaluate their own professional practice as 'people and organizational developers'. However, it is likely that these calls will also be directed toward HRD scholars who engage in collaborative research with organizations, or have previously had their research published in long established/highly ranked HRD-related journals but wish to bring the practical implications of their findings to the attention of a wider population of professional HRD practitioners.

From my perspective, based on my conceptualization of the HRD domain of study

and practice as encapsulated in the definition below, HRD practitioners include: i) professional 'people and organizational development' practitioners (i.e. trainers, talent developers, TD practitioners, learning leaders; T&D/L&D practitioners/officers/advisors/specialists, learning design specialists, LMD advisors/external consultants, coach/mentors, OD specialists, etc); and ii) executive leaders/managers (i.e. top, senior, middle, and first line/supervisory managers) who also perform or engage in various HRD roles and activities as part of their professional practice (See Lundgren & Poell, 2022).

HRD is: "the study or practice concerned with the diagnosis of performance-related behaviour change requirements at the individual, group, and organizational level within any host entity, and the design, delivery, and evaluation of formal and/or informal learning activities to meet the identified needs"

(Copyright © r.g.hamlin, 2017).

In the Articles section of this issue there are four papers that present and discuss research findings which could be used as 'best evidence' to help inform, shape, and/or critically evaluate EBHRD practice. The first paper is from Michael Noonan, Pei Yi-Wang, Winnie Wong, and Venesser Fernandes who explored how school principals in Australia steered their school communities through the COVID-19 pandemic using an "agile approach and mindset" as a crisis management tool. These authors describe how they developed a "model of agile mentality" for education. Their paper illustrates six areas where an agile approach can lead to significant shifts in school operations by encouraging school principals to think and act strategically, and thereby sustain quality outcomes for students, staff, and the wider community. They suggest the model could be used by evidence-based school principals to develop an "agile school", and by HRD professionals in the education sector who are involved in training school principals to become 'agile leaders'

The second paper is from Oluwole Shokunbi, Olugbenga Akintola, and Clare Taylor who explored the level of employee engagement in

one of the largest university teaching hospitals in Nigeria by measuring and analysing three dimensions – vigour, dedication, and absorption. The study revealed low levels of engagement and suggested there was an urgent need for a strategic plan of action focused on improving employee engagement to enhance productivity, safety, positive patient experience, and the level of employee absenteeism. The results of this piece of applied research are illustrative of one type of 'hard facts' that Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) argue managers need to use as 'best evidence' to inform evidence-based management practice.

The third paper is from Jenni Jones and Sally Kah who, as part of a transnational comparative study of HRD practice within the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), and the Netherlands (NL) (see Kah, Jones, Hamlin, et al., 2022), explored the role of the HRD function as perceived by employees, managers, and HRD practitioners within UK public and private sector organizations. They found most employees and managers saw HRD as an 'operational' function focused primarily if not solely on 'learning and development' (L&D), with no role involvement in strategic organizational change and development. In sharp contrast, HRD professionals saw themselves as having strategic influence, or they expressed an aspiration to play a strategic role but were significantly deterred by the mindset of their colleague managers. The study findings suggest that for the HRD function to maximize its contribution to organizational effectiveness, HRD professionals need to be more effective in: i) making clear HRD's scope, ii) clarifying how they create strategic value; iii) positioning their role within their own respective organizations; and iv) managing their colleague managers' expectations of the HRD function and the strategic as well as operational contributions they can make. However, despite such initiatives being taken by HRD professionals, I suggest significant changes in the mindset of managers will only come about through specific concomitant management education and training that focuses on giving managers a better understanding of the critical contribution that HRD can play in bringing about effective and beneficial strategic change within organizations. Furthermore, managers need to better understand the specific HRD investment and effort they themselves need to expend, with help from HRD professionals as necessary, to ensure the achievement of long-term sustainable business success.

The fourth paper is from Alejandro Rios who explored through the prism of Western corporate governance theory the characteristics of board directors of companies listed on the Mexican Stock Exchange. Specifically, he used, and thereby tested, Hambrick et al.'s (2015) "Quad Model" which specifies four essential qualities that members of a board of directors (BoD) need to possess to effectively monitor CEOs and the management of US Stock Exchange Commission (SEC) regulated companies, namely Independence, Expertise, Bandwidth, and Motivation. Of the 95 non-SEC Mexican companies studied, he found 39% (n= 37) had BoDs with either two or three "quad qualified directors" in membership, but only 17% (n=16) of these companies were amongst the 40 that had performed above the average financial "total return to shareholders" (TRS) metric. This finding brings into question the validity, relevance, and transferability to non-Western countries of certain US derived theories and models. Additionally, Alejandro's study offers other important insights into the realities of corporate governance in Mexican companies, including for example that a large majority of board directors are not entirely separated from their respective company and its CEO, and that most BoD chairs are highly related to the company through family ties. The overall outcome is a body of 'best evidence' that could be used by HR(HRM/HRD) professionals to inform policy and practice on the selection, evaluation, and training of Mexican company board directors. Alejandro's study suggests there is a need for indigenous research studies designed specifically to develop Mexican derived theories and models that may provide more complete and/or better understanding of Mexican business and management practice.

The fifth paper is from Robert (Bob) G. Hamlin who offers an example of HRD-related theory development through empirical generalization replication research. Specifically, he discusses the research process of a multiple cross-case/cross-sector/cross-nation comparative analysis of empirical findings obtained from 15 emic qualitative replication studies of effective and ineffective managerial behaviour, as observed, and judged by managers and non-managerial employees within private, public, and third (non-profit) organizations in seven culturally diverse countries. His analysis has resulted in the emergence of a two-factor "universalistic behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial

and leadership effectiveness” comprising eight positive (effective) and six negative (ineffective) generic behavioural criteria. These criteria could be used by HRD practitioners as ‘best evidence’ in various culturally diverse countries to inform, shape, or critically evaluate extant management and leadership development (MLD) provision, or to develop new MLD competency frameworks and training programmes.

In the Perspectives section of this issue I outline the notion of EBHRD and introduce the concept of “critical reflective case histories” of EBP within the HRD domain of practice. Such case histories offer the opportunity for evidence based HRD practitioners and other “people and organizational development” professionals to share with readers significant insights and lessons learned from the successful use of HRD-related theories, models, frameworks, or taxonomies to inform, shape, or critically evaluate their own professional practice. In addition, I present a set of guidelines for writing a critical reflective case history; and this is followed by three varied examples to illustrate different ways the guidelines can be applied.

The first case history is from myself (Bob Hamlin); it describes how the Executive Head of a major non-ministerial governmental department within the British Civil Service commissioned an academically rigorous study of managerial behaviour observed and judged effective or ineffective by a large sample of his managers and non-managerial staff, and how he used the findings as an organization development (OD) instrument to bring about strategic change in the management culture. This was achieved primarily by: i) his managers at an annual management conference being confronted with the organization-specific evidence regarding managerial behaviours that were widely valued, compared to those considered inappropriate for managing effectively in the new emergent ‘flexible’ bureaucracy; ii) groups of his managers in follow-up syndicate workshops being tasked to consider in depth various aspects of the evidence and to identify ways of increasing the effective and eliminating the ineffective managerial behaviours; and iii) the evidence being used to

develop “self-analysis frameworks tools” to help bring about further change in the management culture of the organization.

The second case history is from Rick Holden and Bob Morton who offer a reflective account of EBP in relation to the leadership and management of organizational culture change within a large well-established manufacturing plant in the UK which has had a history of takeover and acquisition. They explain the culture change journey taken by one of them with the managers of the organization from 2013 to the onset of the Covid Pandemic in 2020, and the formal and evidence based HRD-related initiatives deployed. The case history provides insights into the sorts of critical reflective conversations about leading and managing organizational change that need to take place which, appropriately informed by both theory and the knowledge and experience of those ‘living the organization’, can enrich understanding of the challenges faced by managers, HRD practitioners, OD consultants, and other organizational change agents.

The third case history is from Jim Stewart who provides an account of a recent evidence based Senior Leaders Development Programme (SLDP) initiative within a large British National Health Service Trust. The SLDP was informed by an “integrated model of leadership development” derived from empirical research conducted by staff at a UK business school. The model defines leadership as “a collective willingness to tackle wicked issues”. By applying its underlying principles, managers within the Trust were better able to identify the barriers to, and enablers of, the translation of learning to their own leadership practice. This in turn enabled them to take the required actions to resolve the identified organization wide ‘wicked issues’ and thereby bring about effective local level organizational change. The case history closes with several reflective observations and insights regarding the merits of evidence-based leadership development.

A call for critical reflective case histories is made in the Perspectives section of this issue.

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## About the guest editor



### Robert (Bob) G. Hamlin

Bob is Emeritus Professor of Human Resource Development, University of Wolverhampton, UK. His main research interest focuses on perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness within public and private sector organizations within the UK and 17 other countries. Bob has authored/co-authored 52 peer-reviewed journal articles and contributed 32 chapters to various HRD-related books. He is author of *Universalistic Models of Managerial and Leadership Effectiveness* (VDM Verlag Dr Muller, 2009), and lead co-editor of *Organizational Change and Development: A reflective guide for managers, trainers and developers* (FT Prentice Hall, 2001) and *Evidence-Based Initiatives for Organizational Change and Development* (IGI Global, 2019).



# Leading through crisis: An agile mentality for education organisations

Michael Noonan, Pei Yi-Wang, Winnie Wong & Venesser Fernandes

## Abstract

Software development's agile approach to project management is increasingly used across various industries due to its attractiveness as a management tool for modern, high speed, and sometimes 'crisis like', business environments. However, explorations into the agile approach and mentality and its effects on education organisations are scarce, in both theory and practice. So too is research on the possibility of agile as a crisis management tool.

To understand how Australian school principals steered their school communities through the COVID-19 crisis, we conducted qualitative research with 42 Victorian Independent school principals in late 2020. By employing a mixture of multiple inductive and deductive coding iterations in our thematic analysis of principals' experiences, we re-constructed the extent to which an agility mentality was used in schools to combat a major crisis, and developed a model of an agile mentality for education that illustrates six areas where an agile approach created a significant shift in school operations.

We argue that an agility mentality enables school leaders to not only adjust and adapt to new circumstances, but also encourages them to think and act strategically to sustain quality outcomes for students, staff, and the wider community.

## Introduction

A major crisis usually spreads across an organisation like wildfire creating a loss of control, system failure, and significant consequences for leaders (Betta & Owczarzak-Skomra, 2019). With its emphasis on embracing uncertainty to achieve results in a dynamic environment, the agile approach to project management originating from software development (Beck, Beedle, Van

Bennekum et al., 2001), appears tailor-made for managing a crisis (Betta & Owczarzak-Skomra, 2019; Dybå, & Dingsøyr, 2008; Wischweh, 2019).

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic created a major crisis in Victorian Independent schools, forcing them to adapt their education business model overnight when Melbourne was plunged into a series of lockdowns that covered most of the academic year (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2020; Wright, 2021). These schools, which are highly regulated, complex, multi-faceted organisations (Hawkins & James, 2018), were challenged to find ways to upskill teachers to deliver remote learning to thousands of families, while ensuring that students remained connected to their peers and their learning (Flack, Walker, Bickerstaff et al., 2020). To understand how school principals managed and led their school communities through the COVID-19 crisis, we conducted qualitative research based on 42 in-depth interviews with a sample of Victorian Independent school principals in late 2020.

In this paper, we explore how Victorian Independent schools responded to the external shock of COVID-19 and argue that the adoption of agile practices and an agile mentality was a natural response in a time of crisis and may be an effective form of crisis management. We present evidence that due to their management of the crisis, these schools became highly 'agile organisations' and discuss the impact of this agility and how schools changed as a result. Based on our findings, we propose a model that illustrates the practices that emerge from an agile 'education' organisation, or an 'agile school'. We conclude by maintaining that this model may become increasingly important as an alternative leadership model in schools operating in a volatile and complex environment, but caution that this agility and ability to respond

Articles

quickly to change should not be at the expense of a quality education.

## Literature review

### The origins of 'agile'

Although the concept of agile is associated with evolution within the software development world, the origins of agile thinking can be traced back a few decades (Abbas, Gravell & Wills, 2008; Prange & Heracleous, 2018; Rigby, Sutherland & Takeuchi, 2016; Whiteley, Pollack & Matous, 2019; Serrador & Pinto, 2015). However, it was not until the turn of the century when a group of software practitioners created the 'Agile Manifesto' that the concept was fully formed. The manifesto, developed by Beck et al. (2001) in response to limitations of traditional waterfall approaches to project management, proclaims four core agile values:

- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.
- Working software over comprehensive documentation.
- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation.
- Responding to change over following a plan.

Unlike sequential approaches to creating software, agile development is contingent on early and constant customer engagement to iteratively accommodate, adjust, and maximise end-user values and benefits (Brown, Nord & Ozkaya, 2010; Margherita, Sharifi & Caforio, 2020; Serrador & Pinto, 2015).

Because of its natural fluidity and vagueness (Denning, 2018a; Moore, 2017), there have been several criticisms levelled at the agile method, typically based on one of five claims:

- The lack of planning leads to design issues (McBreen, 2003; Stephens & Rosenberg, 2003).
- Its suitability to small teams but incompatibility to larger enterprises (Asnawi, Gravell & Wills, 2011; Cohen, Lindvall & Costa, 2004).
- The lack of scientific evidence concerning its effectiveness (McBreen, 2003).
- Agile practices are difficult to understand and implement (Keefer, 2003).
- Agile is merely one of many managerial fads (Denning, 2015, 2018b; Kupersmith, 2011).

Regardless of the critiques of agile as a methodology, the approach has steadily gained popularity as a viable project management and leadership approach and diverged into other industries (Madsen, 2020; Nyce, 2017)

### An agile mentality and 'agile organisations'

Agile can be viewed as an attitude or belief more than a methodology. Conboy (2009), for example, points out that agile is a "philosophy" as much as a method, while Boehm and Turner (2004) view agile as a mentality that enables:

[The] athlete to make the unexpected play, musicians to improvise and ornament, craftsmen to evolve their style, and engineers to adjust to changing technology and needs (p. 1).

Miler and Gaida (2019) are more explicit, arguing that agile is more than a set of tools and processes but a "particular attitude, way of thinking and behaviour" (p. 841). It is this agile mindset (Broza, 2015), more than the application of the method, which has attracted attention as a management concept in many non-software industries (Accardi-Petersen, 2012; Madsen, 2020; Nyce, 2017; Nuottila, Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016; Rigby & Bilodeau, 2018; Rigby, Berez, Caimi et al., 2015). Rigby and Bilodeau's 2017 survey of more than 1,200 managers included agile management in its 25 most popular management tools (Rigby & Bilodeau, 2018), commenting that many companies are:

Turning novel management and organisational concepts into operational realities as they move away from hierarchical structures and embrace agile management (Rigby & Bilodeau, 2018, p. 1).

Madsen (2020) provides a justification for the growing acceptance of an agile mentality and agile practices in non-software industries, arguing that the modern, digital world has created the necessary conditions for agile to prosper in business environments. Enhanced complexity and unpredictability in the business world requires organisations to become more dynamic, more innovative, and more flexible to keep pace. Madsen's argument is that the agile concept "fits well with the new zeitgeist, which has been dominant in the business community since the early 2000s" (Madsen, 2020, p. 4).

Management's attraction to the agile method has allowed additional concepts of agility to emerge, including agile leadership and organisational agility (Desouza, 2006; Gunsberg,

Callow, Ryan et al., 2018; Sherehiy, Karwowski & Layer, 2007). Organisational agility, defined by Plumber and McCoy (2006, p. 1) as "the ability of an organisation to sense or create environmental change and respond efficiently and effectively to that change", is concerned with employing agile practices across an organisation. While there is contention about the agreed definition of organisational agility (Gunsberg et al., 2108; Sherehiy et al., 2007; Wendler & Stahlke, 2014), Desouza (2006) offers four essential qualities for determining if an organisation is agile:

Being agile will result in the ability to (1) sense signals in the environment, (2) process them adequately, (3) mobilise resources and processes to take advantage of future opportunities, and (4) continuously learn and improve the operations of the organisation (p. xiii).

Agile leadership maintains that leaders require certain characteristics and competencies to thrive in complex environments (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). According to Akkaya and Yazici (2020), these characteristics include collaboration, self-awareness, proficiency, flexibility, ability to change and quickness. A second strand of the literature emphasises the leadership practices to create an agile organisation, such as understanding the right conditions to adopt an agile approach (Rigby et al., 2016).

Concepts such as agile leadership and agile organisations allow the initial software idea of agile to flow to other industries. In what Bennett

and Lemoine (2014) argue is an escalating volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, the appeal for leaders and entire organisations to operate with an agile mentality becomes more pronounced. Particularly as volatility and complexity rise in times of crisis.

### Similarities between agile and crisis management

A crisis comes in many shapes and sizes with consequences that differ from person to person, organisation to organisation, and country to country. However, there are certain features common across crisis situations including instability, a loss of control, system imbalance, and serious ramifications (Betta & Owczarzak-Skomra, 2019). Da Silva et al. (2017, p. 26) provide a useful definition of a crisis as "an abnormal situation, usually resulting from an instability that impacts a part of society with unacceptable consequences".

Standard approaches to crisis management focus on preparation, beginning with the behaviours and decisions an organisation makes to prepare for and mitigate against a crisis, before moving into the response and recovery phase (Vardarlier, 2016). However, a linear approach to crisis management is difficult to implement and responses will necessarily be dynamic and imperfect. Harris's (2020) view on crisis management recognises this reality, stressing that making mistakes is a predictable part of the process to manage the unknown at a rapid pace. She argues that:



leading through a crisis is inherently imperfect, mistakes will be made, but it is the forward momentum that is critically important and the key to getting through the most challenging of times (Harris, 2020, p. 322).

The similarities between the conditions that led to the emergence of the agile approach and a crisis are obvious. One of the original developers of the Agile Manifesto, Robert Martin (cited in Wischweh, 2019), proposes that agile was born out of crisis itself, while Dybå, & Dingsøyr (2008) argue one of the strengths of agile is that it addresses the

in emergency remote learning for varied periods during the pandemic. Students in Victoria endured over 200 days of remote learning due to four state-wide hard lockdowns between 2020 and 2021 (Clayton, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). Such disruptions were not only challenging for school leaders, students, and teachers in terms of teaching and learning outcomes, but also have widespread social-emotional, mental, and physical health ramifications (Flack et al., 2020; Varadharajan, 2020).

leaders—whether principals or teachers—to adapt to changing demands, and seek unique solutions in partnership with colleagues and peers.

In a more recent study, Nissim and Simon (2020) found that the successful transition from face-to-face education to remote learning under emergency conditions doesn't necessarily equate to quality education. For example, student satisfaction can be compromised due to uncertainty, social isolation, and distress even if all educational activity were swiftly transferred to an online setting. Therefore, to only focus on moving quickly to provide a solution for minimising disruptions in education without incorporating contextualising factors such as student wellbeing, learning needs, home environment, teachers' capacity, stress, and lack of concentration, agile practices can be counterproductive.

If an agile approach is, as Betta and Owczarzak-Skomra (2019) suggest, a possible form of crisis management, what evidence is there of an adoption of an agile mindset and agile practices across an industry like education during an unprecedented crisis? And if schools did adopt an agile mentality and use agile as a crisis management tool, what would be the effects on the education and model at the school? Our study into the organisational leadership approaches taken by Victorian Independent school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic provides the opportunity to test some of the assumptions on agile inherent within the literature.

## Method

This study is a collaborative research project between Independent Schools Victoria and the Faculty of Education, Monash University that explored how Independent school principals managed the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative data was collected across 42 principal interviews between October and December 2020. Interviewers used a semi-structured discussion guide and each interview was recorded and transcribed.

We employed a mixture of inductive and deductive coding through multiple iterations to, as Saldaña (2002, p. 2) suggests, delineate different “pools” and “ponds” emerging from the qualitative data. In our first iteration of coding, we analysed each interview transcript and coded the data in a thematic, descriptive way. This inductive approach allowed us to broadly categorise principals' lived experiences of the pandemic.

In the second iteration, we examined the data

to pursue a particular theoretical proposition: how agility is applied in a school setting. We adopted an “explicitly analyst driven” deductive method (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84), where we searched relevant literature on agile and incorporated or developed a set of codes that establish an ‘agile mentality’, including the values present in the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001) and literature on agile practices. Using these codes, we further delineated 13 schools (the ‘ponds’) that came across as most agile from our sample (the ‘pool’).

**Table 1**

Overview of the coding approach

Stage	Coding approach
Thematic analysis of interview transcripts	Data coded into themes and sub themes, including the global theme of ‘agility and adaptability’
Recording of agility and adaptability sub themes to agile values	Data reduced to 119 comments on adaptability and agility which were then recoded to align with the four agile values
Identification of agile practices	Data reduced to 108 comments that were recoded for evidence of agile practices used to manage the crisis
Identification of agile schools	Data analysed to provide a count of agile values and practices in use at each school, schools above the 70th percentile identified as most agile for analysis

Finally, we used process coding to explore the experiences of these 13 schools in our last coding iteration to illustrate how agile practices can be applied in an educational context.

## Results

From our initial thematic analysis, we attributed the code ‘agility or adaptability’ to 119 comments provided by 39 of 42 principals. We then aligned these comments with the four agile values contained within the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001). The assumptions we made in conducting this alignment are contained in Table 2.

# A crisis comes in many shapes and sizes with consequences that differ from person to person, organisation to organisation, and country to country.

challenge of an unpredictable world. Betta and Owczarzak-Skomra (2019, p. 317) have conducted a comparative analysis of the main features of a crisis and the four values underpinning the agile approach, concluding that there is “close congruency” between the two that:

can be explained by the dynamic development of IT technologies, their resulting short lifetime, and consequently the impatience of customer, rapid changes of their needs concerning the final product, lack of time and serious consequences of a possible failure” (Betta & Owczarzak-Skomra, 2019, p. 317).

They argue that not only is there a compatibility with crisis management features and agile methodologies, a new approach to crisis management built on agile has the potential to “deformalize” and “practically eliminate bureaucracy” (Betta & Owczarzak-Skomra, 2019, p. 318).

### COVID-19: A major crisis for schools

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. As of 6 July 2021, more than 183 million people have been infected and close to four million people have died worldwide (WHO, 2021). Like many sectors and industries, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted education in unprecedented ways.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), over 191 countries have experienced national school closures (UNESCO, 2021). Over 1.5 billion students worldwide were forced to engage

### School leadership in an agile time

School leadership has followed three dominant models over the last half century (Hallinger, 1992). Hallinger's (1992) research found that managerial leadership was the dominant leadership approach in schools throughout the 1960s and 1970s, before instructional leadership took over during the 1980s. This was replaced in the 1990s by transformational leadership. Bush and Glover (2014) state that more recently, “distributed leadership has become the normatively preferred leadership model in the twenty-first century” (p. 560). Many school leadership models predominately focus on the relational aspects and the personal/interpersonal role of the principal, who, Grace (1995, p. 50) maintains are “powerful definers of the culture, organisation and ethos” of a school. Under this interpretation of school leadership, concepts such as leadership style, personal characteristics and competencies, philosophy and values are often used to define success (Drysdale, Goode & Gurr, 2009; Gregorzewski, Schratz & Wiesner, 2018).

While the concept of agility is increasingly used in organisational practices, explorations into the agile approach in an educational context remains scant in theory and practice. Existing studies on agile practices in schools mainly focus on learning agility. For example, Howard (2017) suggests that there is a need for teachers to be agile in their learning and delivery to keep up with new educational situations. In a similar vein, Breakspear et al. (2017, p. v) suggests that:

developing “agile leaders of learning” enables improved understanding of complexity, and helps

**Table 2**

Assumptions underpinning the alignment of initial codes with the agile values

Agile value	Assumptions made in the coding
Individuals and interactions over processes and tools	Themes associated with concentrating on people (i.e. engaging stakeholders, or stakeholder wellbeing and mental health)
Working software over comprehensive documentation	Themes focusing on the delivery of education that is valuable to families (i.e. quality remote learning, and new and novel approaches in response to the pandemic)
Customer collaboration over contract negotiation	Themes associated with collaboration with staff, students, and families (i.e. distributed or agile leadership)
Responding to change over following a plan	Themes demonstrating a willingness to embrace change and disrupt existing planning (i.e. viewing change as an opportunity, not a threat)

When investigating how principals led their school through the COVID-19 crisis, two-thirds of the comments coded under agility and adaptability related to the agile values of responding to change (42.9 per cent) or customer collaboration (26.1 per cent).

**Table 3**

Count of agile values present in the data set

Agile value	Count	% of total
Individuals and interactions over processes and tools	14	11.8%
Working software over contract negotiation comprehensive documentation	12	10.1%
Customer collaboration over contract negotiation	31	26.1%
Responding to change over following a plan	51	42.9%
Not applicable	11	9.2%

Distilling research into agile methods from several papers (see: Diebold & Dahlem, 2014; Pikkarainen, Haikara, Salo et al., 2008; Holmström, Fitzgerald, Ågerfalk et al., 2006; Sidky, Arthur & Bohner, 2007; Miler & Gaida, 2019), we identified a set of agile practices that illustrate when an agile approach is in use (see Table 5). We then analysed the 108 comments deemed to align with an agile mentality and examined each code for evidence of agile practices. This analysis was pursued to determine the extent to which an agile method was used to combat the crisis.

**Table 4**

Existence of evidence of agile practices within the data set

Was there evidence of the use of agile practices?	Count	% of total
Yes	73	67.6%
No	35	32.4%
Total	108	100%

Of the 108 instances where we saw alignment with an agile mentality, two-thirds (68 per cent) showed evidence of using agile practice(s) within their processes and procedures to manage the crisis.

**Table 5**

Count of agile practices within the data set

Agile practice*	Count	% of total
Short iterations / regular meetings	25	22.3%
Collaborating with users	22	19.6%
Value based priorities	14	12.5%
Rapid feedback from customers	12	10.7%
Innovation / embracing change	11	9.8%
Regular reflection	11	9.8%
Effective communication	6	5.4%
Rapid response to change	6	5.4%
Cross-functional teams	5	4.5%
Total	112	100%

\*Some comments related to more than one agile practice.

The most common practices in place were short planning iterations and regular meeting cycles (22 per cent), typically associated with an agile Scrum or eXtreme Programming methodology (Salza, Musmarra & Ferrucci, 2019), collaboration with

users (20 per cent), setting priorities based on the return value of the effort (13 per cent), and a cycle of collecting rapid feedback from customers (11 per cent). While we do not suggest that these schools implemented an agile methodology in its truest 'software development' form, we propose that the evidence of agile practices demonstrates the adoption of an agile mentality in the face of extreme crisis and uncertainty.

In summary, in 34 of 39 schools, there was evidence of at least one agile practice employed to manage the effects of COVID-19. We then counted the agile values and practices present at each school and ordered the data into deciles to determine which schools were more 'agile' in their response to the pandemic. Using the 70th percentile as a cut off we reduced the data down to 13 schools to explore the impact of implementing agile practices during a time of crisis on the school community.

Building on the previous two iterations of coding, our final iteration employed process coding to observe repetitive patterns and interconnections across activities and behaviours (Saldaña, 2015). By re-examining data and identifying emerging themes articulated in these 13 schools, we documented several processes that illustrate what an agile mentality would look like in an educational context. All accumulative codes used in this study are listed in Table 6.





**Table 6**

Codes used to capture emerging themes in this study

Codes in Iteration One (Principals' experiences in general)	Codes in Iteration Two (Principals' experiences with an agile focus)	Codes in Iteration Three (Evidence informing an agile mentality in an educational context)
Agility and adaptability	<b>Agile values:</b>	Improving mental health and wellbeing support using a holistic approach
Community	Individuals and interactions	Recognising different learning needs
Education outcomes	Working software	Strengthening school communities through collaboration
Evidence based	Customer collaboration	Empowering staff and emphasising teamwork
Financial challenges	Responding to change	Embracing new ways of teaching and learning
Government issues	<b>Agile practices:</b>	Being the change and increasing flexibility and responsiveness
Government support	Collaborating with users	
Leadership	Cross functional teams	
Network support	Effective communication	
Operational challenges	Innovation / embracing change	
People management, communication, and relationships	Rapid feedback from customers	
Perception of principal's leadership	Rapid response to change	
Principal wellbeing	Regular reflection	
Remote learning	Short iterations / regular meetings	
Resources and support	Value based priorities	
School culture		
School strategy		
School structure		
School sustainability		
Staff development		
Teaching pedagogy		
Technology		
Wellbeing		

Through this iterative process, we found some common and consistent agile actions evident in our dataset. For instance, school principals that demonstrated high levels of agility tended to tackle mental health and wellbeing issues holistically by considering other interconnected circumstantial factors. These principals also recognised that one-size-fits-all learning models were ineffective during the pandemic and saw parents as co-educators when the lounge room became the classroom.

Another prevalent theme was that these 13 school principals consistently emphasised collective goals and highlighted the importance of teamwork and collaboration. They also demonstrated the importance of flexibility, not only concerning their delivery of teaching and learning, but by becoming more proactive in responding to challenges and uncertainties.

## Discussion and implications

Our study provided an opportunity to investigate how school leaders dealt with a once-in-a-lifetime crisis. It also offered the chance to explore what aspects of the agile approach can assist school leaders to manage a crisis and to determine the effect of using an agile approach on school operations.

The findings showed that 34 of 39 schools employed at least one agile practice to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. For the 13 schools we have focused on in this paper, an agile approach became the key method for crisis management and crisis leadership, with agile practices occurring more frequently than in other sites:

We come together as a team at the end of the day, for ten minutes, just to quickly look at that. And then we would do everything else, kind of via Zoom, where it was team meetings or bigger kind of school huddles. Oh, absolutely, yes. We made multiple, multiple changes across just about every aspect of our operation. So I don't think that there was one thing that was untouched by COVID, in the way that we operated (Principal, school 14).

While these 13 principals adopted an agile approach, when asked to define agility none mentioned the agile movement originating in the software development world. This lack of awareness of the agile model highlights the potential of an agile approach as an alternative mode of crisis management by demonstrating that in this case, agile practices were a natural response.

Why did an agile approach thrive in these 13 schools? Because the COVID-19 pandemic created

the right environment for an agile mentality to blossom. The crisis disrupted the entire school community, creating what Rigby et al. (2016, p. 8) would describe as “problems that are complex, solutions that are unknown” and a “scope that isn't clearly defined”. While most principals are adept at crisis planning, the nature of this crisis forced significant changes to school leadership to match the external environment. All 13 principals commented that their leadership style altered during the pandemic. When asked to elaborate, the principals typically nominated one or more of the agile leadership characteristics promoted by Akkaya and Yazici (2020) (collaboration, self-awareness, proficiency, flexibility, ability to change, and quickness), as examples of the transformation of their leadership style.

In these schools, where leaders adopted agile practices and values, we found substantial evidence that demonstrated the characteristics of an agile organisation as defined by Desouza (2006). These ‘agile schools’ were sensing the signals in the environment, processing them and mobilising resources to harness opportunities, and reflecting and learning on the results:

Just a real increase in the need to be very flexible, very responsive, and to respond to things on short timelines, and having to predict and reforecast things on almost a daily basis sometimes. That may change in four weeks' time. So, I think it's important to not try too hard to predict everything. And actually, learn to go with the flow, and manage day by day the best that we can, and understand that our world is not the same at the moment. And it may never go back to what we thought was normal either (Principal, school 10).

We argue that due to their management of the crisis, these schools became highly ‘agile organisations’. Of greater interest and implication emerging from this surge of organisational agility is how schools changed as a result. We now highlight significant shifts where we can see an impact of this agile approach.

### Holistic approaches to mental health and wellbeing

During the pandemic the 13 school principals typically adopted the agile value of individuals and interactions over processes and tended to see the importance of mental health as integral to learning.

I want my children happy, safe and secure, and that's when all the learning can happen (Principal, school 33).

This resulted in less emphasis on academic results and more focus on shifting teachers' priorities to maintain a balance between learning outcomes and connection to the real world. For instance, schools increasingly weighed personal struggles and external factors when designing and implementing learning models.

Their [teachers] concern is how do we write reports, how do we do our assessments, adding that extra strain. So we've said to them that's not the priority, it's looking after the children and the children's wellbeing and your wellbeing (Principal, school 33).

A holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing emphasises compassion. Some schools regularly maintained human connections through conversations with people in the school community, others used a more methodical approach by using evidence-based data to better understand students' wellbeing needs and sought professional advice on and relevant information on coping strategies.

As a result of implementing a people first mentality, these 13 agile schools and their leaders were able to increase the level of emotional and practical wellbeing support for staff by being aware of teachers' fatigue and emotional vulnerability, and that angst, nerves, concern, and alarm can stem from uncertainty. Principals also recognised the importance of selfcare and the potential long-term impacts of the pandemic (such as residual stress) during the transition to a COVID-normal phase.

### Recognising different learning needs

One principal stated that to prepare young people for the future, it is important for schools to aim beyond academic results and emphasise how students acquire the "skills, capabilities, and understandings that go beyond the classroom" (Principal, school 35). Our analysis found that school principals that practiced agility frequently recognised the importance of reimagining the teacher's role during the crisis to improve student agency.

Focus on the process of learning how to be learners, then any skill deficit or content deficit that was going to happen during that time, we could make up once we had less interruptions to our teaching (Principal, school 6).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for class curriculum and learning opportunities to be tailored to individual students. These 13 agile school principals demonstrated flexibility in their teaching and learning methods and a willingness

to increase individualised approaches as some students thrived in an online learning environment while others did not.

There are children who actually love being at home and quiet and in control of their environment. And there are others who are very social and need that interaction (Principal, school 25).

Remote learning created significant challenges to providing quality education for international students and students with disabilities. Therefore, to be agile, school principals needed to trial different programmes and strategies, and constantly evaluate and modify pedagogical approaches to understand what works.

### Strengthening school communities through collaboration

Principals in the 13 agile schools concentrated on creating parents as learning partners to support students to become independent learners at home. Thus, these school principals altered their methods for interacting with parents to create a shared understanding of the importance of fostering ongoing partnerships to provide a quality education.

Make specific times with the parents who were struggling, to meet them one-on-one and talk to them about, basically, child behaviour, management of home, and how to set up their home in a way that enabled the children to be more independent (Principal, school 25).

Many principals increased contact with parents through briefings, newsletters, videos, etc. to keep their school communities up to date. These leaders also conducted survey 'pulse checks', set up online parent-teacher interviews, launched online assemblies, and utilised streaming services to maintain connection among the school community. This ensured that they were well positioned to understand the needs of the community and respond effectively during a crisis.

### Empowering staff and emphasising teamwork

Consistent with the agile values and principles inherent in the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001), principals in the 13 agile schools typically engaged staff in various decision-making processes using small teams and short iterations. Not only were these principals collaborative, but they were self-aware and conscious about developing and nurturing a culture of trust and support, both leadership traits identified by Akkaya and Yazici

(2020) as demonstrating agile leadership.

I certainly deliberately tried to message in my communications with staff, that I trusted their professional integrity, that I wasn't going to monitor them. That if they needed to take a day not teaching their class, but marking the roll, because they had three young kids at home, but their kids had the work to do, that provided they got through what they needed to get through and there was regular communication, there was an increased level of trust (Principal, school 6).

Our analysis uncovered several examples of principals encouraging staff to ask questions, seek help, and show vulnerabilities, including voicing fears and anxieties, to enable the creation of tailored support for staff.

I think in terms of responding to the staff, in the same way it has been helpful in making sure that everybody has felt looked after and responded to their individual needs as well (Principal, school 29).

Regular short communication techniques typically associated with agile methodologies such as Scrum and eXtreme Programming (Salza et al., 2019), were common practices principals implemented to manage the crisis. Such approaches to communication helped staff become more comfortable, if not more confident, in dealing with uncertainty.

Communicate, communicate, communicate. We did that quite early on, and I could see a lot of other principals doing the same. Even if you didn't have all the pieces of the puzzle yet, being very open and transparent about that, and saying, we don't have all the pieces of the puzzle yet, and this is what we know right now (Principal, school 29).

Collectively, agile schools and leaders recognised the need to rework and simplify communication, maintain personal contact and document inquiries

consistently during the pandemic. As a result, their communication strategies and directions to staff, students, and families became more straightforward, succinct, and clear.

### Embracing new ways of teaching and learning

While some schools were investigating online learning pre-pandemic, the COVID-19 crisis forced the adoption of blended or hybrid learning on all schools.

I think it's forced a lot of organisations who might have put online learning in the too hard basket, to say, it actually is feasible. And because everyone was forced to do it, you can now look at it and say, actually, it's really doable, and it can make things a lot easier for people to be able to access certain information as well (Principal, school 29).

Compelled to rely on digital platforms to maintain connection with students, agile principals sought out the opportunities the crisis created, which according to Desouza (2006) is a sign of an agile organisation. For example, schools identified new possibilities to engage certain students outside of conventional classrooms.

We saw a different group of students come to the fore, and we saw students who had struggled to engage physically, engaging online. The pandemic was a game-changer (Principal, school 10).

Principals often explored different school operation models including staggering start and finishing times. One principal considered changing school days in future to accommodate student needs.

I know some schools have a later start for adolescents because the sleep rhythms show that they function better from say 11 o'clock onwards. At the moment, we have our bell times because that's when the buses come, but that's not a logical reason for having our

Figure 1

Proposed model of an agile mentality for an education organisation

Mental health & wellbeng	Personalised learning	Parents as co-educators	Teamwork & distributed leadership	Hybrid/blended learning	Being the change
<i>over</i>	<i>over</i>	<i>over</i>	<i>over</i>	<i>over</i>	<i>over</i>
Academic grades	Standardised teaching & learning	Parents as guardians	Generals & silos	Conventional classrooms	Reacting to change

bell times and starting and ending when we do (Principal, school 6).

While these agile schools and principals saw potential in expanding online learning in the future, they also understood that hybrid or blended learning is not without issues and requires constant experimentation, evaluation, and tweaking to improve. They recognised the importance of setting boundaries with online lesson materials and minimising the risks of using digital platforms.

### **Being the change and increasing flexibility and responsiveness**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the 13 agile principals became less rigid and more adept in letting go of plans, adjusting priorities and putting things on pause. One principal called this “planning for certainty in a very flexible way” or detaching from plans and “preconceived ideas”.

Increase in the need to be very flexible, very responsive, and to respond to things on short timelines, and having to predict and reforecast things on almost a daily basis sometimes ... learn to go with the flow (Principal, school 10).

While most principals that participated in our study showed that they were able to detach from plans, the 13 school principals deemed most agile were all quick to act upon changes and became very responsive to unforeseen circumstances. These principals displayed the agile leadership characteristics of flexibility, quickness, and change (Akkaya & Yazici, 2020). As a result, their schools demonstrated many traits of an agile organisation as per Desouza’s (2006) definition, such of detecting signals in the environment, processing what it means to their schools, implementation of actions and reflecting on results.

Our findings suggest that agile leaders stepped in to help other staff members, became more reflective, and more proficient in anticipating change rather than waiting for change to happen. These school principals were early in their efforts to review digital capabilities, staff professional development needs and communication strategies to keep pace with the pandemic. This supports Conboy’s (2009, p. 341) idea that to be agile, one “must be continually ready”.

We found that agile principals sensed the importance of cultivating an organisational culture that embraces failure and learning from mistakes during remote learning. By encouraging staff to become more expansive and step outside of their comfort zones, staff in agile schools were

more likely to remain calm and to seek alternative ways to attain common goals. For example, agile schools developed creative ways to deliver Physical Education and Music, as well as events like graduations and concerts.

### **Reimagining agility in educational organisations**

To keep pace with the changing educational landscape, it is important for schools to be agile not just during crisis but to operate with an agile mentality in a sustainable way.

Based on our findings and building on the work of Desouza (2006), Gunsberg et al. (2108), Sherehiy et al. (2007), and Wendler and Stahlke (2014), we propose the following model of an agile mentality for education organisations that illustrates what one may expect to find when viewing an ‘agile school’. In keeping with the original intent of the authors of the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001), we present the model as a set of agile education values that juxtapose the impact of agile practices on the education and operational model of schools with the normative values they replaced.

The model builds on previous studies and provides an illustration of how school leaders can operate using an agile mentality for education. To be agile during the pandemic required prioritising mental health and wellbeing over academic achievements. Educators needed to be more empathetic to understand students’ unique learning needs and teach students the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate and thrive in society. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to work closely with parents. Their role in supporting their child’s education became more active during remote learning and agile schools recognised that parents are co-educators.

Our findings suggest that teamwork and distributed leadership is more effective than working in silos during a crisis. This supports Dutton and Heaphy’s (2003) idea of high quality connectedness in organisations is akin to blood vessels in our bodies that provides “vital, life-giving nutrients that strengthen the bond making it healthy, flexible and resilient” (p. 263). After all, being able to swiftly change directions in an organisation as complex as a school requires trust and collaboration among all stakeholders. This suggests that for an agile ‘education’ organisation to be sustainable, there needs to be a relational element to work towards collective goals.

Furthermore, agile schools and their principals

recognised that it is not only vital to implement blended or hybrid learning models swiftly during remote learning, but such models may be important in the future and thus require ongoing attention to review and improve to stay relevant. To survive and thrive during pandemics and crises, being reactive to change is no longer adequate. An agile mentality in education requires schools to drive the changes they wish to see.

## **Conclusion and limitations**

This study has demonstrated that during extreme moments of crisis, there is potential to employ an agile methodology as an effective form of crisis management. This is due to the congruency between the main effects of a crisis and an agile mentality and methodology (Betta & Owczarzak-Skomra, 2019). While more research is required to definitively confirm this possibility, what is clear is that adopting an agile mentality and implementing agile practices comes naturally when combating an intense crisis.

The severe consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and the complete disruption to each school’s entire operational model, created a rare situation where crisis engulfed the entire organisation. As Rigby et al. (2016, p. 6) caution, agile is not a “panacea” and it is important to understand and identify the right conditions for agile to thrive. The crisis that each one of these schools faced created circumstances where an agile approach could succeed. And while the approach taken by most school principals but in particular the 13 we have identified, was not the adoption of an agile methodology in its purest form designed to deliver working software, it did result in schools becoming what Desouza (2006) would describe as ‘agile organisations’ that employed methods and adopted approaches atypical in the management or leadership of a school.

The results of adopting an agile approach within these schools, outlined in our model of an agile mentality for an education organisation, may provide the seedlings of a more modern technique for the leadership and management of a school. Follow up research could explore what happens when the crisis passes: will schools remain agile organisations or will the band snap back and revert to more traditional models of school leadership and management?

### **Practical implications**

For professionals working in the field of human resources (HR), particularly those HRM and HRD professionals in an education setting, there are three practical implications stemming from this study. First, the modern VUCA world we inhabit is progressively providing the conditions for an agile approach to thrive in many organisations and diverse industries (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). It is therefore sensible for practitioners to better understand the concept of agility and become familiar with agile methodologies and their use.

Second, while a crisis requires leaders to act quickly without knowing the consequences of their decisions, they should not compromise quality in the race against time. In fact, Nissim and Simon (2020) maintain that quality products and services are key to an agile organisation. As the COVID-19 pandemic will not be the last crisis in this unpredictable world, this study suggests that practitioners will need to both develop an agile mentality to adjust and adapt to new circumstances, but also ensure that this does not come at the expense of excellence for customers or clients. In a school setting, this means practitioners must balance an agile mentality with quality educational, social and wellbeing outcomes for students, staff, and the wider community.

Third, according to Jones (2018), headteachers (principals) have an absolute critical role in implementing and supporting evidence-based practice (EBP) within their schools. Drawing upon the thinking of Le Fevre et al. (2015), he argues that without their full commitment and engagement to fully embed EBP within the decision-making processes of schools, evidence-based education will be seen as nothing more than the latest fad within the education field. Hence, school principals need to become evidence-based in their everyday professional practice. Likewise, academics in university schools of education, and HRD and specific management and leadership development (MTD) professionals who educate and/or provide training for in-post and aspiring school principals, need also to become evidence based in their practice. We suggest the findings of our study, including our emergent ‘model of agile mentality’, could be used as ‘best evidence’ by evidence-based school principals striving to develop an ‘agile school’. Similarly, they could be used as ‘best evidence’ to inform and shape MTD programmes designed to help school principals become ‘agile leaders’.

## Limitations

This study was confined to a subset of Independent schools in one Australian state. Independent schools in Australia generally have more autonomy over decision making than schools governed under a single system which, while making this group ideal for this study, provides a caution on the ability to generalise the results.

Many of the criticisms of agile remain valid, including concerns over its incompatibility for large endeavours (Asnawi et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 2004). Of the 13 schools considered most agile the median number of staff was 33, which is

considerably lower than both the median number of staff across Independent schools in Victoria (70) and the original sample of 42 schools (56). The fact that most of these schools had small teams provides some validation of this argument that agile is easier to implement across smaller scale operations. The average tenure of each of the 13 principals was seven years, which was slightly higher than the average across the original 42 principals engaged in the study. These limitations also require consideration when interpreting the findings of this paper.

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# Enhancing employee engagement in the Nigerian health sector: the HRD implications

Oluwole Shokunbi, Olugbenga Akintola & Clare Taylor

## Abstract

This study aims at examining the level of employee engagement in one of the largest university teaching hospitals in Nigeria to proffer ways of improving employee engagement among its employees. It used the shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) test to measure and analyse the three dimensions of employee engagement – vigour, dedication, and absorption – among the employees of the aforementioned hospital. The results of this study suggest there is a low level of employee engagement among the workforce and thus an urgent need to focus on improving levels of engagement for enhanced productivity, safety, positive patient experience, and reduced absenteeism. They also suggest that the management of the hospital needs to urgently design a strategic engagement-enhancing plan of action. This provides a basis for future studies of employee engagement in the Nigerian health sector. It also highlights the urgent need for the management and the stakeholders of public health in Nigeria to pay attention to evaluating the level of employee engagement among their workforce and, where deemed necessary, proactively take steps to increase engagement amongst its health workers for the benefit of all stakeholders.

## Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the value of employee engagement to businesses and organizations globally. Consequently, employee engagement has long been a question of interest across different fields. Since the publication

of Kahn's work (1990) on personal engagement and disengagement more than three decades ago, research interest in the concept of employee engagement has grown significantly (Ruban, 2018). The more recent changes witnessed in the workplace in relation to the employer/employee relationship have contributed to this increased interest in the concept of employee engagement (Eldor and Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Academics have produced many studies that suggest that employee engagement offers great benefits to both organizations and employees (Saks, 2019) and engagement has even been identified as the most proximal predictor of employee productivity – the more employees invest themselves in a given day, the better the work product (Parke, Weinhardt, Brodsky, et al., 2018; Vogel, Rodell & Agolli, 2021). Research suggests that employee engagement enhances business success factors like employee performance and efficiency, productivity, safety, attendance and retention, customer service and satisfaction, customer loyalty, and profitability (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Kahn, 1990; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). Debates have continued about the best strategies to build, manage, and sustain an engaged workforce within organizations, with some arguing for their strategies through theory testing (e.g. Harter et al., 2002; Johnson, Park & Bartlett, 2018; Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006; 2019; Schaufeli et al., 2006), and others through developing theories (e.g. Kahn, 1990; Shokunbi, 2016; Shokunbi, de-Ruyter & Clarke, 2019).

But there is still a disconnection between

theory and practice (Pleasant, 2019). Attention has mostly been focused on defining the term itself and identifying the benefits; but less so on practical steps to manage the interplay of complex individual and environmental engagement variables and so enable HRD practitioners to act to build, maintain, and sustain an engaged workforce within organizations (Kwon & Park, 2017).

Nigeria is the focus for this study and has one of the biggest health worker bases in Africa; yet the sector is struggling with a shortage of manpower (Adisa, Osabutey & Gbadamosi, 2016). Additionally, despite the extensive studies on employee engagement across various sectors and contexts, research is unequal as empirical representation of national samples are lacking (Schaufeli, 2012); such as in Nigeria and its health sector. The few studies on employee engagement within the health sector that exist however, do seem to report some positivity too. For instance, Prins, Gazendam-Donofrio, Dillingh, Van De Wiel, Van Der Heijden, and Hoekstra-Weebers (2008) found that highly engaged health professionals were less likely to make mistakes, and enjoyed positive work relationships with supervisors, colleagues, nurses, and patients. Similarly, using a sample of 879 health workers from five Canadian hospitals, Gilbert, Laschinger and Leiter (2010) found that engaged employees provide safer patient care. In another study of over 10,000 health workers in 16 hospitals in Ontario, Canada, Lowe (2012) reported that employee engagement is related to retention, patient-centred care, patient safety culture and employee's positive assessments of the quality of care or services provided by their team.

Finally, in a study focusing on the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS), healthcare organizations with highly engaged workers provide quality and timely care that impacts greater value to their clients and have better financial performance (Jeve, Oppenheimer, & Konje, 2015). Most of the studies above were completed in the Western context but there remains a lot to be done specifically in Africa, to increase the national representative samples, and so increase the knowledge on employee engagement for the benefit of those HRD practitioners who struggle to increase engagement organizations (Schaufeli, 2012).

Identification of practical HRD intervention strategies could have a significant impact on how HR departments and HR professionals in healthcare, both in Nigeria and more widely, build

and sustain engagement (Pleasant, 2019). HRD's role in this could be transformative, so this study aims to offer practical insights and interventions for the benefit of both organizations and their employees. It is against this landscape that the Nigerian public health sector is the context for the present research.

Additional challenges have been reported in the Nigerian health sector, particularly in the areas of training, funding, employment conditions, and deployment of the health workforce for many years (Adeloye, David, Alaogun et al., 2017). While there is a coordinated response across Nigeria to address these challenges (Adeloye et al., 2017), the emergence of the novel coronavirus disease has adversely affected the response.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent global lockdown have had devastating effects on the world, which includes Nigeria. In Nigeria, the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown imposed by the Nigerian government negatively impacted on people's lives, health systems, businesses, and the national economy (Akande-Sholabi & Adebisi, 2020). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic there had been mass migration of healthcare workers out of developing countries (Ogunbamila, 2018) but Nigeria now faces even more serious challenges of attrition, shortage of personnel, mass migration of workers to other locations that offer better pay and better condition of service, trade actions and more needs for proactive actions to address them. In fact, governments of other countries like Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and the United Kingdom are recruiting Nigerian trained health workers to help their own health sector. For instance, the government of Saudi Arabia sent recruiters to Nigeria to recruit Nigerian health workers (Punch, 2021).

Consequently, retention of health workers in Nigeria for HRD practitioners remains a major challenge in the twenty-first century (Adesina, 2022; Bangdiwala, Fonn, Okoye, et al., 2010). Studies have reported that Nigeria needs to focus on reducing health workers' migration and turnover and enhance the functionality of health workers and the quality of the care they provide to their patients (e.g., Adesina, 2022; Ogunbamila, 2014). In other studies, it has been reported that the Nigerian health system has long been weakened by lack of dedicated workers (Adeloye et al., 2017; Amoran, Omokhodion, Dairo, et al., 2005). Different studies have reported that public health workers suffer job stress and

burnout syndrome, which have greater adverse effect on their own health and ability to cope at work (Heath, Sommerfield, & von Ungern-Sternberg, 2020; Friganović, A., Selić, P., & Ilić, 2019; Luceño-Moreno, Talavera-Velasco, García-Albuérne, et al., 2020; Olaleye, 2002). In Nigeria, Mojinyinola (2008) reported that health workers who experienced high level of stress were found to be less satisfied with their careers, resulting in high rate of absenteeism and less commitment to work. Also, it was reported that high stress levels have caused challenges in the recruitment and retention of health workers across Nigeria (Lasebikan & Oyetunde, 2012). A conclusion that can be reached here is that there are different factors responsible for talent retention challenges in the Nigerian health sector and all of considerable significance to service provision and the economy.

However, research has suggested that employee engagement might be significant in resolving the challenges within the Nigerian public sector (Shokunbi, 2016). In a qualitative study of 28 secondary school teachers in Nigeria, Shokunbi (2016) found that employee engagement could be a strategic approach to reduce high employee turnover, and absenteeism by focusing on the prevalent antecedents and the levels of employee engagement. Thus, the aim of the current study is to understand the present level of employee engagement at one of the largest University Teaching Hospitals in Nigeria by testing and validating the nine-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), and offer HRD engagement strategies that could make a difference to the professional lives of health workers and increase organizational performance through better service to end users. This University Teaching Hospital was chosen for the study because it was the most accessible for the researchers and the only one that granted accessibility to its staff to be contacted for the research.

## Literature review

Employee Engagement, as seen in extant literature, has become one of the most significant topics in psychology for HRD practitioners and more for academics (Harter et al., 2002; Jeve et al., 2015; Low & Spong, 2021; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Wollard & Shuck, 2011; Shuck & Wollard, 2010) shortly after the publication by William Kahn in 1990. This is not surprising given the overwhelming evidence of its reported benefits. There are proofs that employee engagement is strongly linked to employee attitudes, behaviours, performance, and well-being (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, et al., 2017; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Halbesleben, 2010; Saks, 2006). Also, studies have revealed that employee engagement is strongly related to positive organizational outcomes like financial and customer metrics of business performance (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Low & Spong, 2021; Saks, 2021; Schneider, Yost, Kropp, et al., 2018). Besides, studies have suggested that employee engagement can provide competitive advantage for organizations (Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, et al., 2015; Saks, 2022). For instance, in their study, Barrick, Thurgood, Smith and Courtright (2015) reported that employee engagement through shared perceptions of employees has a unique, value-adding organizational capability that is associated with organizational performance. In conclusion, employee engagement has become prominent because of its positive outcomes to both individuals and organizations and as such has developed an impressive HRD practitioner following (Shuck & Reio, 2011).

The extant literature reported that employee engagement has different connotations (Shuck, 2011; Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). For example, employee engagement has been referred to at various times as behaviours, psychological states and traits and multifaceted concept (Macey & Schneider, 2008).



But this is problematic for HRD practitioners with so many conflicting interpretations and disagreements failing to produce consistent 'tried and true' strategies for adoption (Valentin, 2014; Schuck & Reio, 2011).

However, recent studies revealed that a few researchers are beginning to find common ground by agreeing with Kahn's (1990) definition of employee engagement as the application and investment of self in the work tasks (e.g., Bakker, Shimazu, Demerouti, et al., 2014; Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, et al., 2002; Shokunbi, 2016; Soane, Truss, Alfes, et al., 2012).

Employee engagement has been defined as the synchronized investment of an individual's physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance (Rich et al., 2010). This is consistent with Kahn's (1990) definition

mind characterized by vitality, dedication, and immersion" (p. 74). While working, vigour refers to employee's high levels of energy and mental resilience; dedication refers to employee's sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge; and absorption refers to being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Warshawsky, Havens, & Knafi, 2012). Employee engagement, according to both definitions, is a multidimensional motivational condition. It is a broader construct than other constructs like job participation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment because it entails a more holistic and comprehensive investment of the entire or full self in the performance of a task or position (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Rich et al., 2010).

Employee engagement has been defined as the synchronized investment of an individual's physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance

of personal engagement as the "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). Personal disengagement, on the other hand, is defined as "the decoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). According to Kahn's (1990) definition, employee engagement is a psychological correlation with task performance rather than an attitude toward aspects of the organization or the job (Maslach et al., 2001). Other aspects of employee engagement highlight the self-investment of personal resources in work (Kahn, 1990; Shuck et al., 2011). Employee engagement, then, refers to the physical, emotional, and cognitive energies that employees bring to their jobs (Shuck, 2011; Shuck et al., 2011; Shuck and Wollard, 2010).

The increase of attention to employee engagement has seen it referred to as work engagement. Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) define work engagement as a "positive, gratifying, work-related frame of

However, HRD practitioners delivering organizational, and employee centred engagement strategies need to be cautious with the overly excessive theories on benefits of the construct, where over-engagement may result in unintended consequences such as burnout, family conflicts and internal focusing on the organization rather than flexibility and change (Valentin, 2014). Regardless of the identified, and increasingly recognized HRD challenges of moving from theory to practice, the main definition adopted by the present study will continue with the one promulgated by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Engaged health workers feel strong and vigorous at work, enthusiastic and optimistic about their jobs and are very absorbed and proactive in their jobs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Warshawsky et al., 2012).

Employee engagement is defined by vigour (high activation) and dedication (high identification), which are the polar opposites of exhaustion (low activation) and cynicism (low identification) - burnout characteristics (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli & Taris, 2005; Schaufeli 2013). However, the third dimension of burnout, inefficacy, is not a direct opposite of engagement's third dimension, absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli &

Taris, 2005; Schaufeli, 2013). Identification spans from cynicism to dedication, whereas activation ranges from exhaustion to vigour (Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker, et al., 2006). Hence, employee engagement is characterized by high level of activation and strong identification with one's work, while burnout is characterized with low level of activation and poor identification with one's work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010; Schaufeli, 2013). But again, the disaggregation by some academics of engagement and burnout as separate constructs can lead to confusion amongst HRD practitioners on intervention strategies as HRD is in a constant state of 'dialectical tension' between the serving interests of organizations and employees (Valentin, 2014). For whom are the engagement strategies truly serving?

Using the UWES-9 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) the present study assesses employee engagement to understand the levels of employee engagement among the health workers at the university teaching hospital being studied. It consists of three three-item measures that evaluate the experience of facets of the construct: Vigour (VI), Dedication (DE), and Absorption (AB). It is from this starting premise that insights into the drivers of engagement in this specific and under-researched context will add to the wider discussion on possible practices, enabling HRD practitioners, facing similar workforce issues, to help them develop their own 'tried and true' initiatives for employee and organizational success.

## Methods

While there are several instruments used in measuring employee engagement, UWES-9 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003; Schaufeli et al., 2002) seems to be the most validated measuring tool of all. This is because UWES has been validated in several countries, including China (Yi-Wen & Yi-Qun, 2005), Finland (Hakanen, 2002), Greece (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, et al., 2009), South Africa (Storm & Rothmann, 2003), Spain (Schaufeli et al., 2002), and The Netherlands (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2002). The confirmatory factor analyses applied to these studies established that the fit of the hypothesized three-factor structure to the data was superior to that of any other alternative factor structures (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Moreover, the internal consistencies of the three subscales proved to be sufficient in each study. However, it is pertinent to note that some studies

did not find the three-factor structure of employee engagement. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2008), this could be due to translation issues with items containing metaphors (e.g., "Time flies when I'm working"). Furthermore, Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006) argued that the total score for employee engagement may occasionally be more useful in empirical research because of the moderate to high correlations between the dimensions. Thus, Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006) developed a short, nine-item version of the UWES, and provided evidence for its cross-national validity. They showed that the three engagement dimensions are moderately strongly related. Thus, the present study adopted the shortened version - UWES-9 test to measure and analyse the three dimensions of employee engagement - vigour, dedication, and absorption - among health workers in one of the largest university teaching hospitals in Nigeria. These three dimensions were examined using nine statements - three statements per each dimension. The table below presents the three statements used in measuring and analysing the three dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption.

**Table 1**  
UWES-9 statements

Vigour (VI)	Dedication (DE)	Absorption (AB)
At my work, I feel bursting with energy.	I am enthusiastic about my job	I feel happy when I am working intensely.
At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.	My job inspires me	I am immersed in my job
When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work	I am proud of the work that I do	I get carried away when I am working

All the responses to the nine items of the UWES-9 were categorized on a seven-point Likert type scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always) as illustrated in the original test. The results of the present study were compared with the UWES-9 global database (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) as control. As previously mentioned, the present study was conducted in one of the largest University Teaching Hospitals in Nigeria. The name and

the location of the teaching hospital cannot be mentioned because both the management and the employees of the hospital wanted their anonymity guaranteed. The nine questions of UWES-9 survey are shown in the appendix.

## Research participants

The target population of this study was the employees. The researchers presented introductory information about the study to the 164 staff members of the teaching hospital directly with notification that participation is voluntary and anonymous. In order to avoid bias of recruitment and selection of participants, all of the 164 members of staff were each given a copy of the questionnaire which had the consent form and introductory information sheets attached to it. Only 135 participants (82%) out of the 164 who were given the questionnaire completed and returned it. Although there are 15 different departments within this teaching hospital, the researchers considered all the departments as a single group. This is because employee engagement is not only an individual phenomenon (Kahn, 1990), but has also been described as a group phenomenon (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The participants included the entire employees of the teaching hospital including doctors, nurses, administrative and unskilled (cleaning and security personnel) staff. It is important to note that none of the researchers are employees of the teaching hospital.

## Results

Only 82% (135) of the 164 participants, who received the questionnaires, completed it. To ensure confidentiality and reliability, the researchers adopted the research analytic principles used by Jevé et al., (2015) in their cross-sectional study of employee engagement within the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the researchers analysed the collected data as a single group and not on the basis of different working groups of the teaching hospital including doctors, nurses, administrative and unskilled staff. This helps to avoid group specific bias and ensure confidentiality (Jevé et al., 2015). The collected data were analysed and compared with the standard test manual using PRISM 6 and Microsoft Excel. The results are shown in the appendix.

Descriptive analysis on the sample of 135 health workers who completed the questionnaires revealed that 62 (45.9%) of them were female and

the other 73 (54.1%) were male. Representing employee engagement, the UWES-9 was a three-factor scale - vigour, dedication, and absorption - with each factor having different scales. The results indicated that the employee engagement among the health workers at this teaching hospital is generally low. As mentioned earlier, the results of the present study were compared with UWES global database. This comparison resulted in the following: the mean score for vigour was significantly lower than control group ( $P < 0.0001$ , 94% CI: -0.55 to -0.20). Also, the score for dedication was significantly lower than the control group ( $P < 0.0001$ , CI: -0.53 to -0.23). Likewise, the score for absorption was significantly lower than the control group too ( $P < 0.0001$ , CI: -0.51 to -0.18). The total score ( $P = -0.55$ , CI: -0.51 to -0.22) in both groups revealed the low level of employee engagement within this teaching hospital.

## Discussion

There are several points of discussion and implications for both HRD theory and practice considering the findings of the present study.

### Implications for theory

Although there have been a number of studies (Adekola, 2010; 2011; Karatepe, 2011; Shokunbi, 2016; Shokunbi et al., 2019) around employee engagement in Nigeria, this is the first study to focus wholly on health workers in Nigeria. The results of this study indicate that the scores for the three dimensions (vigour, dedication, and absorption) of employee engagement are significantly lower when compared with the standard test manual. The results suggest that the general level of employee engagement within the teaching hospital is significantly low. They also show the working culture within the organization. As earlier mentioned, Schaufeli et al. (2002) opined that employee engagement consists of the following dimensions:

- Vigour is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, not being easily fatigued, and persistence even in the face of difficulties.
- Dedication is characterized by deriving a sense of significance from one's work, by feeling enthusiastic and proud about one's job, and by feeling inspired and challenged by it.
- Absorption is characterized by being totally



and happily immersed in one's work and having difficulties detaching oneself from it. Time passes quickly and one forgets everything else that is around.

The most interesting finding of the present study was that the lower scores recorded for the dimensions of employee engagement – vigour, dedication, and absorption. The lower score for vigour reflects lack of energy, lack of mental resilience while working, the unwillingness to invest effort in one's work, being easily fatigued and weakness in the face of difficulties. Similarly, the lower score for dedication suggested that the health workers have no sense of significance from their work as such they are neither enthusiastic and proud of their job nor inspired and challenged by it. Also, the lower score for absorption indicated that the health workers are highly absentminded and inattentive in their work as well as easily detached from it.

These findings were not unexpected bearing in mind the recent challenges faced by the public health sector in Nigeria. These results suggest that there is an urgent need to improve upon the vigour, dedication, and absorption within the teaching hospital. Most of the actions and decisions taken by the health workers are self-motivated and driven. Thus, employee engagement is a major determinant for quality of health care. Previous studies have indicated that health service organizations should pay more attention to promoting employee engagement because an engaged workforce is characterized by energetic employees, who are highly connect to their work and better equipped to deal with the job demands (Jeve et al., 2015; Jose & Mampilly, 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Warshawsky et al., 2012).

The results of the present study suggest high rate of workaholism within the teaching hospital studied. This is indicative in the service appraisal report of the teaching hospital which reflects low performance and productivity as well as high rate of employee turnover. Previous studies suggested that workaholism could result in burnout, work and family conflicts, stress, poor productivity, job dissatisfaction, and high employee turnover (Di Stefano & Gaudiino, 2019; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008; Shimazu, Schaufeli, Kubota, et al., 2012; Yuksel, 2014). In contrast, employee engagement fosters job satisfaction, organizational performance, reduced employee turnover, increased profitability, safety, organizational commitment and more

personal initiative and innovative behaviour at work as well as reduced absenteeism (e.g. Boyd, Bakker, Pignata, et al., 2011; Halbesleben, 2010; Hansez & Chmiel, 2010; Harter et al., 2002; Harter, Schmidt, Killian, et al., 2009; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Menguc, Auh, Fisher, et al., 2013; Shuck et al., 2011; Sulea, Virga, Maricutoiu, et al., 2012; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, et al., 2009).

### **Implications for HRD practice**

This study emphasizes the necessity for public sector organizations to improve employee engagement. This becomes part of the responsibilities of HRD practitioners within the sector. This is because HRD practitioners should assess the level of employee engagement in their own organization. To enhance levels of engagement within teaching hospitals across Nigeria, we suggest HRD professionals working in these organizations should constantly seek to measure engagement levels using the UWES-9 scale as highlighted in the present study. For instance, organizations can determine the characteristics of engaged employees and possibilities to raise engagement levels by consistently measuring employee engagement. Previous studies (e.g., Attridge, 2009; Kim, Kim, Woo, et al., 2017; Khodakarami, Dirani, & Rezaei, 2018; Lartey & Randall, 2021; Mone & London, 2018; Stoeber & Damian, 2016; Shokunbi, 2016; Wollard & Shuck, 2011) provided insight into the steps to do this. For instance, Attridge (2009), Mone and London (2018), Stoeber and Damian (2016), and Shokunbi (2016) suggest any attempt to improve the levels of employee engagement in an organization must start with a measurement of the levels of engagement among the workforce. According to Wollard and Shuck (2011) practitioners should prioritize measuring the levels of engagement in their attempt to build an engaged workforce for their organization. Kim et al. (2017), Khodakarami, Dirani and Rezaei (2018) and Lartey and Randall (2021) validated and advised that the UWES-9 scale should be used in measuring the levels of employee engagement effectively. Therefore, the results of this study implied that as HRD practitioners in the public health sector seek to constantly build and maintain engaged workforce in their organizations, they must implement purposeful employee engagement measuring strategies like the UWES-9 scale when measuring their employees' levels of engagement.

HRD practitioners especially those in the

Nigerian public health sector should design and plan strategies to enhance employee engagement across the sector. The present study found that employee engagement levels are low at the teaching hospital investigated. In such situations, previous studies (e.g. Attridge, 2009; Mone & London, 2018; Stoeber & Damian, 2016; Shokunbi, 2016; Wollard & Shuck, 2011) indicate that employee engagement can be enhanced through adopting certain workplace strategies which promote supervisory communication, job design, availability of materials and resource support for the job, working conditions/work environment, corporate culture, leadership style, relationship and support between employees, training and retraining, and pay and remuneration. Since these are within the focus and field of responsibilities of HRD practitioners, the implication is that whatever strategy is adopted and implemented by the organization, the respective HRD practitioner should ensure the right balance between vigour, dedication, and absorption is attained, maintained, and sustained (Jeve et al., 2015). The challenges of the twenty-first century compel HRD practitioners to pay more attention to building, developing, maintaining, and sustaining employee engagement to improve their performance, profitability, and competitive advantage. HRD practitioners in this situation should ensure an effective internal communication system which presents, educates, and informs everyone about the organizational goals and strategy (Jeve et al., 2015; Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014; Ruck & Welch, 2012) and promotes positive relationship and support between employees as well as helps create working conditions/work environment, which promote employee engagement (Shokunbi, 2016). Therefore, HRD practitioners in the Nigerian public health sector should ensure that their employees are treated the way their clients are treated (Jeve et al., 2015; Mishra et al., 2014). This implies that those in teaching hospitals should embark on an organizational cultural change project that could positively promote employee engagement across the organization. HRD practitioners should ensure that such processes start by initially measuring the levels of employee engagement to determine the characteristics of the engaged and the disengaged employees of the organization. They should then encourage the creation of work conditions that make every day work tasks employee engagement opportunities across the organization. Research suggests that building employee engagement within

an organization includes defining the employee's role in fulfilling the organization's purpose, making available the resources/materials for the job, paying attention to and recruiting passionate employees, creating and promoting a positive work environment, creating a reward system for pay and remuneration, encouraging training and retraining, as well as positive relationship and support among employees (Jeve et al., 2015; Shokunbi, 2016). Meeting the knowledge and skill requirements associated with some or all these actions could have implications for HRD practitioner involvement.

Finally, the present study has generated initial evidence of the levels of employee engagement in one of the largest university teaching hospitals in Nigeria. The uniqueness of this study lies in the measurement and operationalization of engagement using the UWES-9 scale, as well as evidence indicating the low levels of engagement, which stemmed from the employees' working conditions as identified in the introduction section. The implications for practice are that both HRD researchers and practitioners can use the findings of this study to strengthen their business case for the need of addressing employee engagement within public organizations while also working to understand the unique individual characteristics affecting their engagement efforts. Employee engagement is defined as an employee's emotional attachment to the organization and its goals. It assesses if an employee will devote his or her peak performance to the organization and go above and beyond his or her job description and role for the benefit of the organization. Employee engagement is strongly linked to patient safety, quality of care, patient satisfaction, frequency of employee rotations, and overall financial benefit of the organization. This study shows the critical need for developing measures to increase employee engagement in the Nigerian public health sector. High levels of employee engagement will lead to better public health care systems.

### **Limitations, conclusion and recommendations**

A limitation of this study is that it focused only on a single teaching hospital and did not even consider and compare the engagement levels among departments. In spite of this limitation, the study certainly adds to our understanding

of employee engagement within a non-Western country. Furthermore, because the current study was based on one of the largest university teaching hospitals in Nigeria, we suggest it provides a basis for future studies of employee engagement within the Nigerian public health sector. Additionally, the findings suggest there is a need for the stakeholders in the Nigerian public health sector to crucially, and urgently, pay attention to the development, attainment, maintenance, and sustenance of employee engagement among employees to promote better performance and productivity as well as ensuring quality and safe health care services.

This study reveals that the level of employee engagement is low within the university teaching hospital studied. The three dimensions of employee engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption) were found to be significantly lower than the control group. This suggests that the employees of this university teaching hospital lack the energy, the mental resilience, the willingness to invest effort, and persistence at work. Also, the study indicates that the employees have no sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge towards their work. Lastly, these employees are detached, absentminded, and inattentive at work. There is the need for more comprehensive longitudinal and comparative studies of all the university teaching hospitals

across Nigeria to be able to draw a more emphatic conclusion about employee engagement within the Nigerian public health sector.

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for the stakeholders within the Nigerian public health sector. Firstly, this research highlights the need for academics, practitioners, and the government to partner on developing employee engagement within the public health sector by providing funding to researchers and the university teaching hospitals to complete studies to aid this. Secondly, the management of each university teaching hospital should proactively evaluate the level of employee engagement among their employees periodically to help identify the areas of work they need to improve upon. Thirdly, each of the university teaching hospitals should design and plan employee engagement strategic approaches to enhance the levels of engagement to improve safety and quality of service. In conclusion, the study suggests that paying more urgent attention to designing strategic plans to improve employee engagement across all the university teaching hospitals in Nigeria will not only lead to better and improved public health care but will also greatly help reduce the recent high rate of employee turnover experienced by the health sector.

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## Appendix

### Scale to response statements

Never	Almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Always
0 Never	1 A few times a year or less	2 Once a month or less	3 A few times a month	4 Once a week	5 A few times a week	6 Every day

### UWES-9 Questions

No.	Question	Dimension	Psychometric Characteristics
1	At my work, I feel bursting with energy	<b>Vigour</b>	Energy, mental resilience, the willingness to invest one's effort, and persistence
2	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work		
3	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous		
4	I am enthusiastic about my job	<b>Dedication</b>	A sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge
5	My job inspires me		
6	I am proud of the work that I do		
7	I feel happy when I am working intensely	<b>Absorption</b>	Being engrossed in one's work, to the extent to which time passes quickly and it is difficult to detach oneself from work
8	I am immersed in my work		
9	I get carried away when I am working		

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# How well is HRD meeting the needs of those it is intending to serve? From diffusion to confusion

Jenni Jones & Sally Kah

## Abstract

Human Resource Development (HRD) is broadly concerned with individual and organizational learning and development. However, it is unclear how well HRD is meeting the needs of those it intends to serve and how key stakeholders (i.e., HRD professionals, managers, employees) perceive this function in organizations. This study explored the perception of the HRD function from the perspectives of employees, managers, and HRD professionals in UK public and private sector organizations. Qualitative semi-structured interviews with 30 participants across six organizations provided insights into the perceived role of HRD professionals. Employees and managers acknowledged HRD as a central focus for learning and development, but the HRD function is not perceived as strategic. HRD professionals, on the other hand, claimed that they have a strategic influence and add value through the employee life cycle. The differing views are centred on the perceived value, positioning, and responsiveness of the HRD role. Thus, a framework is developed to illustrate the differing perceptions between HRD professionals and other critical stakeholders. Previous studies have provided extensive evidence of HRD's role and function. This study provides insights from the internal stakeholders on how HRD professionals and the HRD function meet their needs.

## Introduction

Gold et al. (2003) stated that Human Resource Development (HRD) “should be characterized by diversity, creativity and debate about the meanings and practices that constitute its field” (p. 452). Although the role of HRD is people and organizational development and rational planning, Vince (2003) argued that the profession has been weak strategically, thereby shifting the emphasis of learning on individuals. Lee (2007) suggested shifting HRD from training and development to a holistic perspective that shifts boundaries, conflict, and change. In the UK, HRD involves duties and processes that impact organizational and individual learning (Stewart & McGoldrick, 1996). Yet, tensions exist in meeting organizational outcome needs (Roche, Teague, Coughlan, et al., 2013). Some employees perceive HRD as a supplier of technical training and an invisible role in organizations (Keeble-Ramsay & Armitage, 2015).

Despite growing interest in understanding the role of HRD in organizations, current research lacks complete detail on how HRD professionals meet the needs of different stakeholder groups. Therefore, this research aims to provide insights into internal stakeholders' perception of HRD's role. The study will answer the following research questions:

- What do HRD professionals see as the

most valuable aspects of their role?

- What do key stakeholders see as the most valuable aspects of HRD's role?
- What are the differing perceptions between HRD professionals and other key stakeholders?

This paper will briefly share the recent academic thinking about the widening and changing practices of HRD professionals. Then, through evidence-based research, similarities and differences in perceptions and expectations from different stakeholders concerning HRD's role in six UK organizations will be shared. This study will highlight discrepancies and differences with the shared underpinning issues and challenges for all stakeholders. The implications for HRD professionals to progress the future reputation of the HRD profession will then be discussed.

This paper proceeds as follows — first, the review of scholarship on the role of HRD and the theoretical argument on stakeholder theory. Second, the research design, data collection, and analysis are explained. Then, the key findings, discussion, conclusions, and implications are presented.

## Literature review

Recent studies have focused on the changing definitions of the role of HRD (Hamlin & Stewart 2011; Wang, Werner, Sun, et al., 2017) and the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of HRD's role (Torraco & Lundgren, 2020). The HRD field of study and practice has changed. It is no longer just about training and development (Lee, 2011; Hamlin & Stewart, 2011), and HRD is no longer the sole responsibility of HRD professionals (Torraco & Lundgren, 2020).

Hamlin & Stewart (2011) help to show the breadth of the role by reviewing a plethora of HRD definitions and noting that HRD has four key purposes: improving individual or group effectiveness and performance, improving organizational effectiveness and performance, developing knowledge, skills, and competencies, and enhancing human potential and potential growth (p. 214). This clearly shows that HRD is underpinned by learning and development, but this is just one part of its multi-disciplinary role. HRD now encompasses the additional and important aspects of organisational development (OD), change leadership, talent management, as well as coaching, and mentoring too.

Another change over time is that HRD is no longer expected to be the primary agency for promoting HRD aspects among employees (Torraco & Lundgren, 2020). HRD should now be seen as a central activity within the organization and the responsibility of everyone. Managers should recognize gaps, develop skills, and facilitate opportunities; and employees should have autonomy to recognize, request, and access opportunities. Gardiner et al. (2001) stated that

the adoption of learning as a central competence of the company is a collective responsibility and will happen only as the result of carefully designed strategy and shared management objectives. The task for human resource professionals is to oil the wheels of these processes ... the responsibility must be shared now at every level within the organization (pp. 401-402).

They also state that “new thinking on the way employees are managed suggests that conventional styles of management may have to change radically in order to accommodate this new focus” (p. 401). The suggestion is that HRD professionals have clarity about the new purpose and the direction of travel of their role, but that those managers enacting some of their diffused HRD related duties (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018) and those employees on the receiving end may have differing needs and expectations.

Torraco and Lundgren (2020) in their comprehensive review of recent HRD literature examining the role of HRD, highlight some of the key criticisms and challenges that were emerging:

- HRD is not aligned with the organization's strategy and business needs.
- HRD does not demonstrate its effectiveness and return on investment (ROI).
- HRD is pre-occupied with offering programmes aimed at marginal problems.
- HRD carries out limited needs analysis.
- HRD has insufficient first-hand knowledge of work and the workplace.

These are not necessarily new assertions, but they do point to the need for further research to examine the perceptions of differing stakeholders (i.e., for instance; leaders, supervisors, and employees) to determine how well HRD is meeting the needs of those it is intending to serve. This paper seeks to address this gap by sharing insights from recent empirical research into how HRD might be able to increase its reach and enhance its reputation.

The study has been underpinned by the

notion of stakeholder theory; proposing that an organization is characterized as a set of relationships, crucial to its functioning, among individuals or groups who affect or are affected by its business operations (Freeman, 2010). Wang et al. (2017) state that HRD's defining attribute is its host-system-dependence, and its contribution to the host system. The host system is made up of a variety of internal and external stakeholders, of which managers and employees are key internal customers who affect and are affected by the host system's operations. Alagaraja & Egan (2013) states that internal customer perceptions of the role and responsibilities of HRD professionals and the HRD function are crucial for assessing the value and effectiveness of HRD. Wang et al. (2017) go on to affirm that "HRD will not be a panacea to cure all organizational or social problems ... HRD is a tool or mechanism for achieving its (organizational) desired outcomes" (p. 1173). HRD may not be the panacea for all HRD practices, but as stated earlier, it does need to 'oil the wheels' of organizational change initiatives

## Study design and data collection

This study adopted a critical realist position and an interpretivist epistemological perspective, which aimed to offer "explanation, clarification, and demystification" (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). The interpretivist perspective supports qualitative research which seeks to provide new insights through 'how', 'who', and 'why' questions (Doz, 2011). In this study, qualitative methodology provides rich and thick process descriptions (Doz, 2011) of HRD professionals' experiences and how they are perceived by other stakeholders in their organizations. Semi-structured interviews are deemed the most suitable method to enable participants to express their feelings, and thus present a more realistic picture of their experiences (Fontana & Frey, 1998).

A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted between July 2020 and November 2021. Snowball sampling was used to collect data from HRD professionals (in senior/director and mid-level HRD positions), managers (senior and middle managers), and employees (non-management). Data was collected from six organizations - 10 participants across two Higher Education Institutions, 10 across two Healthcare

Trusts, 6 in the Hospitality sector and 4 within the Transportation sector. All the organizations were based in England – Liverpool, Birmingham, and Wolverhampton. Table 1 provides a descriptive summary of the organizations.

Set questions were asked by two interviewers (one interviewer per three organizations) focusing on the key aspects of the role, all aspects of the employee lifecycle (i.e., induction, training, development, performance management, talent management), return on investment/evaluation, and future HRD activities. Some interviews were carried out face-to-face, but the majority were carried out online through Microsoft Teams. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed lasting one hour on average. The information gathered was then thematically analysed through the use of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and crosschecked by the two different authors to answer the three research questions.

Most of the data collection was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and there were some lockdown issues in relation to access; hence, it was not possible to find organizations of similar sizes wishing to participate, nor was it possible to achieve an even spread across the key stakeholders for each organization. This study was part of a more comprehensive project looking at the HRD role within 20 companies within the UK, the Netherlands, and the USA respectively (to be published in an upcoming HRD book), but for the purposes of this paper the focus will be on the findings from the six UK case study organizations. Despite the differences in organizational size and sector, some similar themes emerged regarding differing expectations, perceptions, and potential tensions, together with the underlying challenges of the various roles performed by HRD professionals.



**Table 1**  
Case organizations and participants

Case organizations (codes used with quotes)	Sector	Region in the UK	Year established	Size of organization (by number of employees)	HRD roles	Manager roles	Employee roles
1 – HEI1	Higher education	West Midlands	1800s	Over 2,000	3	0	1
2 – RAIL	Transport	West Midlands	2000s	Over 2,500	3	0	1
3 – NHS1	Health	North West	1990s	Over 5,000	0	3	1
4 – PUB	Hospitality	West Midlands	1800s	Over 14,000	2	2	2
5 – HEI2	Higher education	West Midlands	1800s	Over 2,000	2	2	2
6 – NHS2	Health	West Midlands	1990s	Over 6,000	2	2	2
<b>Total interviewed</b>					12	9	

## Findings

This study found differing perspectives of HRD roles among HRD professionals, those with some HRD responsibilities (managers) but not within the HRD function, and employees. Before providing the specific findings of this study, it is worth noting that in most cases (HEI1, RAIL, NHS1, HEI2, NHS2), HRD is considered a primary function within the organization. However, one organization (PUB) have HRD embedded within the broader human resource management (HRM) function. The various participants' perceptions differ on what the HRD function does and its value, as expressed below.

### HRD practitioner perceptions of the value in their role

HRD professionals at HEI1 and RAIL acknowledge that the role of HRD has evolved over the years. HRD was about delivering mandatory training to meet the needs of the business, and the training took place in a physical space for many hours. However, the training and development courses and the delivery medium have changed, thus changing the nature of their role and responsibilities. Three themes emerged

from the analysis concerning the perception of value in their role: 'strategic influence', 'value-added', and the 'employee lifecycle'.

### Strategic influence

From the view of nine HRD professionals, strategic influence is the ability to effect decisions at a higher level. However, three HRD professionals claim their HRD function is not strategic. The nine HRD professionals at HEI1, PUB, NHS1, and NHS2 believe that senior leaders accept them in the organization; but this is about acknowledging their contributions.

As one participant said,

We are being listened to more and more because of the impact of what we are doing, not being seen on the periphery – some more open to that than others are (HRD Professional, NHS1).

The strategic effect is action-led, which means HRD is changing the nature of how learning and development are changed, thus developing the learning culture.

We also hold the ring on culture – cultural development, we have a very clear culture programme; to change our ways of working, to be more positive – a conscious decision by

the organization to do this four years ago ... Responsibility and accountability with this sit with organizational development (HRD Professional, NHS2).

Whilst another research participant said they spend 80% of my time doing strategic work and 20% doing problem-solving (HRD Professional, PUB).

In contrast, some participants believe that HRD's role focuses on the delivery of learning, not on strategic influence. As one participant claimed,

HRD are responsible for organizational learning, but the amount of influence they've been given in the past has been limited. It is going to increase, but it has been limited, and we need to be strategic about it (HRD Professional, RAIL).

Despite the lack of strategic influence in some organizations, the HRD professionals claim their role does add value to the business.

### Value-added

Value-added is concerned with the worthiness of HRD responsibilities to the business areas and stakeholders. Value is discussed in the context of what the function does.

I see the organization as my customer. The role of HRD is two-fold to deliver the needs of the individual and then the organization to decide what those needs are. To be the critical friend and to say actually, I don't think that's necessarily the way to go (HRD Professional, HEI2).

The needs of individuals (i.e., employees) are about meeting their learning and development requirements. Professional learning and development courses are mandatory and elective training that employees are expected to complete between six months and a year. Employees engage with their learning online or onsite. Some digital platforms include Oracle Enterprise Resource Planning at HEI1 and IBM Electronic Staff Record at NHS1.

I think there's an obligation or an expectation in the learning and development team in my part of the business to offer up options, solutions, ideas, for people to do on an optional basis. We also look after all the technical training. Of course, some of that is mandatory and is competence-based. That's also our responsibility to offer that to the business (HRD Professional, RAIL).

In facilitating HRD activity,

We are the 'custodians' of the service; we need to set the framework for others to operate within (HRD Professional, HEI1).

Interestingly, these participants talked about how others perceive their role in the organization. The central point is that HRD is not well understood as a sole function because it is drawn to administrative duties and offering training solutions.

Not sure the NHS fully understands what OD is. I think they think it is still learning and development. Not sure how I describe it – a bit of L&D (Learning and Development), HR and improvement. Not quite sure people get it. But when they are on the receiving end of it, they get it. Nine times out of ten, they feel it is worth their time (HRD Professional, NHS2).

Another HRD Professional (RAIL) enforced this view from their organization,

We still have a long way to go because HRD still gets drawn to do more administrative duties like taking minutes in meetings and so on. However, we are also in a place where managers and their teams are trying to take ownership (HRD Professional, RAIL).

### Employee lifecycle

As explained in the previous section, HRD professionals focus on developing employees. They also consider how the employees are onboarded and developed through their lifetime in the organization.

Others discussed adding value to specific aspects of the employee life cycle.

We are adding value through the employee lifecycle. It is our role, and we take that very seriously to ensure that onboarding stage, people have onboarded accurately, so they can transition as smoothly as possible, and get on with their careers and have the resources to be able to do their job (HRD Professional, HEI1).

The value of employee lifecycle has given HRD a seat at the table in some organizations. They can demonstrate the link between what they do and how this influences where the business is going.

We are definitely able to provide a good link between strategically, this is where we are going, and this is what happens operationally, and operationally this is what we need to do strategically. I think we sit really nicely in-between – the balance of the 2 (HRD Professional, NHS2).

However, being proactive and forward thinking has not always been the approach of the HRD function, according to a participant from HEI2.

Going back a few years, our seat at the table involved CMT and putting in CMT paper. In last 12-18 months improved substantially, seats that we

have wanted are more readily available, e.g., now part leading a workstream looking at organizational behaviour (HRD Professional, HEI2).

### Managers' and employees' perceptions of HRD's role

The common themes from managers and employees are: 'internal stakeholders' and 'operational role'.

#### Internal stakeholders

Most managers (n=7) perceive HRD's role as learning and development rather than the broader employee lifecycle. In their view, the role of HRD is to meet internal stakeholder needs through operational aspects of facilitating training and development. Further, the function updates the core skills of their teams, managing the online learning resources, reviewing performance, and auditing mandatory training.

This perspective is captured by a Manager (HEI2), who said,

HRD set up internal courses, recruit to internal courses and lead the Employee Engagement Committee (Manager, HEI2).

The learning and development team supports stakeholders across the business to integrate training throughout the business areas. There are three objectives for collaborative working across the organizations (HEI1, NHS1, and RAIL). First, to identify the needs of the internal stakeholders. Second, to meet the strategic goals of the business, and third, to work efficiently. However, there is a need for HRD professionals to strengthen how they develop talent in organizations.

The learning and development team do meet our needs. They do a very good job, but they need to work alongside experienced nurses to understand that people absorb information differently (Employee, NHS1).

Whilst HRD is considered a valuable function by managers, they argued that:

HRD does not have the profile they should have. It should be seen to be much more important. HRD is seen as the 'tinsel on the Christmas tree' – nice to have, but you can strip it off. Even the name OD/HRD; not sure that people know what that is. Learning and training is clearer, isn't it? (Manager, HEI2).

#### Operational role

Managers' and employees' perceptions of HRD dominantly focus on the operational

facets of the HRD function's role, specifically on the training they have received and wish to undertake. Employees across the organizations have undertaken hard and soft skills training such as Customer Service training, Prevent, Health and Safety, Data Protection, Equality and Diversity, and Information Security. NHS1 has critical training for nurses, which is facilitated by nurses and ward managers. The core competency training is linked with their performance reviews. Despite the perception that HRD meet their operational role through training provisions, employees agree that there is a lack of understanding of what HRD does.

As one employee said

HRD need to shout louder in the Trust, promoting what they offer and what they can do – they do this but not enough (Employee NHS2).

Others said they know where to go for training but only connect the training department with the overall learning process.

One participant said,

The only person that helps me with what training I need is my line manager. I don't know exactly how things work in the training department. I get told what training I need to do, but sometimes I get asked what I want to do. I learn so much from the training, but I want to move up the ladder but don't know when it will happen (Employee, RAIL).

Interestingly, uncertainty about where to go for learning was noted by an employee (HEI2) who said, “

If I had a particular learning need in the university, short of asking my line manager, who I suspect might also not know, if I'm honest, I have no idea where to go. Absolutely no idea at all (Employee, HEI2).

The suggestion from employees seemed to be that in some organizations HRD has sold itself as a strategic function but has not invested in the resources needed to cascade (and deliver) the strategy to operational levels.

Those people who make the strategy real for the people who need to deliver the actions that make the strategy happen are missing (Employee HEI2).

A similar view is expressed by an employee (HEI2), Not all those in HRD are strategic. Need bigger bandwidth and to think wider (Employee, HEI2).

Part of this approach is for HRD to think beyond the principal role of training. They are expected to be approachable and be forward thinking.

An employee (PUB) clearly articulates this view, Sometimes don't feel that I can approach HR,

don't want to be put in the 'red-room'. A colleague of mine wants to have some L&D support, their manager says no, is that the end of it? Can they take that conversation to HR and get some support and buy in from them? Don't think they would, so I question how accessible HR is? (Employee, PUB).

Interestingly, one employee appears sympathetic about the enactment of HRD responsibilities.

If this stuff is being pushed out to line management, that's fine, but you have to give them the skill, the resource and the time to do it. If you're not going to do that, it ain't going to happen (Employee, HEI1).

In summary, the majority of HRD professionals believed that they have a strategic influence and work to improve the experience of employees through the employee lifecycle, and that this strategic influence has a positive impact on the learning culture of the organization. However, there is a lack of understanding from some of the key stakeholders (managers and employees) about the value that HRD offers. The managers and the employees felt that HRD professionals were supporting them (mostly) with their training and development needs but there was scope for them to operate more strategically. It seemed there was some dissatisfaction with HRD in respect of not being

instance, senior HRD professionals hold a more strategic perception of their contribution, and less experienced line managers having greater expectations for more operational support. Similarly, employees with no HRD experience perceived HRD as an operational function for learning and development. There may well be other factors that contribute to the ambiguity, i.e., the length of time that HRD professionals have worked in their respective organizations, the extent of their established relationships, their experience and length of time in this or other HRD roles, etc.

As illustrated in figure 1, the perceptions are different between managers and employees versus HRD professionals. Managers believe that HRD's role is concerned with the provision of training and development both online and onsite, meeting stakeholders needs, and reviewing performance. Employees also share the same perspective about HRD's role with the addition of an assumed strategic influence. The employees acknowledge the principal role of HRD but argue that HRD is not strategic. The view of both employees and managers supports only in part Hamlin and Stewart's (2011) view that the purpose of HRD is "to improve or maximize effectiveness and

organizing training courses when requested, not prompted.

Regarding positioning, HRD is a recognized term in all cases; however, for some, it is situated within the Learning and Development Team (n=2), so HRD is perceived as a process and not a function. In other organizations (n=2), HRM and HRD activities were distinct. Still, with some overlap whereby HRD was fulfilling some HRM responsibilities and others (n=2), HRD was split into specific functions (i.e., L&D, OD, and Training). HRD as a function seems to consider its position as a strategic one, but managers and employees are not seeing this; they are still expecting the 'old learning and development cycle service'. In terms of responsiveness, HRD professionals, despite their views of being more proactive and strategic, come across to the other critical stakeholders as having a more reactive approach rather than a proactive one. Linking back to Torraco and Lundgren's (2020) review, perhaps this shows how HRD professionals feel they are aligned to the organization's strategy but, according to managers and employees they are less so, and instead more aligned with the operational, day-to-day business needs.

role in UK organizations. By exploring these perceptions, the paper determines how well HRD is meeting the needs of those it serves. Managers and employees have similar views about HRD's roles, but dissimilarity exists between these and the views of HRD professionals. These similarities and differences are centred on the perceived value of HRD, how the HRD function is positioned, and the responsiveness of HRD professionals to the organizational and internal stakeholder needs. This paper argues that a proactive HRD function could change the perception of internal stakeholders on positioning and responsiveness, thus minimizing potential tensions between the stakeholders.

### Theoretical implications

There are two main theoretical contributions from the findings of the present inductive inquiry. This paper goes beyond discussing the role of HRD professionals (Hamlin & Stewart, 2011; Torraco & Lundgren, 2020) by exposing the perceived value of HRD from critical stakeholders. The paper identifies three distinct ideas that the perception of HRD is central to its value, positioning, and responsiveness. Value is affiliated with the training and development of staff. However, the tension is that there is a need for skills analysis and HRD to be out there across business areas. Therefore, value and positioning are intertwined.

Second, this study provides context-specific

## The majority of HRD professionals believed that they have a strategic influence and work to improve the experience of employees through the employee lifecycle

as proactive or as supportive as they had hoped. This created a disconnect between expectations and delivery, and ultimately tension. In summary, this demonstrated confusion from some of the key stakeholders about the value that HRD can offer, and their own lack of understanding of the diffusion of some HRD aspects of their own roles.

### Discussion

The study aimed to explore the most valuable aspects of HRD's role from the point of view of the HRD professionals and key stakeholders in UK organizations. This study has found differing perspectives of HRD roles from all participants. These conflicting views show what they believe is or should be the role of HRD professionals and, more importantly, the value that HRD creates. The length of experience could be a contributing factor in the perception of HRD's role. For

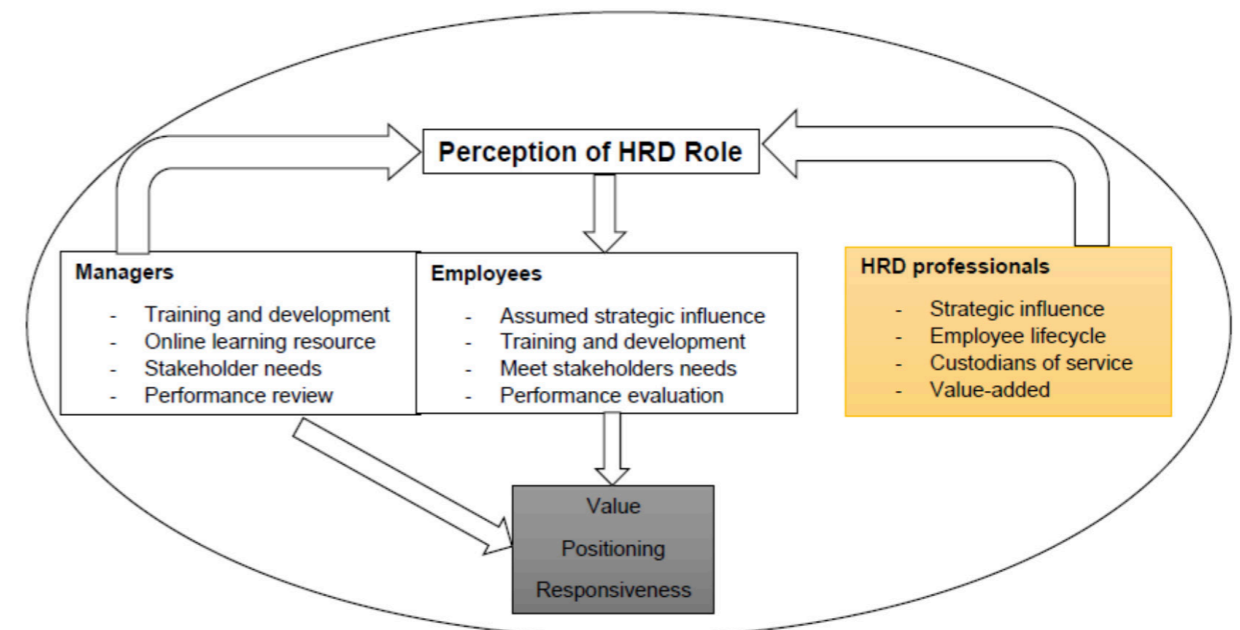
performance at either the individual, group/team, and/or organizational level" (p. 213).

In contrast, HRD professionals perceived their role as primarily strategic, but only some operational aspects are mentioned in relation to the training aspects of the employee lifecycle and administration. The key differences seem to lie within the perceived value, positioning, and responsiveness of HRD in the organizations researched. As Alagaraja & Egan (2013) argued, the internal customer perceptions of the HRD role and responsibilities are crucial for assessing its value and effectiveness. HRD professionals believe they add value by influencing decisions at the senior management level and developing guidance for the organization's strategic needs, such as investing in people. For those for whom value is created (i.e., managers and employees), HRD is not seen as strategic because they are reactive, for example,

### Conclusion and implications

This inductive inquiry extends existing research by exposing key stakeholders' perceptions of HRD's

Figure 1 Stakeholder Perceptions of the HRD Role





knowledge about the potential tensions caused by differing perceptions of HRD's role in UK organizations. The authors explored a diverse set of organizations across the public and private sectors, so this study does give clear insights into some of the patterns of differing perceptions by role, but due to the small sample of participants, it is not possible to generalize beyond these cases.

### Implications for HRD professionals

The critical concern for HRD professionals is that there seems to be a disconnect between what they think they are doing and what other vital stakeholders think, but more importantly, what those others want them to do. In short, the implications for HRD professionals are twofold: i) to improve the understanding of the critical stakeholders in the organization concerning what those with HRD role responsibilities should be doing; and ii) developing the competence of the key stakeholders to facilitate (managers) HRD operational activities and to look for HRD related opportunities (employees) for themselves. With this in mind, the call to action for HRD professionals involves a refocus on value, positioning, and responsiveness.

On value, HRD professionals should clarify to all key stakeholders how they 'oil the wheels' of their activities in the organization, and how they create strategic value for all key stakeholders involved. Further, HRD professionals should revisit how they position their role in the organization. They should check, consult, and develop the title, the job description, and the scope of the role. Also, they need to take proactive steps to educate key stakeholders to recognize their contribution to HRD activities. This responsive act will enable them to manage stakeholders' expectations; make clear the scope of HRD's role and where to find additional HRD-related support. Finally, HRD professionals should find opportunities to develop an enhanced (strategic) alliance at all levels of the organization to build relationships, understand what is needed, and involve key stakeholders in the planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of all key employee lifecycle aspects.

### Limitations and Future Research

As with all studies, this investigation does have its limitations. Some cases had no managers (HEI1 and RAIL) or HRD professionals (NHS1). Access to data collection was challenging because we began data collection in the first phase of the

Covid pandemic national lockdown in 2020. Future research should consider information from all key stakeholders in different organizations. It would also be worth exploring the perception of HRD's role across various other organizations and wider throughout the UK. Given that the HRD function is influenced by and dependent on the host system within which it operates (Wang et al., 2017), a deductive study would provide objective evidence of the impact of the organizational and cultural context on employees' and managers' responsibilities, expectations, and perceptions.

As previously stated, further comparison between two other countries has been carried out, and similar themes emerged from the data. Still, the suggestion is to choose similar size organizations, sectors, and a similar set-up and labelling of the HRD function, to bring more profound insights in the future.



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# Board's monitoring capacity: Mexican companies' reality

Alejandro Vazques Rios

## Abstract

Corporate governance faces important challenges when balancing stakeholders' requirements and interests. Agency Theory specifies monitoring, evaluating, and advising as the primary duties of the board to contribute to the strategy of the company (Ross, 1973). Thus, a considerable body of research on corporate governance has been developed during the last few decades to investigate the influence of various types of directors for the effective oversight of corporations. Hambrick, Misangyi, and Park (2015) offer the "Quad Model" as a theoretical framework to integrate four characteristics which are independence, expertise, bandwidth, and motivation as predictors of effective monitoring. There is no empirical research that includes these four characteristics, and it was the purpose of this study to empirically test the quad model using the companies listed on the Mexican Stock Exchange as the sample. The method was based on archival data from 2014 to 2017, assessing the four qualities of each board member to correlate the board quality with the total return to shareholders as a measure of the effectiveness of the board. The findings bring into question the validity, relevance, and transferability of this US derived theoretical model to a non-Western country such as Mexico, and offer important insights into the distinctive cultural realities of corporate governance in Mexican companies.

## Introduction

Corporate governance has become a critical subject in business stakeholders' agenda. The diversity of directors overseeing a company's operation increases the likelihood of balancing and representing different and sometimes opposite stakeholder interests. Thus, a considerable body

of research on corporate governance has been developed during the last few decades to investigate the contributions to and influence of various types of directors to the effective oversight of corporations (Bebchuk & Weisbach, 2010; Ponomareva, 2019). Directors should have the ability and independence to represent the interests of many stakeholders in performing their role. According to Agency Theory literature (Ross, 1973), the board's role has evolved as a result of the increasing complexity for the principal (shareholders) in monitoring the agent's (management) actions; as a result, Fama and Jensen (1983) described the role of the board as the information system that the shareholders use to monitor the agent. More recently, the board's responsibilities as the principal's representative have been defined as encouraging, directing, and monitoring the actions and plans of managers (agents) to ensure they act in ways to maximize economic value for the company and its shareholders (Bebchuk & Fried, 2003); and acting as the guardian of the company's capital (financial, human, and reputational) (Bagley, Cova, & Augsburger, 2017).

## Roles and purposes of corporate governance

Based on internal factors such as capital structure, board effectiveness, managerial incentives, and control systems; the corporate governance construct has been defined as "the ways in which financial suppliers assure themselves of getting a return on their investment" (Shleifer & Vishny, 1997, p. 737). This study is focused on how the board's composition influences its effectiveness in performing its responsibilities to meet shareholders' expectations. The underlying argument is that the people who comprise the board determine its effectiveness in performing its

responsibilities acting individually and collectively as representatives of the shareholders, by finding the best balance between management (agent) and stakeholders' (principal) interests and concerns.

Many researchers have undertaken investigations seeking to identify the best board composition and member characteristics that lead to ensuring management makes the best decisions regarding assessing financial performance, setting compensation packages for the C-suite, ensuring returns to shareholders, setting product strategy, and maintaining corporate profits. Since investigating board governance requires developing measures to operationalize the construct, several proxies have been used in the research literature. The most commonly used are board size and structure (Bebchuk & Fried, 2006; Bhatt & Bhattacharya, 2015), independence of its members (Sun, Cahan, & Emanuel, 2009), stock ownership concentration (Sun & Cahan, 2009), and executive compensation packages (Bebchuk & Fried, 2003; Bebchuk, Fried, & Walker, 2002). But despite the diverse approaches and proxies used by researchers, their findings have been inconclusive. In a recent review of these studies, Boivie et al. (2016) concluded that "the empirical findings linking structural board characteristics with important firm outcomes have been decidedly mixed at best" (p. 321).

Notwithstanding the inconclusiveness of previous research, electing an engaged, knowledgeable, objective, and effective board of directors should be a critical concern for any corporation to have a board capable of analysing information and data, interacting with all stakeholders, and monitoring managerial decisions and actions to find the optimal balance between risks and rewards for all stakeholders. The board

members should be trustworthy and professionally qualified in order to build a working governance system that allows open dissent and encourages a respectful environment (Sonnenfeld, 2002).

One of the more critical issues that boards address is managing the power relationship when they seek to find the best balance of management authority with the board's responsibility of control and monitoring. Boards limit managers' behaviour, evaluate their decisions, and determine rewards. But in some cases, the board's role may be compromised if the CEO has a way to exercise power over the board or its individual members. For example, when the CEO has a board with a high proportion of handpicked directors, there are few major stockholders (e.g., influential institutional shareholders), or the managers are protected by antitakeover arrangements, the board's ability to properly perform its control and monitoring role is reduced (Bebchuk & Fried, 2003; Shin, 2016).

Governance scholars (Barton & Wiseman, 2015; Bosse & Phillips, 2016) argue that monitoring the CEO's performance is essential to achieve two core outcomes: aligning managerial behaviour and decisions with the interests of shareholders by assessing firm performance, and finding an appropriate balance between short- and long-term goals that best serve long-term shareholder's interests.

It is the purpose of this research to investigate the characteristics of board members and their relationship to board effectiveness. Moreover, this research uses a non-USA Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) regulated sample (e.g., Mexican) of publicly held companies to confirm that the key board members' characteristics identified in research on SEC-regulated companies

are also true for non-SEC regulated companies. If directors are to be effective monitors of a company's owners to control managers, then the characteristics found true in the SEC-regulated publicly held companies should also be true for non-SEC regulated companies.

The key board members' characteristics or qualities were recently identified and organized in "The Quad Model" developed by Hambrick, Misangyi, and Park (2015). According to this model (Appendix A), boards need to contain members who have four essential qualities. These qualities are independence, expertise, bandwidth, and motivation. Independence is the ability of the director to be capable of acting independently when making decisions. Expertise is the understanding that the director should have of the business strategy and the industry where the focal company competes. Bandwidth is the capacity to devote time and attention to the board's duties. Motivation is the eagerness to exert oneself on behalf of shareholders.

As seen in Appendix A, these four qualities combine to predict control and monitoring effectiveness of the board. This board capability results in making the CEO provide explanations for strategic decisions, take accountability for performance, and present rationales for plans and corporate actions. Finally, control and monitoring also include oversight of resource allocations and corporate leadership. Thus, control and monitoring are valuable tools to mitigate agency costs.

The method used to research the purpose of this study was based on information and data gathered from the Mexican Stock Exchange (MSE). The MSE consists of 140 companies. To ensure that these companies were not regulated in any important way by non-Mexican regulatory agencies, only those companies not listed on other regulated exchanges were included in the study. To establish a detailed explanation on how to implement corporate governance practices, the MSE endorsed the "Código de Mejores Prácticas Corporativas" (Code of Best Corporate Practices) (CCE, 2010). This document is based on practices from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members and asks companies to adopt a corporate governance structure focused on setting the business strategy, supervising the business operation, and evaluating the CEO; looking to maximize the value for the firm. The main difference between the Mexican

regulatory framework and other countries, such as the United States, is that the Mexican Securities Exchange Act (Diputados, 2005) is focused more on the administrative governance duties and only on independence as a requirement for 25% of directors. Moreover, despite the Code of Best Corporate Practices (CCE, 2010) being more detailed regarding structure, composition, and directors' characteristics, companies listed on the MSE are expected but not required to comply with it. As a result, managers and boards may operate without the strong control and monitoring authority seen in other nations. Additionally, companies listed exclusively on the MSE are rarely studied which means there is little prior research on these companies.

The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it seeks to respond to the call by Hambrick et al. (2015) to test their quad model empirically. The second contribution is to respond to the call by Boivie et al. (2016) for expanding the factors included in the board's monitoring capacity role. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, this study responds to the call by Van Essen, Otten, and Carberry (2015) to move beyond US firms to study the characteristics of effective boards in other nations.

## Literature review

### Corporate governance research

Previous research has separately examined the main characteristics of corporate governance, for example, its independence to act (Daily, Johnson, Ellstrand, et al., 1998) and the impact of CEO duality (term used to explain that the CEO may also serve as Chair of the Board) (Canyon & Peck, 1998). De Angelis and Grinstein (2014) sampled 494 firms looking for changes in performance measures during 2007-2008 as a result of the rules issued by the SEC in 2006 regarding how firms tie CEO compensation to performance. These authors found significant variations in the choice of performance measures. They observed that board decisions about how to assess performance include three types of measures: market-based measures which are based on stock price performance; accounting-based measures such as income, sales, return on equity, and return on assets; and nonfinancial measures based on subjective topics such as customer satisfaction and corporate diversity. De Angelis and Grinstein (2014) concluded that firms should choose a



combination of performance measures not only to assess but to try to predict CEO actions.

By the use of several independent and control variables, Van Essen et al. (2015) confirmed that CEO duality, which leads to more power in the same individual, and firm size, are positively related to CEO total compensation. However, in the presence of a larger and more independent board, the association between CEO compensation and firm performance becomes stronger. Van Essen et al. (2015) concluded that board independence represents an important counterbalance over CEO power. Their specific recommendation for future research was to move beyond the US samples and focus on other nations to test several variables and hypotheses, looking for new evidence to determine board power.

More recently, Shaikh and Peters (2018) using a sample of S&P 1500 US firms examined the value that monitoring exerts in reducing the agency costs of under- and over-investment in R&D projects. Using board independence as a proxy to determine board monitoring, these authors concluded that independent boards heighten underinvestment but encourages better resource allocation in those situations where firms have high cash flows. The authors supported that, even if firms have only independent directors, but maintain CEO duality. This can result in greater dependence on powerful CEOs, suggesting firms comply with board independence regulations because independent monitoring is essential in strategic decisions (Shaikh & Peters, 2018). Additionally, they highlighted the fact that most studies on Agency Theory are

based on US context, and emphasized the value of extending the research to different countries where different corporate governance practices exist.

The results and recommendations of previous studies could be summarized in the following: partial examinations of boards' characteristics have been inconclusive in explaining boards' governance monitoring capabilities (Devers, Cannella Jr, Reilly, & Yoder, 2007); different performance measures should be used to assess the capability of board members to act with independence and knowledge, and be responsible representatives of shareholders (Hambrick, Werder, & Zajac, 2008; Huse, Hoskisson, Zattoni, et al., 2011; Van Essen et al., 2015). And finally, using non-US samples should be encouraged to contribute new insights to the corporate governance literature (Huse et al., 2011; Shaikh & Peters, 2018; Van Essen et al., 2015). This study attempts to address within the Mexican context these calls for more research on the issue of corporate governance.

#### Monitoring capacity

As business complexity has increased, boards have been under greater pressure to increase CEO accountability. Shareholders have become more vigilant in overseeing executives as they expect greater performance measured by share price and total return to shareholders (Epstein & Roy, 2005). As a result, elected boards are increasingly playing a pivotal role in corporate governance. As noted earlier, the literature divides directors' tasks into two complementary roles: monitoring and advising (Guerrero, Lapalme, Herrbach, et al., 2017; Laux

& Laux, 2009). Performing these tasks effectively, increases the necessity of the board's information processing capability to monitor decisions and advise on these activities (Withers & Fitza, 2017). The board, acting for the principals as an effective monitor, is essential because misbehaviour by self-interested executives can result in important agency costs, such as excessive expenditures, high bonuses for managers, wasteful projects and illogical acquisitions (Bosse & Phillips, 2016). While even strong board action may not eliminate these costs entirely, it is possible to reduce and control them by monitoring executive decisions and behaviours. This study explores the impact of the composition of boards on the performance of companies listed on the Mexican Stock Exchange (MSE). Specifically, the central research question addressed was as follows: Does the presence of quad qualified directors on the board increase the likelihood of higher financial results for shareholders in Mexican companies?

#### Research method

To achieve the study purpose, an empirical investigation was undertaken to test the research model (Figure 1). The research model posits a relationship between the combined qualities that are defined in the quad-model and organizational outcomes. Specifically, this empirical investigation tested the degree to which the presence of the four qualities defining the quad-model are related to the total return to shareholders. The positive direction of the relationship stated in this study followed the suggestion by Hambrick et al. (2015) that "the relevance of the quad model might extend beyond the domain of failure prevention to other outcomes such as corporate performance" (p. 339).

#### Sample

Firms selected for participation in the sample were determined based on the following conditions being met: Corporations were listed only on the MSE, and corporations whose annual reports and annual shareholders meeting reports are available for the 2014-2017 period. Ninety-five companies accomplished both requirements, 45 companies were not considered because 20 of them were listed also in another stock exchange (US, UK, and Spain), 15 companies were listed after 2014 or unlisted before 2017, and 10 companies were temporarily suspended by the MSE due to lack of information reported and lack of maintenance fees payment.

The time window from 2014 to 2017 was selected because of the availability of the annual reports. Two data sources were required to obtain the reports, the MSE website, which offered the last two years' reports, and the companies' investors' websites which presented the last four years' reports.

#### Hypothesis

To answer the central research question, this study tested the following hypothesis:

H1: A higher (lower) number of quad qualified directors on the board will lead to a higher (lower) return to shareholders in comparison to the average returns of all publicly traded companies on the MSE and not otherwise listed.

#### Dependent variable

Monitoring effectiveness/performance of management, was operationalized by the use of the financial metric Total Return to Shareholders (TRS). TRS was selected according to previous studies (Boivie, Bednar, Aguilera, et al., 2016; Ellig, 2014; Seo, 2017) as it is considered an accurate proxy for measuring the effectiveness of the actions and behaviours of management. The TRS calculation consists of the year-end share price minus initial share price plus the stocks' dividend yield all divided by the initial share price to capture the total return on a firm's stock in a calendar year (Krause, Withers, & Semadeni, 2017).

Total Return to Shareholders (TRS) formula:

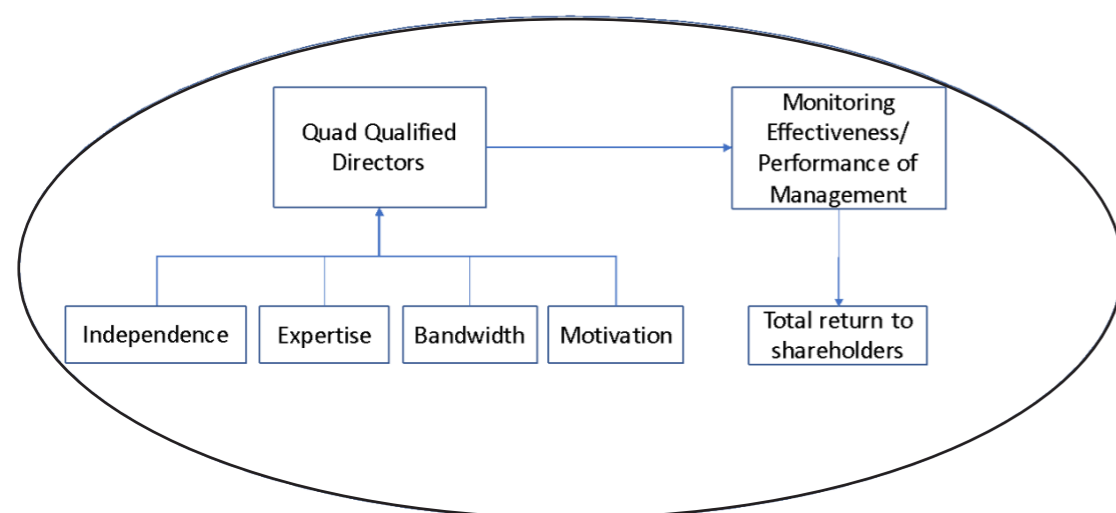
$TRS = \text{Annual change in stock price} + \text{reinvested dividends}$

For this research project's purposes, TRS was calculated for each of the four years, 2014-2017, share prices and dividends data were manually collected from the annual reports of each listed company and *Economática*, which is an investment platform of financial data.

#### Independent variables: Quad qualified directors

A scale of different items was designed to assess the four qualities of the quad model for individual directors. Following the recommendation by Hambrick et al. (2015), the quad score was calculated first of all, based on individual directors; and second, on the basis of the number of quad qualified directors on the board of each company.

**Figure 1**  
Research model



**Table 1**

Items to assess the presence or absence of each independent variable.

Variable	Items	Values
Independence	Is the director currently or formerly an employee of the company?	Yes = 0 No = 1
Independence	Does the director have family or personal ties to the CEO?	Yes = 0 No = 1
Independence	Does the director have any material business connection to the company?	Yes = 0 No = 1
Independence	Does CEO-Duality exist in the focal firm?	Yes = 0 No = 1
Expertise	What are the director's areas and levels of formal education and certification?	Unrelated = 0 Related = 1
Expertise	Does the director have professional experience in the focal company's industry?	No = 0 Yes = 1
Bandwidth	Is the director fully employed elsewhere?	Yes = 0 No = 1
Bandwidth	How many other boards does the director serve on?	3 or more = 0 2 or less = 1
Motivation	Does the director have ownership stake in the company?	No = 0 Yes = 1
Motivation	Does the director have experience as an investor or venture capitalist?	No = 0 Yes = 1

Directors' information was derived from each board member's biography included in the company's annual reports, shareholders' reports, and Bloomberg's database. The items for each characteristic were analysed to determine if a director possessed that quality. Table 1 shows the scoring for each item measured to determine the quad model characteristics.

Each of the four qualities were assessed by different items, for example, directors were considered as totally independent if they were not employees of the focal company, did not have a family relationship with the CEO, did not have a business connection to the company as being suppliers or customers, and CEO-duality did not exist in the focal company (Bebchuk & Weisbach, 2010; Conyon, 2014; Daily et al., 1998; Krause et al., 2017; Withers & Fitz, 2017). Two items defined whether or not directors had the necessary expertise to accomplish their monitoring responsibility: their academic background and their professional experience. The academic background was coded "1" if it was related to the focal firm's industry, was an MBA or represented a specialization in finance (Haynes & Hillman, 2010; Linck, Netter, & Yang, 2009; Tian, Haleblan, & Rajagopalan, 2011). Professional experience was coded "1" if the director's experience was related to the focal firm's industry or if the director had experience as CEO, CFO, or in strategic planning. Bandwidth was assessed by the use of two elements. First, if directors were fully employed elsewhere (Seo, 2017), especially as a CEO, CFO, or as a VP in a multinational company because these time-intensive jobs constrain the director's ability to spend time on the focal company's agenda. And second, the number of other boards the director served on by using the measure developed by Fich and Shivdasani (2006), which established that serving on three or more boards increases the directors' busyness. Finally, motivation was determined by the use of two measures. First, if directors were also shareholders (Hambrick et al., 2015; Hillman, Nicholson, & Shropshire, 2008) and, second, if a director had experience as a professional investor or a venture capitalist (Guerrero et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2009), both measures were coded "1" when these characteristics allowed a director to be considered as having an ownership interest in the focal firm.

Directors were considered as quad qualified when reaching at least seven points among the ten items established across the four qualities,

according to the following formula:

$$Qq_{\text{Director}} \geq 4i + 1e + 1b + 1m$$

This means that a quad qualified director was one who fulfils the four items for independence and accomplishes at least one of the two items for expertise, bandwidth, and motivation.

The weight among the four qualities in the quad qualified formula was based on Hambrick et al. (2015). According to the authors, "only independent directors are eligible to be assessed for their monitoring capacity, it is essential that they are not capable of scrutinizing themselves or their boss dispassionately" (p. 325).

## Analysis and results

### Descriptive statistics of the MSE companies' boards

This section is divided into two parts. First, descriptive statistics regarding the MSE boards' characteristics. Second, frequency analysis regarding the four quad model qualities.

**Table 2**

Descriptive statistics of the MSE boards

Statistics	Mean	SD
Board Size	11.1	3.4
Director's Age	61.9	11.4
Boards They Served On	4.0	3.0

### Quad model characteristics

A detailed summary of the number and proportion of directors who possess each one of the items separately and the number and proportion of companies where CEO duality does not exist is presented in Appendix C. The findings regarding each quality are explained in the following section.

### Independence

The majority of directors participating in Mexican companies' boards possessed some independence characteristics. Directors were independent as 83.8% of them did not have a business connection to the company, 78.7% were not former or current employees of the company, and 77.2% of them did not have personal or family ties to the CEO. Particular attention should be paid to the CEO-Duality practice because 63% of the companies separated the Board Chair and CEO positions into two different executives. This practice is higher than

the S&P 500 standard, where, for the first time in 2017, the majority of US listed companies (51%) separated both positions (Spencer-Stuart, 2017). Integrating the four independence requirements, only 391 directors (37%) were considered as independent.

### Expertise

The dominant source of expertise among the 1,059 directors was professional experience. A high proportion of directors (81%) possessed professional experience related to the firm's industry or had held positions such as CEO or CFO, or had experience in strategic planning. Academic background resulted in the second source of expertise among directors. The maximum academic degree obtained by board members presented a dispersed distribution where a notable proportion of 39% had only a bachelor's and master's degree (MBA, economy, law, engineering), 8% had participated in executive education programmes, and only 5% had a doctoral degree.

### Bandwidth

The time devoted by directors to perform their responsibilities was importantly constrained for two reasons: 49% of board members had a full-time position in another company, and the majority of them (58.3%) were busy directors because they participated on three or more boards simultaneously (Cashman, Gillan, & Jun, 2012; Fich & Shivdasani, 2006). The detailed information about directors' business is presented in Appendix D.

On average, the 1,059 directors participated on four boards, which is a workload considerably higher in comparison to the US practice. According to the 2017 US Board Index (Spencer-Stuart, 2017), more than three-quarters of the S&P 500 boards had limits on their directors accepting other corporate directorships (no more than four to five boards), and a stricter restriction for directors who are fully employed or are CEO in another company (no more than two boards). In 2017, the maximum number of boards where US directors participated simultaneously was six, representing less than 1% of all directors.

According to the busy board definition by Fich and Shivdasani (2006) a busy board consists of 50% or more busy directors. This study contains 60 busy boards out of the 95 firms listed on the MSE, and only 35 boards are not busy. Table 3 shows the proportion of busy directors that companies have.

**Table 3**  
Busy boards

Boards	% of Busy Directors
3	100%
6	90-99%
11	80-89%
12	70-79%
11	60-69%
17	50-59%
35	Not Busy

According to the formula presented, which posits that directors are considered as quad qualified when reaching seven points distributed among the four qualities or characteristics ( $QqDirector \geq 4i + 1e + 1b + 1m$ ), the results showed that 391 directors (37%) were independent on the four items. This result is aligned to the Mexican Securities Exchange Act (Ley del Mercado de Valores) (Diputados, 2005) which establishes that at least 25% of directors must be independent. Regarding expertise, the sum of the results was positive, with 91% of directors accomplishing at least one item. Some concerns arose about bandwidth and motivation because 31% of directors had significant constraints devoting time to their board responsibilities, and 42% of directors did not reach the acceptable score to be considered

**Table 4**  
Directors by score on the quad model characteristics

Points by variable	Independence		Expertise		Bandwidth		Motivation	
	Directors	%	Directors	%	Directors	%	Directors	%
0	3	0.3	97	9	332	31	442	42
1	66	6	456	43	474	45	528	50
2	208	20	506	48	253	24	89	8
3	391	37						
4	391	37						

#### Motivation

The characteristic with the lowest presence among directors on MSE boards is motivation. Only 18% of them have experience as an investor or venture capitalist, and only 49% have an ownership stake in the company. This is lower than the practice of the S&P 500 boards where 25% of directors are investors. Indeed, stock grants are an essential component of the directors' compensation packages, representing 56% of the total package (Spencer-Stuart, 2017).

#### Quad-qualified directors

After analysing the results of the ten items classified into the four qualities of the quad model, the characteristics of directors participating in the MSE boards of the 95 companies show a more detailed picture of the board structures and features of the MSE listed companies. The following table presents directors by the score of each one of the quad model qualities.

as motivated to be identified with shareholders. Despite the results by quality or characteristic, it is necessary to remember that a director is considered as quad qualified only when all four qualities are present. Thus, using the formula of four points for independence and at least one point on the other three qualities, only 93 directors (8.8%) out of the 1,059 were quad qualified. As shown in Table 5, this particular group of directors are distributed among 37 companies, and only one firm has a majority of quad qualified directors (7 out of 12). A majority of companies did not have quad qualified directors participating in their boards.



**Table 5**  
Quad qualified directors by company

Quad Qualified Directors	Companies
0	58
1	12
2	9
3	8
4	5
6	2
7	1

#### Correlation analysis

A set of Pearson correlations were computed to determine if there were relationships between the variables of the research model. Between the number of quad qualified directors in each company and the difference between the company's total TRS of the four years 2014-2017 and the average TRS of the 95 companies during the same period. The average TRS from the 95 companies during the 2014-2017 period was 40.4%, with 40 companies (42%) above and 55 (58%) below the average returns. For the correlation, the TRS of each company was compared against 40.4%. For example, the company with the highest TRS (493.9%) was computed as 453.5% above the average, on the other hand, the company with the lowest TRS (-87.3%) was computed as -127.7% below the average TRS.

**Table 6**  
Correlations between quad qualified directors, TRS, and Beta

	Mean	SD	1	2
Quad Qualified Directors	0.98	1.56	-	-
Difference Against Average TRS 14-17	0	71.06	-0.01	-
Stock's Beta	0.41	0.46	0.06	-0.4

Note: correlation statistically significant at  $p < .01$ .

First, and regarding the presence of quad qualified directors on the board, Table 6 shows that the

number of quad qualified directors over the 95 companies was not significantly related to the company performance measured by TRS. So, the hypothesis that a higher or lower number of quad qualified directors on the board will lead to a higher or lower return to shareholders in comparison to the average returns of all publicly traded companies on the MSE, and not otherwise listed, was not supported. Second, the stock's beta was not significantly related to the presence of quad qualified directors. Thus, it was concluded that the directors' quad qualification was not related to the degree of systemic risk of the firm's stock; this means that the presence of qualified directors was not related to the aggressiveness or defensiveness of the company in comparison to the market. In conclusion, the 95 companies listed on MSE did not demonstrate the influence of having quad qualified directors on their boards concerning financial outcomes assessed by the TRS.

#### Discussion

The primary purpose of this research project was to determine whether the presence of quad qualified directors on the board of Mexican companies increases the likelihood of higher financial results for shareholders by testing Hambrick et al.'s (2015) 'Quad Model' empirically within Mexico. The results show they do not. In addition to this finding, which is considered highly significant within the Mexican context, other significant outcomes and insights have emerged. First, the study refines the measurement of the four quad model characteristics. And second, the descriptive statistical analysis reveals the corporate governance reality that exists across the 1,059 directors from the research sample of firms listed on the MSE.

#### Discussion of hypothesis

The study hypothesis was not supported as seen with the correlation analysis. There were no statistically significant relationships between having quad qualified directors participating on boards and the TRS during the period 2014-2017. Additionally, the comparison of the returns of the companies publicly traded on the MSE and not otherwise listed demonstrates a minimum difference between the number of quad qualified directors in the companies above and below the average TRS. The average returns from the 95 companies during the 2014-2017 period were 40.4%, and the distribution resulted in 40 companies (42%) above

and 55 (58%) below the average returns. From the 40 companies with returns above the average, 16 firms (40%) had an average of three quad qualified directors in the board, with a standard deviation of two. On the other hand, from the 55 companies with returns below the average, 21 firms (38.2%) had an average of two quad qualified directors in the board, with a standard deviation of one. Appendix E includes detailed information for these companies.

The 16 companies with higher TRS had 23% of quad qualified directors on the board (46 out of 201 directors), and the 21 companies with lower TRS had 19% of quad qualified directors on the board (47 out of 246 directors). Notwithstanding these findings were aligned with the hypothesis of this research project, the differences between the number and proportion of quad qualified directors on the boards of companies with low- and high-TRS were minimal; thus, the statistical relationship between both variables was not significant. There are two plausible explanations for the non-significance in this relationship: the theoretical framework used for this study and the methodology followed to analyse data from the 95 companies.

#### **The validity of the theoretical framework**

This study used Agency Theory to frame the monitoring effectiveness of the board in the MSE. Notwithstanding Agency is the most widely used theory in corporate governance research, the findings of this study demonstrate that the MSE corporate governance characteristics are related to the Managerial Hegemony Theory (Kosnik, 1987; Mace, 1971). Managerial Hegemony Theory posits that the board of directors is a legal fiction, an ineffective governing institution due to its lack of independence (Dallas, 1996; Kosnik, 1987), performing as a mean of perpetuating the power of a group.

The 95 companies used in this research project showed that the separation of responsibilities and duties between ownership and control are affected by variables such as, the role of majority-controlling shareholders (Kumar & Zattoni, 2016, 2018) and the national business system (Zattoni, Witt, Judge, et al., 2017) for two reasons: First of all, there is a high control role from the board's chairs because only 14% of them were entirely separated from the focal company. The majority of them (60%) have family ties to the CEO; so, they can exert more significant influence over

management, playing an active role in persuading the board to accept the management proposals and decisions instead of being a promoter of objectivity and open discussion (Bezemer, Nicholson, & Pugliese, 2018). Second, and in regard to the influence of the national business system, Mexico was classified as a concentrated country by the Corporate Governance Factbook (OECD, 2017) which means that a single family, group, or individual holds the majority of shares and most often include the CEO and the board chair. Analysing MSE, almost all of the chairs (95%) from the sample, have ownership stakes in the company. This concentration may impact the board's monitoring effectiveness because decision making is performed by the owners participating on the board and the firm's operation.

In sum, Agency Theory by itself was not a valid framework to study the MSE sample because the director's fiduciary duty is diminished due to the minimal separation between principal and agents' interests. Despite the qualifications of some directors at MSE, their monitoring impact over strategic decisions and corporate performance is limited due to the decision-making power exerted by the company's owners who tend to follow the Managerial Hegemony Theory to gain and sustain their control by recruiting friends and family onto the board to play a passive role in their oversight function.

#### **The methodology**

The variables considered in the research model could be another reason for the failure in supporting the hypothesis of this study, both independent and dependent variables have been used in previous research but separately. Thus, testing them empirically with data from the MSE, which is a barely studied market, represent a good opportunity to reach new insights and a potential necessity to re-test them with some adjustments.

#### **Independent variables.**

The ten items classified in four qualities were based on Hambrick et al.'s (2015) recommendations, and the coding system based on dichotomous values was based on previous research projects. The objective of this methodology was to combine independence, expertise, bandwidth, and motivation as conjoint qualities for the first time. Thus, as a novel empirical operationalization of the quad model, the weighting of the four qualities may be affected by some imprecisions.

#### **Dependent variable**

Accounting and market returns are the two common proxies in research to assess corporate performance (Pucheta-Martínez & Gallego-Álvarez, 2019; Rebeiz, 2018; Shaukat & Trojanowski, 2018).

This study used TRS as a performance metric to operationalize the Monitoring effectiveness/performance of the management construct. TRS is one of the most common market returns used in recent research. These kinds of measures are commonly used as dependent variables and some researchers consider them imperfect (Mans-Kemp, Viviers, & Collins, 2018; Ponomareva, 2019; Rebeiz, 2018; Shaukat & Trojanowski, 2018) because of the complexity of archival data, which means that these metrics resulted from unobserved factors driving corporate performance, and that there is a time-lapse between a corporate decision

#### **Managerial implications**

From an engaged scholarship perspective, this Mexican study represents the first empirical test of the quad model in companies listed on the MSE. Although the statistical result was not significant, the study provides, for the first time, a detailed description of the board member characteristics from companies regulated exclusively by the MSE legal framework, and a refinement of the measurement of the four quad model qualities. Regarding Independence, only 37% of the 1,059 directors were entirely separated from the focal company and its CEO. An important finding is that board chairs are highly related to the company, only 14% of the 95 chairs were totally independent, and in some cases, they were the CEO's father or brother (24%); so, due to the family tie they can potentially neutralize the board and exert higher influence over the CEO. About Expertise, most

Expertise had a moderate positive and significant relationship with TRS, concluding that, across the MSE sample, firms with a greater number of independent and experienced directors have better financial results.

and its impact on the market (Rebeiz, 2018).

The non-significant relationship of this research project is similar to Shaukat and Trojanowski's (2018) and Rebeiz's (2018) conclusions because the archival data from the 380 observations (95 companies during four years) to calculate TRS as a dependent variable, showed that dividends were paid in 167 cases; only 28 firms paid dividends during all four years, and 56 firms did not pay dividends at all. Thus, considering that the TRS calculation is the sum of the annual change in stock price and reinvested dividends, for 56 out of 95 companies, the TRS was calculated exclusively based on the stock price changes. And, as stated in recent studies (Ponomareva, 2019; Shaukat & Trojanowski, 2018), the stock price could be determined by market factors and may not adequately reflect the board's effectiveness.

Summarizing, for this study's purposes, TRS may have been an imperfect metric to use as a dependent variable because its calculation was based on the investors' subjective perceptions of the marketplace, and consequently, did not reflect the firm's actual value.

of the directors possessed professional experience related to the focal firm's industry or have occupied CEO, CFO, or strategic planning positions. Professional experience dominates over academic background across the boards included in this research project, concurring with Veltrop et al. (2017). Bandwidth results put up red flags for the 95 studied boards. Critical concerns about 58.5% of directors serving on multiple boards arose because busyness may distract their attention from strategy topics and their monitoring responsibility (Park, Kim, Chang, et al., 2018). Two critical challenges of busyness may be faced by the 60 busy boards: complicated coordination of schedules for board meetings, and substantial time constraints on processing information (Mans-Kemp et al., 2018). Although bandwidth was not related to corporate performance, the results of this study support those who advocate: i) the setting of limits on the number of directorships could be useful to reduce the busy board indicator (Fich & Shivdasani, 2006) at MSE; ii) looking to enhance directors' skills and incentivize them to be capable monitors, reducing the possibility of compromising their commitment (Kaczmarek, Kimino, & Pye, 2014; López

Iturriaga & Morrós Rodríguez, 2014), and iii) supporting directors to improve or maintain their reputation as productive board members (Park et al., 2018). As Mans-Kemp et al. (2018) mentioned: “you are not a director for three hours, four times a year; you are a director every day of the year” (p. 216). Finally, regarding Motivation, only 49% of directors own shares of the focal firm. This result concurs with the classification by the OECD (2017), which considers Mexico a business system where corporate ownership is concentrated among a family, small group, or individual.

Concurring with Hambrick et al. (2015), the results of this study show that possessing the four qualities is not common across board members. A minority of 93 directors (8.8%) fulfilled the characteristics to be considered as quad qualified, and only 37 companies (39%) had quad qualified directors in the board. Pursuing a more in-depth analysis of the quad model characteristics among the boards of the 95 companies listed in the MSE, a second set of correlations were calculated considering the four characteristics of the quad model as independent variables to determine if they were individually connected to the TRS. Appendix F shows that only Independence and Expertise had a moderate positive and significant relationship with TRS, concluding that, across the MSE sample, firms with a greater number of independent and experienced directors have better financial results. This finding concurs with Kiymaz (2018) because the companies with better return to shareholders are the ones that favour the Agency Theory principles, hiring independent directors with academic background or professional experience related to their industry. So, according to the results from the sample of 95 companies, the transition from the Managerial Hegemony Theory to the Agency Theory represents a positive effect over the financial performance for investors.

For investors of Mexican companies, the results of this study could have important practical implications. It may encourage them to revisit their process for selecting board members. Not even they can reject candidates or remove board members during the annual meeting; shareholders could exercise their rights beyond the Act requirements and be focused not only on looking for 25% of the directors to be independent to support their vote, but to consider more elements to improve the board characteristics.

Since board composition is likely to impact board oversight effectiveness, empirically testing

the quad model may yield new insights into improving board member selection and their evaluation to identify training necessities to update their governance skills. Executing effective HR practices should go beyond the operational hierarchy. If the selection, evaluation, and training of board members is made more strategically, the board’s performance should be improved. Thus, talent management principles must be applied starting on the board to establish an example for the rest of the company.

Finally, this study responds to the call by Van Essen et al. (2015) to move beyond US firms to study the characteristics of boards in other nations. The MSE, as an emerging stock market, contributes new insights to the corporate governance literature and allows the comparison between Mexico and other stock markets regarding regulation and governance practices. Practitioners and investors could consider recommendations to strengthen corporate governance such as identifying and training board candidates, recruiting directors from new sources, increasing diversity, and limiting directorship, among others (Mans-Kemp et al., 2018).

### Limitations and recommendations for future research

Caution is recommended when interpreting the findings of this study because it has limitations that suggest future research. First, the sample of companies is limited to a single country, thus, the results could be influenced by unique Mexican business conditions and cannot be generalized to other countries. Second, the focus of this study is only on market return measured by the TRS as a proxy for corporate performance, future research could use alternative measures of performance such as, Tobin’s Q, ROA, and ROE among others. However, this original research is a first step on the path to extend corporate governance literature and hopefully encourages other researchers to explore some alternative directions.

The national context matters, MSE demonstrates that its corporate governance practices are not aligned with the Agency Theory principles. So, data analysis from a barely studied market is helpful to test frameworks and methods widely used in other countries. Especially in non-SEC regulated markets because boards vary across geography (Steckler & Clark, 2019).

Regarding recommendations for future research, other topics could be considered to analyse board members’ monitoring effectiveness such as merger and acquisition activity, ethical practices recognitions, and the position of the company over different indexes or rankings (Shaukat & Trojanowski, 2018) with the limitation of reducing the sample only to the companies that experienced those kind of circumstances.

Thinking beyond the statistical results obtained by this study, the research goals pursued were achieved. The quad model was empirically tested based on evidence regarding the relationship

between four corporate governance qualities and firm performance in an emerging country barely studied previously, and new insight and better understanding of the impact of board composition within listed Mexican companies were generated. The data collected and analysed in this research provide evidence from an emerging market, thereby expanding the corporate governance research area. Hopefully, this will encourage others to invest more research effort designed to contribute to the corporate governance literature based on the Mexican business environment.

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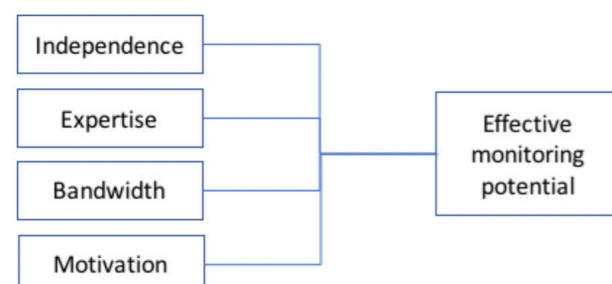
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## Appendices

### Appendix A

The Quad Model

The following model is an adaptation of the Quad Model by Hambrick et al. (2015).



### Appendix B

Companies listed on the Mexican Stock Exchange during 2014-2017

COMPANY	TOTAL DIRECTORS
HILASAL_MEXICANA	3
CONVERTIDORA INDUSTRIAL	5
CORPORATIVO_GBM	5
INDUSTRIAS_CH	5
GENERAL_SEGUROS	6
CREDITO_REAL	6
CONSORCIO_ARISTOS	7
GRUPO FINANCIERO MONEX	7
PEÑA_VERDE	7
PROMOTORA_AMBIENTAL	7
CORPORATIVO_FRAGUA	7
CASA_BOLSA_FINAMEX	7
CMR	7
EMPRESAS_CABLEVISION	7
GRUPO_QUMMA	7
ORGANIZACIÓN SORIANA	8
PROMOTORA_OPERADORA_INFRAESTRUCTURA	8
GRUPO_TMM	8
BBVA_BANCOMER	8
COMPAÑÍA_MINERA_AUTLAN	8
CORPORACION_MOCTEZUMA	8
GRUPO_PROFUTURO	8
ALPEK	9
GRUPO_COMERCIAL_CHEBRAUI	9
GRUPO_HERDEZ	9
GRUPO_LALA	9
CORPORACION_INTERAMERICANA_ENTRETENIMIENTO	9
GRUPO_MINSA	9
VALUE_GRUPO_FINANCIERO	9
GENOMMA_LAB_INTERNACIONAL	10
GRUPE	10
GRUPO_FINANCIERO_INBURSA	10
GRUPO_POSADAS	10
GRUPO_SPORTS_WORLD	10
COMER	10
ELEMENTIA	10
GRUPO_FAMSA	10
GRUPO_FINANCIERO_MULTIVA	10
GRUPO_POCHTECA	10
OHL_MEXICO	10
SANTANDER	10
ALSEA	11
BIO_PAPPEL	11
GRUPO_FINANCIERO_INTERACCIONES	11
INFRAESTRUCTURA_ENERGETICA_NOVA	11

COMPANY	TOTAL DIRECTORS
ACCEL	11
GRUPO_RADIO_CENTRO	11
QUALITAS_CONTROLADORA	11
WALMART	11
CORPORACION_INMOBILIARIA_VESTA	11
DESARROLLADORA_HOMEX	11
GRUPO_HOTELERO_SANTA_FE	11
GRUPO_VASCONIA	11
MEGACABLE_HOLDINGS	11
PROTEAK_UNO	11
MEXICHEM	12
FINANCIERA_INDEPENDENCIA	12
DINE	12
GRUMA	12
GRUPO_BAFAR	12
GRUPO_CARSO	12
GRUPO_INDUSTRIAL_SALTILLO	12
GRUPO_LAMOSA	12
GRUPO_NACIONAL_PROVINCIAL	12
IDEAL	12
VITRO	12
HOTELES_CITY_EXPRESS	13
COMPARTAMOS_BANCO	13
GENEREA	13
INTERNACIONAL_CERÁMICA	13
CONSORCIO_ARA	13
GRUPO_KUO	13
GRUPO_ROTOPLAS	13
MINERA FRISCO	13
GRUPO_CEMENTOS_CHIHUAHUA	14
GRUPO_SANBORNS	14
INDUSTRIAS_PEÑOLES	14
REGIONAL	14
GRUPO_AEROMEXICO	15
LIVERPOOL	15
PROCORP	15
RASSINI	15
GRUPO_PALACIO_HIERRO	15
AXTEL	15
GRUPO_MEXICO	15
MAXCOM	15
G_COLLADO	16
ORGANIZACIÓN CULTIBA	17
INVEX_CONTROLADORA	17
ACTINVER	17
CYDSA	18
GRUPO_BIMBO	18
ARCA_CONTINENTAL	19
GRUPO_MEXICANO_DESARROLLO	19
MEDICA_SUR	20

### Appendix C

Presence of the quad model characteristics

QUALITIES	ITEMS	DIRECTORS/ COMPANIES	%
Independence	Directors who are not current or former employees of the company	833	78.7%
	Directors with no family or personal ties to the CEO	818	77.2%
	Directors with no material business connection to the company	887	83.8%
	Companies where CEO-Duality doesn't exists	60	63.2%
Expertise	Directors with formal education related to the focal firm's business	610	57.6%
	Directors with professional experience in the focal company's industry	858	81.0%
Bandwidth	Directors who are not fully employed elsewhere	540	51.0%
	Directors who serve on 1 or 2 boards	440	41.5%
Motivation	Directors who have ownership stake in the company	518	48.9%
	Director who have experience as an investor or venture capitalist	188	17.8%

### Appendix D

Directors' Busyness

BOARDS THEY SERVED ON	DIRECTORS	%
1	225	21.2%
2	215	20.3%
3	129	12.2%
4	114	10.8%
5	111	10.5%
6	83	7.8%
7	56	5.3%
8	40	3.8%
9	27	2.5%
10	28	2.6%
11	6	0.6%
12	1	0.1%
13	10	0.9%
14	3	0.3%
15	3	0.3%
16	8	0.8%
TOTAL	1059	100%

### Appendix E

Number and proportion of quad qualified directors by company  
16 Companies with QQ directors and TRS above the average

COMPANY	TRS 14-17	TOTAL DIRECTORS	QUAD QUALIFIED DIRECTORS	% QQ_DIR
RASSINI	493.9%	15	1	7%
GRUPO_MEXICANO_DESARROLLO	203.1%	19	1	5%
COMPAÑÍA_MINERA_AUTLAN	117.0%	8	2	25%
GRUPO_CEMENTOS_CHIHUAHUA	108.1%	14	6	43%
INDUSTRIAS_PEÑOLES	88.2%	14	1	7%
DINE	84.3%	12	7	58%
GRUPO_FINANCIERO_INTERACCIONES	78.8%	11	3	27%
GRUPO_AEROMÉXICO	78.7%	15	4	27%
WALMART DE MEXICO	77.1%	11	2	18%
EMPRESAS_CABLEVISION	77.0%	7	3	43%
ARCA_CONTINENTAL	67.0%	19	6	32%
ALPEK	62.0%	9	2	22%
GRUPO_POSADAS	59.6%	10	1	10%
GRUPO_INDUSTRIAL_SALTILLO	53.9%	12	3	25%
PROTEAK_UNO	46.8%	11	3	27%
REGIONAL	42.0%	14	1	7%

21 Companies with QQ directors and TRS below the average

COMPANY	TRS 14-17	TOTAL DIRECTORS	QUAD QUALIFIED DIRECTORS	% QQ_DIR
PROMOTORA_AMBIENTAL	29.9%	7	1	14%
OHL_MEXICO	29.3%	10	1	10%
ELEMENTIA	27.5%	10	3	30%
IMPULSORA_DESARROLLO_EMPLEO_AMERICA_LATINA	24.6%	12	2	17%
GRUPO_HOTELERO_SANTA_FE	23.6%	11	3	27%
GRUPO_LALA	16.4%	9	2	22%
GRUPO_CARSO	8.5%	12	4	33%
GRUPO_SPORTS_WORLD	8.1%	10	3	30%
BBVA_BANCOMER	6.7%	8	2	25%
MEXICHEM	3.7%	12	1	8%
GRUPO_SANBORNS	-0.7%	14	1	7%
LIVERPOOL	-1.3%	15	4	27%
SANTANDER	-3.9%	10	4	40%
GRUPO_FINANCIERO_INBURSA	-7.1%	10	1	10%
ORGANIZACIÓN_SORIANA	-11.2%	17	1	6%
MINERA_FRISCO	-18.4%	13	2	15%
COMER	-30.2%	10	2	20%
G_COLLADO	-44.5%	16	3	19%
GRUPO_PALACIO_HIERRO	-53.8%	15	1	7%
GRUPO_POCHTECA	-58.3%	10	4	40%
MAXCOM_TELECOMUNICACIONES	-87.3%	15	2	13%

### Appendix F

Correlation between individual quad model characteristics, TRS, and Beta.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Independence	3.04	.92	-				
2. Expertise	1.39	.65	.00	-			
3. Bandwidth	.93	.74	-.26**	-.05	-		
4. Motivation	.67	.62	-.19**	.04	-.04	-	
5. TRS14-17 vs. average	40.38	71.06	.06*	.06*	-.00	-.06	-
6. Stock's beta	.41	.46	-.03	.01	.00	-.02	-.03

Note: \* correlation statistically significant at  $p < .05$  \*\* at  $p < .01$

## About the author



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Alejandro is currently Head of the People Management area at IPADE Business School in México. He received the Doctoral degree from Crummer Graduate School of Business, Rollins College in the USA, and conducts research in talent management practices and corporate governance. Alejandro is Board Member at the Mexican Association of HR Management (AMEDIRH) and is a visiting professor in different business schools across Latinamerica.

# Evidence-based MLD-related theory development through replication research

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## Abstract

This article offers an example of HRD-related theory development through empirical generalization replication research. It discusses the process and results of a multiple cross-case/cross-sector/cross-nation comparative analysis of empirical findings obtained from 15 emic qualitative replication studies of effective and ineffective managerial behaviour observed and judged by managers and non-managerial employees within private, public, and third (non-profit) organizations in seven culturally diverse countries. The analysis resulted in the emergence of a two-factor ‘universalistic behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness’ comprising eight positive (effective) and six negative (ineffective) generic behavioural criteria. These criteria could be used by HRD practitioners as ‘best evidence’ to evaluate existing ‘management and leadership development’ (MLD)-related competency frameworks and training programmes, or to develop new ones. The criteria offer insights of the specific types of effective and ineffective managerial behaviour that managers need to emulate or avoid exhibiting to be perceived effective by their superiors, peers, and subordinates

## Introduction to the Article

As mentioned in the ‘From the Guest Editor’ contribution to this issue, the topic of ‘evidence-based human resource development’ (EBHRD) is being introduced as a feature of the ‘Perspectives’ section. Hence, in support of that development,

the primary purpose of my article is to illustrate how mid-range HRD-related theories, models, frameworks, and taxonomies can be developed to expand the extant small body of contemporary ‘best evidence’ currently available in support of evidence-based ‘management and leadership development’ (MLD) which is a core component of the HRD domain of study and practice. Despite large-scale annual investments in MLD provision, which in the USA has been claimed to be a \$50 to \$166 billion industry and worldwide a \$366 billion global ‘leadership training’ industry (Kaiser & Curphy, 2013; Pfeffer, 2016; Westfall, 2019), many if not most programmes fail to bring about the desired and planned for changes in managerial behaviour and performance (Bregman, 2013; Pfeffer, 2016). Indeed, as Ardichvili et al. (2016) claim, regardless of the wide range of Western theories, models, and competency frameworks used as foundational underpinning, most leadership development (LD) programmes fail to achieve their goals. Furthermore, according to Brown et al. (2016), there is limited evidence the skills covered in management development (MD) programmes are used or transferred back to the job. Factors contributing to much of this failure can be attributed to the fact that i) most of the foundational MLD-related theories, models, and competency frameworks are dated, having mostly been derived from empirical manager or supervisory leadership behaviour studies carried out in the United States of America (USA) from the 1950s to late 1980s; ii) the widely held assumption that they are universally relevant and transferable from the US

culture to other national/societal cultures has been challenged by numerous writers (Alban-Metcalf & Alimo-Metcalf, 2000; Dorfman, Hanges, & Brodbeck, 2004; Gupta & Fernandez, 2009; Peterson & Hunt 1997; Tsui, 2007); iii) the US derived charismatic-transformational leadership models that predominantly have been used over the past two decades or more to inform and shape studies of leadership, and which underpin many if not most contemporary LD systems and programmes in multiple countries around the globe, are claimed to be theoretically flawed, and new models should be deduced from 21st century managerial (manager/leader) behaviour research (see van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013); iv) there is increasing disillusionment with Western theories and models of management and leadership in non-Western countries, particularly in countries of the Asia Pacific Region and the Middle East (see Barkema, Chen, Yandong et al., 2015; Holtbrugge, Narayanan, & Hui, 2011; Homan, Gündemir, Buengeler et al., 2020; Khatri, Ojha, Budwar et al., 2012; Li, Zhou, & Sekiguchi, 2014; Lyles, 2009; Tsui, 2004; Wolfram, Spiller, & Voyageur, 2014); and v) even in public sector organizations of some Western countries, such as the National Health Service in the United Kingdom (UK), there is much resistance by managers and leaders against LD training programmes based on MLD related theories and models derived from research carried out in private (for-profit) business organizations (see West & West, 2015).

To address the widespread failure of so much MLD provision, various writers, including myself, have called for evidence-based practice (EBP) in the field of MLD and the broader domain of HRD (see for example Geerts, Goodall, & Agius, 2020; Gubbins, Harney, van der Werff et al., 2018; Hamlin, 2002, 2010; Holton, 2004). However, for this to come about there needs to be a sound and sufficient extant body of ‘best evidence’ that HRD practitioners can draw upon to inform, shape, and critically evaluate their MLD practices. According to Rousseau (2006) within the context of evidence-based management (EBMgt), ‘best evidence’ can range from ‘big E evidence’ which refers to generalizable knowledge regarding cause-effect connections derived from scientific methods, to ‘little e evidence’ which is local or organization-specific as exemplified by root-cause analysis and other fact-based approaches to organizational decision-making. Drawing upon what applies in the field of medicine and of management, I have

argued elsewhere that ‘best evidence’ relevant to HRD practice (including MLD practice), can comprise: i) a combination of relevant, good-quality empirical research including both ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ research; ii) descriptive studies and/or self-report stories; iii) the consensus opinion of recognized professional experts in the fields of management/leadership and HRD respectively; and iv) ‘situated expertise’ based on the proficiency and judgment that individual managers acquire through practical experience and critical reflective evaluation (Hamlin, 2010). However, there are several significant difficulties and dilemmas confronting HRD practitioners attempting to use ‘best evidence’ comprising generalizable knowledge resulting from ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ research (i.e. Big E evidence). According to Hamlin (2010), the three that impede the most are: i) the lack of a sound and sufficient body of general knowledge derived from contemporary empirical research; ii) the lack of relevance and practical utility of most management research/science; and iii) the failings of business schools in educating and developing managers and HRD practitioners to become evidence based. To address these difficulties, Hamlin advocates creating new bodies of MLD generalizable knowledge using: i) Tsang and Kwan’s (1999) notion of “theory development through empirical generalization replication research”; and/or ii) van Aken’s (2019) notion of design science which can be used first to explore an HRD-related field problem manifested in a given organizational setting to generate a body of ‘instrumental knowledge’ (i.e. knowledge-to-act) that can be used to help resolve the problem. And then to test and refine this ‘instrumental knowledge’ by conducting equivalent studies in several other specific organizational settings experiencing the same field problem, and subsequently comparing the findings to generate ‘conceptual knowledge’ (i.e. ‘knowledge-to-understand’) in the form of a mid-range theory that can advance the extant body of ‘best evidence’. The specific purpose of this article is to illustrate how MLD-related theory can be developed through empirical generalization replication research.

## The Empirical Generalization Replication Study

### Introduction

The study discussed as part of this article is a

re-telling of a comparative analytic study that compared sets of findings obtained from past emic replication studies of effective and ineffective managerial behaviour observed and judged by managers and non-managerial employees within private, public, and third (non-profit) organizations carried out in various culturally diverse countries. The original multiple cross-case/cross-sector/cross-nation comparative analysis (MCCA) was completed in 2012 when the results were presented at an international research conference (Hamlin, Patel, & Ruiz, 2012). However, the study, which won the 2013 International Federation of Training and Development Organizations (IFTDO) Global HRD Award for Research Excellence has not been published in an academic journal.

There were two compelling reasons that brought about this MCCA study. First was the effect of globalization that had led to an increasing frequency in the transnational employment of managers, an increasing requirement for local (indigenous) managers to work with people from other nations, and an increasing need for expatriate managers to know and understand how effective and ineffective managerial behaviours are perceived within and across culturally diverse countries (Zhu, 2007). The second reason was the widely held belief that managers in public sector organizations should adopt and manifest different managerial behaviours to those in private sector companies because of the inherent differences between the two sectors (Baldwin, 1987). But, as Hooijberg and Choi (1998) had pointed out, while many researchers have examined these differences, few have focused on whether management or leadership styles vary or should vary across sectors. In the absence of hard evidence of managerial and leadership differences and similarities between the sectors, plus a continuing lack of clear unequivocal empirically derived behavioural dimensions of managerial performance/effectiveness criteria, it was thought that managers and leaders in all sectors would likely operate and behave based on their own individual personal preferences. Hence, it was concluded that domestic and international/global organizations ought to find out the extent to which identified behavioural determinants of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness within given organizations, organizational sectors, and countries, were the same or different. The central question that guided the original study as re-told here, was: What do managers and non-managerial employees within and across organizations,

organizational sectors, and countries, perceive as effective and ineffective managerial behaviour?

At this juncture it should be noted that the researchers of the original MCCA study and of the empirical source studies followed Hamlin (2009), who had followed Yukl (1989), by making no rigid distinction between the concepts of 'management' and 'leadership'. The reason was that 'leading' had been perceived by many scholars to be an integral aspect of the daily task of 'managing', and in many if not most organizations the two terms have tended to be blurred and used interchangeably (see for example Bolden, 2004; Frich, Brewster, Cherlin et al., 2015). Hence, the term managerial behaviour used by them, and by me for this article, embraces both managing-related and leading-related behaviours. Furthermore, the word 'leadership' in the term perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness refers to the 'supervisory leadership' that every manager performs, and not to the type of 'strategic leadership' that top managers and organizational leaders additionally perform.

## Literature Review

This section discusses extant research on 'managerial effectiveness' and 'leadership effectiveness', the theoretical concepts which guided the comparative study, its purpose, and the specific research questions that were addressed.

### Past managerial effectiveness and leadership effectiveness research

Various researchers have developed behavioural models or taxonomies of 'managerial effectiveness' and 'leadership effectiveness' (see Borman & Brush, 1993; Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). However, these cited models and taxonomies have been based overwhelmingly on empirical data obtained from studies carried out in North America. Furthermore, there is considerable variability in their content, complexity, and comprehensiveness, and many of them are simply retranslations and/or re-combinations of previously published taxonomies (Anderson, Krajewski, Goffin et al., 2008; Tett, Gutterman, Bleier et al., 2000). Due to the positivist bias in most management and leadership research which has largely favoured quantitative inquiries using pre-determined survey-based questionnaires, few researchers since the early 1980s have conducted qualitative studies of people's perceptions of effective and/or ineffective

managerial behaviour 'within' organizations, or 'across' sectors or countries. The few 'within' organization and sector qualitative inquiries that do currently stand out in the literature, are those of: i) Cammock et al. (1995) who explored managerial effectiveness in a large New Zealand public sector organization; ii) Brown and Hanlon (2004) who used the critical incident technique (CIT) to create a behavioural observation scale (BOS) for the purpose of coaching and developing entrepreneurs, identifying the training needs of prospective entrepreneurs, and for evaluating the effectiveness of entrepreneurial training programmes; iii) Brown, McCracken and Hillier (2013) who conducted a managerial behaviour study using CIT to identify the 'soft (behavioural) skills' of executives that reflect the workplace dynamics within public sector organizations; and iv) the cumulative series of CIT based emic replication managerial behaviour studies that were variously carried out by me in the UK and various other countries, either individually, or jointly, or collaboratively with local co-researchers (see for example Hamlin & Hatton, 2013; Hamlin, Kang, Chai et al., 2021). Regarding multiple 'across' sector or 'across' nation managerial behaviour research, I know of no studies other than those conducted by me with various local co-researchers, as follows: Patel and Hamlin (2012) developed a behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness from the findings of six emic replication managerial behaviour studies carried out in three EU countries; Patel, Hamlin, and Louis (2022) deduced a generic framework of perceived negative manager/leader behaviour from the findings of 13 emic replication managerial behaviour studies carried out within private companies across nine culturally diverse countries, and Hamlin, Ruiz, Jones, and Patel (2022) derived a universalistic behavioural model of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness for the health services sector from the findings of five emic replication managerial behaviour studies carried out in public hospitals across four culturally diverse countries. The study presented in this article extends the above line of MCCA managerial behaviour research.

### Theoretical context

According to Walumbwa, Lawler and Avolio (2005), leadership in the context of management is most effective when the values and perceptions of effectiveness held by managers are compatible

with equivalent cognitive structures held by those they manage and lead. Hence, the 'theories' that guided the comparative study presented in this paper, which also informed explicitly or implicitly most of the empirical source studies upon which it was based, included the multiple constituency (MC) model of organizational effectiveness, implicit leadership theory, and the concept of reputational effectiveness respectively. According to the MC model, managers and leaders are perceived as operating within a social structure consisting of multiple constituencies or stakeholders (e.g. superiors, peers, subordinates) each of whom has his/her own expectations of and reactions to them (Tsui, 1990 or 1984). Such expectations are influenced by the implicit leadership theories (ILTs) and cognitive prototypes of 'good' (effective) and 'bad' (ineffective) managerial practice and behaviour which people individually hold in their heads either consciously or most often unconsciously (Tsui, 1984). How managers are perceived and judged by their superiors, peers, and subordinates, who are likely to be influenced strongly by their personally held ILTs, can be important for managerial success (or failure) because it determines a manager's reputational effectiveness (Tsui, 1990). Such perceptions can affect positively or negatively the attitude of individual stakeholders, which in turn can determine how they react to and/or perform for those managers with whom they regularly engage (Hall, Blass, Ferris et al., 2004). As Tsui and Ashford (1994) contend, immediate subordinates can decide either to follow or ignore their leadership, whilst superiors, peers, and other key stakeholders can decide either to give or withhold important resources such as information, co-operation, and collaboration.

### Purpose of the study and research questions

The study searched for evidence of 'universalistic' behavioural criteria of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness that were relevant across organizational sectors and national boundaries. Specifically, it was a qualitative MCCA study of findings obtained from 15 emic replication managerial behaviour studies, most of which were conducted by me and my various local (indigenous) co-researchers in seven culturally diverse countries, but with one equivalent managerial behaviour study having been carried out by Wang (2011) independently of the author. The following

research questions were addressed.

- To what extent are people's perceptions of the behavioural determinants (definitions) of 'perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness' across a sample of organizations, organizational sectors, and nations the same or different?
- Where such definitions are found to be held in common (if any), can they be expressed in the form of a universalistic taxonomy or model?

## Research methodology

### Philosophical stance

The philosophical stance adopted for the comparative study was informed by notions of epistemological instrumentalism, abduction, and the pragmatic approach in applied research which allows researchers to assume a pluralist ontology and epistemology best suited to address the specified research questions (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009; Morgan, 2007; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Informed also by Berry's (1989) 'compelling idea' of imposed etics-emics-derived etics research, Tsang and Kwan's (1999) notion of empirical generalization replication research, and Eisenhardt's (1989) notion of building theories from case study research, the adopted philosophical assumptions were based on a post-positivist (empirical realist) ontology and a constructivist-interpretivist (transactional-subjectivist) epistemology (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Cunliffe, 2011).

### Empirical source data

The empirical source data were obtained from the 14 afore-mentioned emic qualitative replication managerial behaviour studies carried out in Canada, Egypt, Germany, Mexico, Romania, and the United Kingdom (UK) respectively, plus Wang's (2011) equivalent replication study in China. The core question that guided these empirical source studies was as follows: What behaviourally distinguishes effective managers from ineffective managers? All 15 studies replicated or in part replicated Hamlin's (1988) original managerial behaviour study in UK state secondary schools using Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique (CIT). In each case, concrete examples (critical incidents - CIs) of effective and ineffective managerial behaviour were collected

from purposive samples of participating managers and non-managerial employees. In each study, the collected CIs were subjected to open and axial coding to group them into the maximum number of discrete behavioural categories, and then behavioural statements (BSs) were devised for each category to reflect the meaning held in common with all its constituent CIs. The number of CIT informants interviewed across the studies ranged from 27 to 130; the number of CIs collected by the respective researchers ranged from 154 to 1,200; and the number of discrete BSs deduced by the CI categorization and coding process ranged from 29 to 120. In total, 436 positive (effective) BSs and 422 negative (ineffective) BSs emerged from the 6,176 CIs collected by the respective past researchers from 760 CIT informants. Specific details relating to all the empirical source studies can be obtained from me: the sole author of this article.

### Data analysis

The units of analysis were the deduced sets of BSs obtained from the 15 empirical source studies. To address the two posited specific research questions, the BSs from these data sets were subjected to qualitative realist analysis (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000) using a three-stage inductive coding and categorization process (Flick, 2009) conducted at a semantic level of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first stage involved open and axial coding to identify the salient unit of meaning (code/concept) of each BS, and to assess whether it was the same as, similar to, or contained an element of congruent meaning with one or more other concepts. Sameness was deemed to exist when the sentences or phrases used to describe two or more BSs were identical or near identical. Similarity was deemed to exist when the BS sentences and/or phrases were different, but the kind of meaning was the same. Congruence existed where there was an element of sameness or similarity in the meaning of certain phrases and/or key words.

The coded BSs were accordingly classified using a form of selective coding (Flick, 2009) with the aim of identifying (if possible) a smaller number of core behavioural categories around which they could be integrated. To be considered nation-general and potentially universalistic, each core category had to be underpinned by at least one BS from all 15 empirical source studies. The deduced categories were subsequently interpreted and tentatively labelled according to the meaning held in common with all their respective constituent BSs. The so

deduced core categories, which are referred to as 'generic behavioural criteria', were interpreted and given descriptive labels to reflect in essence the meaning held in common with all the respective BSs underpinning them. These criteria provide a foundational base for an emergent mid-range theory in the form of a two-factor universalistic behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness.

### Trustworthiness of the findings

Credibility and dependability were achieved through the processes of 'realist triangulation' (Madill et al., 2000) and 'investigator triangulation' (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991). This involved using multiple sources of empirical data (namely the BSs obtained from the 15 emic studies carried out in seven countries) that had been generated by the multiple researchers who had conducted them. The empirical source data were suitable for comparison because the same research design and common CIT protocols for data collection and analysis had been used for all the studies. This assured consistency in the research

focus and processes. Cumulative confirmation of the convergence and consistency of meaning of the obtained empirical source data were achieved by having four researchers involved in the original data analysis who initially worked independently of each other, and then jointly to arrive at a consensus judgement (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1991).

## Results

The result of this MCCA study has demonstrated empirically that people operating within different types of organizations, organizational sectors, and national contexts perceive the behavioural determinants of effective and ineffective managerial performance and effectiveness in much the same way. Its main contribution is the emergence of eight positive (effective) and eight negative (ineffective) generic behavioural criteria of 'perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness' as listed in Table 1. The study suggests that regardless of the organizational, sectoral, or national context, managers are likely to be perceived effective by their superiors, peers, and subordinates when they

**Table 1**

Generic behavioural criteria of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness:

Positive (Effective) Behavioural Criteria	Negative (Ineffective) Behavioural Criteria
Good planning and organizing, and proactive execution, monitoring, and control.	Poor planning, organizing, and controlling, bad judgment, low standards, and/or tolerance of poor performance from others.
Supportive management and leadership.	Shows lack of interest in or respect for staff, and/or care or concern for their welfare or wellbeing.
Delegation and empowerment.	Inappropriate autocratic, dictatorial, authoritarian, and non-consultative, non-listening managerial approach.
Shows care and concern for staff and other people.	Unfair, inconsiderate, inconsistent, and/or selfish, manipulative, self-serving behaviour.
Actively addresses and attends to the learning and development needs of their staff.	Active intimidating, and/or undermining behaviour.
Open, personal, and trusting management approach.	Slack management, procrastination in decision making, ignoring problems and/or avoiding or abdicating from responsibilities.
Involves and includes staff in planning, decision making, and problem solving.	Depriving and/or withholding behaviour.
Communicates regularly and well with staff, and keeps them informed.	Exhibits parochial behaviour, a closed mind, and/or a negative approach.

are good in planning and organizing and proactive in execution, monitoring and control; manage and lead in an active supportive manner which includes promoting and fighting in the interests of their staff and department/unit; when they: delegate well and actively empower their staff; show care and concern for staff if faced with personal difficulties; and also when they: are generally open, approachable, personal and trusting in their managerial dealings with people. Additionally, managers are perceived effective when they: actively attend to the learning and development needs of their staff; involve and include them in planning, decision making and problem solving; and when they communicate regularly and well with their staff and keep them informed on organizational matters that will affect them. Conversely, managers are likely to be perceived least effective or ineffective not just when they fail to exhibit positive (effective) managerial behaviours, but also when they are perceived to be unfair, inconsiderate, selfish, manipulative, self-serving, undermining, and/or intimidating; or

when they are inappropriately autocratic and non-consultative, and/or exhibit behaviours indicative of slackness or procrastination in the way they manage; or when they ignore and avoid and/or abdicate from their managerial responsibilities. Additionally, managers are perceived least effective/ineffective when they actively or negligently deprive and/or withhold from staff such things as key information, clear instructions, guidance, adequate resources, recognition, praise, or feedback, and when they exhibit parochial behaviour, a closed mind, or a negative approach.

**Emergent ‘universalistic behavioural taxonomy’**

Most of the BSs that constitute the deduced negative (ineffective) behavioural criterion: Shows lack of interest in or respect for staff, and/or care or concern for their welfare/wellbeing’ describe the absence of the types of effective managerial behaviour reflected by the BSs that constitute the positive (effective) behavioural criterion Shows

**Table 2**

Emergent two-factor universalistic behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness

<b>Positive (effective) Universalistic Behavioral Criteria</b>	<b>Negative (ineffective) Universalistic Behavioral Criteria</b>
Good planning and organizing and proactive execution and monitoring/control.	Inappropriate autocratic, dictatorial, authoritarian and non-consultative, non-listening managerial approach.
Active supportive management and leadership.	Unfair, inconsiderate, inconsistent, and/or selfish, self-serving behaviour.
Delegation and empowerment.	Active intimidating, manipulative and/or undermining behaviour.
Shows care and concern for staff and other people.	Slack management, procrastination in decision making, ignoring problems and/or avoiding or abdicating from responsibilities.
Fights in the interests of their department/ staff and actively attends to their learning and development needs.	Depriving and/or withholding behaviour.
Open, personal, and trusting managerial approach.	Exhibits a closed mind and negative approach.
Involves and includes staff in planning, decision making, and problem solving.	
Communicates and consults well with staff and keeps them informed.	

care and concern for staff and other people. Thus, these two criteria could be seen as the ‘near opposite’ ends of a single behavioural construct with the BSs of the positive behavioural criterion describing acts of commission, and the BSs of the negative behavioural criterion describing acts of omission. A similar situation applies for the negative criterion: Poor planning, organizing, and controlling, bad judgment, low standards and/or tolerance of poor performance from others, and the positive criterion: Good planning and organizing, and proactive execution, monitoring and control. Although the negative criterion: Inappropriate autocratic, dictatorial, authoritarian, and non-consultative, non-listening managerial approach might appear in some respects to be ‘near opposite’ in meaning to the positive criterion: Communicates well with staff and keeps them informed, most of the underpinning BSs describe specific ‘acts of commission’ (i.e. acting in an undesirable way) rather than ‘acts of omission (i.e. failing to act in an expected way); these are behaviours managers need to avoid exhibiting if they are to be perceived and judged effective. Hence, what has emerged from the findings is a two-factor ‘universalistic behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness’ comprising eight positive (effective) and six negative (ineffective) generic behavioural criteria, as shown in Table 2.

**Relevance for Evidence Based HRD**

**Discussion**

The key result of the study was the unexpected finding that the type of managerial behaviours that people within and across multiple organizations in seven diverse countries around the globe associate with effective managers and ineffective managers are very similar. This raises questions about the validity of claims made by past researchers who have suggested that national specificities, including national culture, have a significant impact on how employees perceive behaviour exhibited by managers (Morrison, 2000), and that this determines whether they will accept and follow the leadership of their respective managers (Atlas, Tafel, & Tunlik, 2007). On the contrary, the study suggests that specific managerial behaviours observed and judged as effective or ineffective by managers and non-managerial employees in Canada, China, Egypt, Germany, Mexico, Romania, and the

UK are: i) much the same; ii) described in similar terms; and iii) not culture-specific to these societies. Indeed, over 94% (n=811) of the BSs indicative of the different types of managerial behaviour that people in these seven countries perceive as differentiating effective managers from ineffective managers are convergent (universal) rather than divergent (contingent).

Another key finding was that there is little difference in the perceptions of ‘perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness’ across organizational sectors. This evidence supports Lau, Pavett and Newman’s (1980) claim that there are similarities between managerial roles, behaviours, and activities across organizational sectors. Conversely, it lends little support for those who argue that for managers to be effective in public sector and third sector (not-for-profit) organizations, they need to adopt different managerial behaviours from those adopted by managers in private sector (for-profit) organizations (see Baldwin, 1987; Peterson & Van Fleet, 2008). Additionally, the findings lend minimal support for Tsui’s (1984) assertion that specific managerial behaviours that are instrumental for gaining reputational effectiveness will vary by constituencies within [and by inference] across organizations and organizational sectors; or for Flanagan and Spurgeon’s (1996) assertion that managerial effectiveness is “situationally dependent and varies from one organization to another” (p. 96). Although several researchers such as Arvonen and Ekvall (1999), and Dorfman et al. (1997) have demonstrated both similarities and differences existing between the perceptions of leadership effectiveness across different nations, this study has demonstrated there are many more similarities than differences. The findings suggest universal explanations of ‘perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness’ are more consistent with the facts.

**Limitations of the study**

There were four potential limitations to the study. First was the fact that of the 15 emic replication inquiries from which the empirical source data were obtained, 10 were carried out in public sector organizations, three in private (for profit) companies, and two in the third (not-for-profit) sector; and overall, nine were UK based. This means that the deduced generic behavioural criteria may contain an under representation of certain types of managerial behaviour manifested

within private and third sector organizations, and in countries other than the UK. Second is the fact that although the number of CIT informants in these 15 past managerial behaviour studies were within or exceeded the range of recommended sample sizes (n=20 to 40) for qualitative research (Cresswell, Plano Clarke, Gutmann et al., 2003), it is possible there might have been a degree of under sampling in some of the studies. If so, there may be other generic behavioural criteria of effective and ineffective managerial behaviour that have yet to be identified. Third, some writers have argued that good organizational performance should not

'abusive', 'harassing', and 'toxic' leadership (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007). The study discussed in this article explored ineffective as well as effective managerial behaviours, and thereby has made a distinctive contribution to current literature in this substantially neglected area of management research. Of the eight deduced negative (ineffective) generic behavioural criteria, six do not simply reflect the absence of the type of managerial behaviours identified with highly effective managers/leaders, but rather indicate the active presence of the type of behaviours that their superiors, peers, and subordinates consider

## The emergent two-factor 'universalistic behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness' can be regarded as relevant, translatable, and transferable to seven culturally diverse countries situated across five continents.

be automatically attributed to effective leadership (Erkutlu, 2008). Similarly, it could be argued that 'perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness', as judged against subjective proximal outcome measures such as the generic behavioural criteria deduced by this study, may not automatically lead to 'good' or 'poor/bad' managerial performance as measured against objective distal standards. Fourth, although the findings suggest cultural influences within and across nations have limited impact on how people define 'perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness', additional empirical evidence needs to be obtained from more emic replication studies before one could claim the existence of a stable 'universal' or 'near universal' behavioural taxonomy or mid-range theory.

### Implications for HRD research

Of the few contemporary researchers who have explored the behavioural determinants of managerial and leadership effectiveness, even fewer have identified the specific managerial behaviours that managers need to avoid if they are to prevent being perceived by their respective stakeholders (i.e. superiors, peers, and subordinates) as being ineffective (CIPD, 2011; Fernandez, 2005). And of those who have explored ineffective managerial behaviour, the focus has mainly been on the issue of 'bullying',

inappropriate and ineffective. Thus, the emergent 'universalistic behavioural taxonomy' provides new insight and a better understanding of the type of specific 'demonstrated [management] behaviours' (Ferris, Blass, Douglas et al., 2003) that managers need to avoid, as well as those they need to adopt, if they are to establish a reputation for managerial and leadership behavioural effectiveness. And because the taxonomy contains a rich description of indicative effective and ineffective managerial behaviours observed in public, private, and third sector organizations in seven culturally diverse countries situated across five continents, it is likely to strike a chord with, and be easily understood and applied by managerial and non-managerial employees in many other organizations and nations around the globe.

### Implications for evidence based HRD practice

Although competency-based HR(HRD/HRM) systems serve as a means of measuring and assessing managers and leaders for development, for improving managerial performance, and for managing progression more effectively across a variety of modern organizations (Gold & Iles, 2010), in many cases the benefits either do not materialize or do not match up to expectations. As Hamlin (2010) claims, many managers find it hard

to use competencies to help achieve their own goals and the goals of the organization because, typically, competency-frameworks are either too general or too detailed. When the former, insufficient guidance is given as to the specific types of managerial behaviour critical for success; when the latter, processes become too cumbersome and too time consuming. This can lead to a lack of credibility, and then to 'lip service' or 'disengagement' on the part of hard-pressed managers and employees. A potential solution to this problem could be the emergent two-factor 'universalistic behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness' resulting from this study because, as outlined above, it specifically identifies the critical managerial behaviours that differentiate 'good' from 'bad' managerial practice. Additionally, the taxonomy has the potential to be used as 'best evidence' by evidence-based professional HRD practitioners in various organizations and countries to: i) critically review and validate existing managerial competency-frameworks; ii) develop management/-leadership competency frameworks that have international relevance and utility; iii) shape the creation of better MLD-related development tools such as 360 degree appraisal instruments and self-assessment personal development plans; iv) help inform the design and content of MLD programmes with evidence derived from 21st century empirical research conducted in multiple countries, rather than from mid-20th century empirical research conducted mostly in the USA; and v), inform HRD/OD intervention strategies for bringing about desired changes in an organization's management culture.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The emergent two-factor 'universalistic behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness' can be regarded as relevant, translatable, and transferable to seven culturally diverse countries situated across five continents. However, its relevance and validity for other specific organizational, sectoral, and national contexts has yet to be demonstrated empirically. Hence, further emic replication studies of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness should be conducted by indigenous researchers in a more diverse range of public (state), private (for-profit) and third (non-profit) sector organizations not

only in Canada, China, Egypt, Germany, Mexico, Romania, and the UK, but also in many other countries around the globe. The empirical findings of such studies could then be used cumulatively to test and refine the behavioural taxonomy deduced by this study through a succession of MCCA comparative studies until theoretical saturation has been reached, which is when additional cases do not add anything (Eisenhardt, 1989). This might then lead ultimately to the emergence of a 'universal behavioural taxonomy of perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness'. In conclusion, it is hoped this illustration of MLD-related theory development through empirical generalization replication research will encourage more HRD scholars and HRD practitioners to explore other types of MLD and HRD field problems using this approach, with the aim of: i) generating 'instrumental knowledge' that can be applied in specific organizational contexts; ii) instigating replication studies in other organizations experiencing the same field problems to enhance understanding; and iii) using the empirical findings of these studies to conduct multiple cross-case comparative analyses with the aim of generating 'conceptual knowledge' that can lead to the development of mid-range HRD-related theories, models, frameworks, and taxonomies to expand the small body of contemporary 'best evidence' currently available in support of evidence-based HRD practice.

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# About the author



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Bob is Emeritus Professor of Human Resource Development, University of Wolverhampton, UK. His main research interest focuses on perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness within public and private sector organizations within the UK and 17 other countries. Bob has authored/co-authored 52 peer-reviewed journal articles and contributed 32 chapters to various HRD-related books. He is author of *Universalistic Models of Managerial and Leadership Effectiveness* (VDM Verlag Dr Muller, 2009), and lead co-editor of *Organizational Change and Development: A reflective guide for managers, trainers and developers* (FT Prentice Hall, 2001) and *Evidence-Based Initiatives for Organizational Change and Development* (IGI Global, 2019).



# Evidence-based HRD and critical reflective case histories

Robert (Bob) G. Hamlin

## Introduction

The idea of introducing a periodic or regular feature in this Journal, which focuses on the topic of ‘evidence-based HRD practice’ (EBHRD) came about during a discussion with the outgoing Editor-in-Chief, Prof Mark Loon - in the early part of this year. Hence, when I was invited to be Guest Editor for the 2022 Vol. 6(1) Issue prior to the arrival of the two recently appointed Editors-in-Chief, namely Prof Barbara Eversole (USA) and Dr Janet Firth (UK), I suggested to the Board of Directors (BoD) that this EBHRD related idea should be implemented. This paper introduces that idea to readers by: i) outlining what is understood by the term EBHRD which from my perspective includes ‘organizational change and development’ (OCD) as a core component, ii) discussing the notion of ‘critical reflective case histories’, and iii) offering a set of guidelines for writing up these type of case histories. Additionally, three examples are presented to illustrate for professional HRD-related practitioners, HRD scholar practitioners, OD specialists, professional coach/mentors, change management consultants, and other professionals concerned with ‘people and organizational development’, regarding the different types of EBHRD critical reflective case histories that the newly appointed Editors-in-Chief would like to see published in future issues of the journal.

### Evidence based HRD practice and critical reflective case histories

In Volume 1(1) of this Journal Bob Hamlin argued the case for ‘evidence-based organizational change and development’ (EBOCD) within the context of ‘evidence based human resource development’ (EBHRD). The purpose of his

article was to help HRD practitioners and other HRD-related professionals to appreciate more fully the complexities of the process issues of managing change and the associated HRD issues, plus the merits of using HRD-related theory, change management-related theory, and/or the results of instigated academically rigorous internal in-company research in a very conscious way to inform, shape, and critically evaluate their own professional/change agency practices, whether applied at the individual, group, or organizational level. He discussed why so many OCD programmes fail and argued research-informed/evidence-based HRD geared to the strategic thrust of the business would likely lead to the HRD function maximizing its contribution to organizational effectiveness and sustainable business success. He also discussed and illustrated the merits of HRD-related collaborative ‘professional partnership’ research (Jacobs, 1997) and empirical generalization replication research (Tsang & Kwan, 1999). The findings of the latter type of studies are focused on specific ‘practice-based’ field problems commonly experienced in many organizations, the results of which can then be used as empirical source data for the purpose of developing mid-range theory through multiple cross-case comparative analytic research. Such research leads to the production of ‘practice-to-theory’ models and theories that can be used as ‘best evidence’ in support of EBHRD and EBOCD.

In Volume 5(1) Bob Hamlin with Jenni Jones and Andrea Ellinger discussed further the compelling need for EBOCD within the broader domain of EBHRD practice, drawing upon the arguments and empirical evidence contained in their co-edited book *Evidence-based Initiatives for*

*Organizational Change and Development* published in 2019 by IGI Global. They demonstrated the practical ‘reality’ of EBOCD in the 21st century by offering a summary of 10 validated and 10 emergent common ‘insights’ and ‘lessons learned’(CILs) on the effective formulation and implementation of OCD initiatives, as listed in Table 1 and Table 2.

**Table 1**

Framework of validated common insights/lessons (CILs) about effective OCD and EBOCD change agency

- 1) Communicating with all stakeholders for the purpose of securing common ownership, commitment, and involvement.
- 2) Securing the active commitment, involvement, and participation of senior to middle managers is pivotal.
- 3) Securing top management support.
- 4) Being clear, consistent, and open, regarding what you are seeking to achieve, setting clear strategic objectives and sharing the vision.
- 5) *Recognising and addressing the real problems or root causes of change agency problems, including the cultural dimensions.*
- 6) Giving enough time for the OCD programme to take root and succeed.
- 7) Recognising the relevant contributions that the HR function can make and the strategic role it can play in bringing about transformational change.
- 8) The role of learning in the change management process and the need for a no-blame culture.
- 9) *The importance of being reflective as a change agent.*
- 10) *The value of conducting internal research as part of the change agency practice*

Note: The insights/lessons in italics relate specifically to evidence-based OCD initiatives.

Source: Hamlin, Ellinger and Jones (2019)

**Table 2**

Emergent common insights and lessons (CILs) about effective EBOCD

- 1) Create a vision and set of values that engage everyone.
- 2) Allow participative ‘bottom up’ initiatives in the change process.
- 3) Adopt a shared/distributive leadership approach.
- 4) Engage participants affected by the change by giving them voice, using their expertise, involving them, and treating them as active collaborative partners.
- 5) Recognise the power of trust and build on it.
- 6) Use theory and models as change agency tools and draw upon sources of ‘best evidence’ to inform and guide OCD processes.
- 7) Ensure understanding of individuals’ interests and the power relationship between those involved in the change, and respect their perspectives.
- 8) Ensure collaboration between internal external (or internal) change consultants and the internal client change agents.
- 9) Ensure all change agents involved in the OCD processes become fully skilled and act as a team.
- 10) Ensure the ‘soft’ social/interpersonal relations/cultural aspects of OCD are given as much attention as the ‘hard’ strategy, structure and systems aspects.

Source: Hamlin, Ellinger and Jones (2019)

The CILs in Table 1 and Table 2 were derived from critical ‘reflective case histories’ of OCD and EBOCD change agency practice within specific organizational contexts. These were offered respectively by 18 self-identified research-informed or evidence-based organizational leaders/managers, HRD professionals, and change management consultants who had contributed to the co-edited books of Hamlin, Keep and Ash (2001) *Organizational Change and Development: A reflective guide for managers, trainers, and developers*, and then, 18 years later by 60+ other similar OCD-related change agents drawn from a much wider range of culturally diverse countries who had contributed equivalent EBOCD-related ‘reflective case histories Hamlin, Ellinger and Jones’ (2019) book.

Prior to making their contributions to these two

books, they were asked to reflect critically on the process issues of formulating and implementing one of their recent OCD strategies, and discuss not only the specificities of their respective change management and change agency ‘successes’ but also their ‘failures’. In drafting their ‘reflective case history’ they were expected to provide a brief description of: i) the contextual background of the organizational setting in which the OCD initiative had taken place; ii) the situation that needed to be changed; iii) an outline of the key decisions that were made in formulating the OCD strategy; iv) the ‘best evidence’ used to inform those decisions; v) what happened during the process of implementing the OCD strategy; and most importantly vi) what new ‘insights’ or ‘lessons’ were gained or learned about EBOCD, or OCD initiatives that had not been evidence-based. An indication of the wide ranging HRD-related focus of these OCD initiatives, and the countries where they took place can be gleaned from the titles of a sample of these reflective case history chapters (12 of 33) in Section 3 of Hamlin, Ellinger and Jones’ (2019) book, as follows:

- 1) Evidence-based organizational change in the UK public sector (UK)
- 2) Coaching for change at Joseph Rowntree (UK)
- 3) Lessons learned in right-sizing a UK medium size manufacturing site (UK)
- 4) Building an integrated architecture for leadership assessment and development at PepsiCo (USA)
- 5) Using integrative development to create a coaching culture in a professional services firm (USA)
- 6) Organization-wide culture change in a large healthcare organization (USA)
- 7) Reflections on an organizational change process in a medium-sized Bavarian family business (Germany)
- 8) Embedding a new health and safety culture within an Indian national gas transmission company (India)
- 9) Everything must change because nothing changes: A history of organizational change in the Italian banking sector (Italy)
- 10) Gezairi Transport ‘new horizon’ transformation project (Lebanon)
- 11) Macro-change in a micro firm (The Netherlands)
- 12) Reflections on a successful downsizing project within a for-profit global organization in Dubai (UAE)

To provide a more detailed indication of these critical reflective case histories of EBOCD initiatives, the abstracts of four Section 3 chapters - one from above and three others – are presented in Table 3.

Consistent with the aims and scope of the IJHRDPPR journal, which is greatly concerned about the challenge of ‘bridging the scholar-practitioner gap’ in the HRD domain of study and practice and, as mentioned in the ‘From the Guest Editor’ contribution to this issue, a decision has been made to introduce a new periodic feature for the ‘Perspectives’ section of the Journal devoted to show-casing examples of ‘evidence based HRD’ in the form of ‘critical reflective case histories’ similar in format to those published in the Hamlin, Keep and Ash (2001) and Hamlin, Ellinger and Jones (2019) books, but with the word count limited to 2,750 to 4,000 words. Unlike full academic articles published in the ‘Articles’ section of the Journal, these case histories will not be ‘blind’ peer reviewed. However, members of the IJHRDPPR editorial team will scrutinize them, and as required will provide constructive feedback to help authors to revise their accepted case histories where needed. Find guidelines below for structuring and writing evidence-based HRD-related critical reflective case histories.



**Table 3**

Indicative abstracts of four reflective case histories

<p><b>Chapter 21:</b> Developing Coaching Skills to Support OD Skills for Leaders  <i>Karren Hatton, National Health Service, UK</i>          Karen Hatton’s reflective case history describes the three-phase process deployed by an acute National Health Service (NHS) Hospital Trust in England to develop its staff through the introduction of a specific OD tool. Phase 1 brought together data from a literature review and a small in-work trial which influenced the planning of Phase 2. Evidence collection, formal and informal, helped to identify the unexpected positive outcomes that went on to shape Phase 3. Key learning and evidence were continuously reviewed to inform subsequent phases and ensure positive impact both for individuals and the wider organization. Thus, the scale and spread of the OD intervention were both planned and emergent, being shaped by reflection on the tool itself, personal experiences, and acknowledged impact. Around 1,000 staff members accessed the intervention in some form which represented nearly one-fifth of the organization. The outcomes included a noticeable increase in leader/team engagement, raised self-awareness, and improved working relationships.</p>
<p><b>Chapter 31:</b> Using Integrative Development to Create a Coaching Culture in a Professional Services Firm  <i>David B. Drake, Moment Institute, USA</i>          David Drake’s reflective case history describes the introduction of an integrative development (ID) as an approach for EBOCD initiatives, which brings adult development and OD into a unified theory. ID aligns three HRD disciplines (coaching, training and OD) into a unified set of practices. His case history outlines how narrative coaching, an ID-based methodology, was used in creating a coaching culture in a professional services firm, and offers principles and recommendations for EBOCD practitioners.</p>
<p><b>Chapter 33:</b> New Leader Transition and Acquisition Integration Using an Evidence-Based Action Learning Workshop Influenced by Appreciative Inquiry and Whole Group Approaches  <i>Jeffrey W. Flesher, Underwriters Laboratories, USA</i>          Jeffrey Flesher’s reflective case history describes an EBOCD intervention conducted for a new division head in a division of Underwriters Laboratories made up of recently acquired companies. During the workshop, the teams revealed and shared success stories, developed a common evidence-based model of guiding characteristics for continued success, and described current state situations. To include the perspectives of all employees, a brief survey that was focused on point-of-work needs was sent to every employee in the division. This leader-as-researcher method brought a new level of clarity to decision making, positively engaged the entire division in the process of change, created an enhanced level of transparency across the companies, and formed the basis for greater managerial commitment to evidence-based action.</p>
<p><b>Chapter 49:</b> An Evidence-Based Journey of Organizational Change and Development Through Human-Centred Design  <i>Simon Lau, Still Point Consulting Ltd, UK</i>          Simon Lau’s reflective case history describes how he took a systemic approach to an OCD intervention by applying organizational psychology, gestalt group dynamics, and their intersection with human-centred design. The intervention centred on senior leaders in an international private sector company based in Singapore with global operations in over 60 countries. The company was going through significant change, a result of entering a period of loss-making performance, a change in leadership, and digital disruption to their business model.</p>

Note: The abstracts of all Section 3 chapters in Evidence-based Initiatives for Organizational Change and Development have been widely publicised by the publisher-IGI Global, Inc and can be accessed via its website.

## Guidelines for writing a critical reflective case history including relevant definitions

### Relevant definitions

When writing your critical 'Reflective Case History' based on an HRD-related initiative or intervention with which you have been closely involved, including OCD initiatives, please bear in mind:

1. The definitions of: Human Resource Development; Evidence-based Human Resource Development (EBHRD), Evidence-based Organizational Change and Development (EBOCD); and Best Evidence, as presented below.
2. The recommended outline structure that your 'critical reflective case history' should follow.
3. A set of questions offered that hopefully will help you to focus your critical reflections on the 'new insights' or 'lessons' that you have gained or learned which you would like to share with other professional HRD/HRD-related practitioners including HRM, MLD, OD and coaching/mentoring professionals, plus change management consultants.
- 4.

### Human Resource Development

HRD is: *the study or practice concerned with the diagnosis of performance-related behaviour change requirements at the individual, group, and organizational level within any host entity, and the design, delivery, and evaluation of formal and/or informal learning activities to meet the identified needs.* (Copyright © r.g.hamlin, 2017)

Evidence-Based Human Resource Development (EBHRD)

Evidence-based HRD is the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the development of individuals, groups, and organizations, integrating individual HRD practitioner expertise with the best available external evidence derived from systematic research (Hamlin, 2002, pp. 97-98).

### Evidence-based Organizational Change and Development (EBOCD)

Evidence-based OCD is *the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence and/or of action research to inform, shape, critically reflect upon, and iteratively revise decisions made in relation to the formulation and implementation of OCD interventions and the associated change management*

*processes.* (Copyright © r.g.hamlin, 2016)

### Best Evidence

'Best evidence' support of EBHRD and EBOCD could include any of the following:

1. Pure research which is concerned with conceptual knowledge production and development of generalised theory and models.
2. Applied research including studies in specific local contexts which are concerned with instrumental knowledge production for application to solve real-life problems.
3. Individual descriptive studies or the consensus of experts in the field including practitioner expertise and judgement.

### Guidelines

The recommended 'reflective case history' structure, and some questions concerning the processes of evidence-based HRD-related initiatives are set out below. These are offered as 'food for thought' and should not be followed slavishly.

#### a) Background to the organization and setting

What type of organizational context was it? (e.g. private, public or third/voluntary sector; nature of the 'business', products, service, markets, clients, etc).

#### b) Triggers and drivers of the HRD-related evidence-based initiative or intervention

What factors were applying that caused the need for an HRD (or OCD) initiative/intervention, whether at the organizational, sub-business unit, departmental level? (Or even at the individual level, where, for example, the mindset of a key manager needed to be radically changed through executive coaching.)

#### c) Organizational analysis undertaken for better contextual understanding

At the outset, how did you go about 'making sense' of the organization through a process of organizational analysis (if any)?

What theoretical perspectives, models or conceptual frameworks did you consciously and deliberately intend to use (if any) to help diagnose the prevailing state of the organization and to describe the desired future state?

What 'complexities' and 'uncertainties' did you

perceive to be applying at the time, and how important were these in informing and shaping your thinking about the planned HRD (OCD) change and/or development processes at the organisational, group or individual level?

What internal research did you instigate (if any) to help better understand these 'complexities' and make sense of the organization and what was happening on the ground?

#### d) Adopted evidence-based HRD-related strategy

What EBHRD strategies and methods did you adopt in practice? Why these and not others?

What aspects of your organizational and /or cultural diagnosis (if any) acted as determinants of the chosen change agency methods and processes, and why was this?

Did the implementation of the EBHRD initiative/programme go according to plan? What happened in practice? Were the HRD initiatives successful (or not) and in what way?

What additions or revisions in HRD strategy or method did you have to adopt during implementation (if any) and why?

#### e) Critical evaluation of the evidence-based HRD-related initiative/intervention

What were the 'critical success factors' applying, whether already existing in the organizational context/setting or deliberately embedded in the HRD-related processes?

What factors impeded or frustrated the achievement of the objectives of the EBHRD-related initiative/programme?

Overall, how effective were the originally conceived and, if applicable, the subsequent emergent EBHRD-related strategies?

Did 'theory' work out in 'practice', and if not why not?

#### f) New insights gained and lessons learned for self and other HRD practitioners

In hindsight, what did you do in your evidence-based practice that was most successful?

What should you have done differently to achieve a speedier or even more successful outcome?

Resulting from your critical reflections, what 'new insights' have you gained and 'lessons learned' about effective evidence based HRD/OCD?

To further illustrate what an HRD-related critical reflective case history looks like, three examples are

presented later in this section of the journal. The first, which was published in 2001 but, as will be seen, has as much relevance today as it did then, relates to a UK based EBOCD initiative within HM Customs & Excise (Anglia Region) concerned with managing organizational and cultural change informed by the findings of an HRD-related collaborative 'professional partnership' study of perceived managerial effectiveness. It draws on the 'reflections on practice' case history offered by Margaret Reidy in the Hamlin, Keep and Ash (2001) book, and in the Hamlin and Reidy (2005) conference paper on Facilitating organisational change and development through professional researcher-practitioner partnerships which won an American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) Research into Practice Excellence Award. The second more contemporary example by Rick Holden and Bob Morton is a reduced version of their Chapter 22: Managing change within the UK chemical manufacturing sector in the Hamlin, Ellinger and Jones (2019) book - *Evidence-based Initiatives for Organizational Change and Development* published by IGI Global Inc. The third example is a recently produced critical reflective case history submitted by Jim Stewart for this issue of IJHRDPPR which focuses on 'leadership development as a mechanism for organisation change' within a large NHS Foundation Trust.

## A call for critical reflective case histories on evidence-based HRD

For publication in future issues of IJHRDPPR, the journal's Editors-in-Chief invite 'critical reflective case history' contributions from any professional HRD-related practitioner who wishes to share with other practitioners the 'insights' and 'lessons learned' from their own EBHRD practice. We refer here not only to HRD practitioners and HRD scholar practitioners working in any area of the HRD domain, but also other 'people and organizational development' professionals such as OD specialists, coach/mentors, organizational change consultants, and line managers. Case histories that tell the story of using 'best evidence' derived from self-instigated HRD-related research studies or other evidence gathering methods will be much welcomed.

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# Management culture change within a British civil service department through collaborative partnership research

**Robert (Bob) G. Hamlin**

## Introduction

This example of an HRD-related ‘critical reflective case history’ of evidence based practice (EBP) relates to evidence-based ‘organizational change and development’ (OCD) and evidence-based ‘management and leadership development’ (MLD) initiatives designed to bring about organizational and management culture change within a major department of the British Civil Service using the results of a HRD-related type study (Jacobs, 1997). of perceived managerial effectiveness. It is a part re-telling of the ‘reflections on practice’ case history offered by Margaret Reidy in Hamlin, Keep and Ash’s (2001) book: *Organizational change and development: A reflective guide for managers, trainers and developers*, and of Hamlin and Reidy’s (2005) related conference paper: *Facilitating organisational change and development through professional researcher-practitioner partnerships* which won an American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) Research into Practice Excellence Award.

Experience suggests collaborative ‘HRD professional partnership research’ conducted jointly by HRD practitioners and HRD scholars can be invaluable for the pursuit of excellence and expert practice. In such partnerships the scholar and practitioner enter with their own respective goals for the collaboration. Maintaining the integrity of those goals is important for the common good; although they may differ, they

complement each other. The goal of ‘scholar partners’ is to advance the field of knowledge as well as help the collaborating organization, but they need the pragmatic insights on the issues of concern (i.e. the focus of the research) and access to the organization which only their respective practitioner partners can provide. The goal of the ‘practitioner partners’ is to help their own organization use highly relevant information (i.e. evidence) resulting from the study whilst also helping to advance the field of knowledge. Hence, HRD scholars and practitioners serve the interests of each other to achieve their respective goals which otherwise could not be achieved working alone.

The ‘practitioner partners’ in the ‘example case history’ presented here included Dick Shepherd, the then Executive Head of HM Customs & Excise (Anglia Region) and Margaret Reidy his OD consultant (HRD-related practitioner); the HRD scholar partner was Bob Hamlin, an external university business academic from the University of Wolverhampton, UK. The case history describes how second-order changes in the management culture were brought about through OCD and MLD initiatives informed and shaped by the findings of academically rigorous, single-organization, practice-grounded, mixed-method managerial behaviour research.

### Background to the organizational context

At the time Dick Shepherd was appointed Executive Head of HM Customs & Excise (Anglia Region) the prevailing traditional British Civil Service ‘command and control’ style of management did not sit well with his own preferred style, nor with the changing managerial philosophy being articulated by the Department’s Board of Management. He concluded that a new cultural infrastructure was required, one comprising characteristics such as flexibility, risk taking, enterprise, and innovation and change that would enable the organization to cope effectively and efficiently with the various change programmes likely to be imposed from above and those he would also be initiating. Furthermore, he believed strongly in the concept of empowering people and teams by giving them all the facts and encouraging them to develop their own solutions. However, this required team managers to provide the right type and styles of leadership and to create the right environment when acting both as team heads and team members. Having set out his expectations clearly, and having encouraged a more open style of management, he found that the changes were very slow to happen due to ‘cultural lag’, a term Bate (1996) uses to describe the condition when culture is no longer relevant to the needs of the organization.

### Triggers and drivers of the OCD/MLD evidence-based initiatives

Whereas some managers exhibited behaviours indicative of enlightened management values consistent with the requirements of the changing organization, a large proportion continued to exhibit the characteristic behaviours of a traditional “rigid” bureaucracy. Hence, Dick Shepherd decided he needed to develop and strengthen the cultural infrastructure of the organization, particularly the management culture. Although he was generally aware of the wide range of managerial behaviours exhibited by his managers, he felt he had insufficient specific knowledge to be certain about those that were strategic to success or failure and which, therefore, needed either to be encouraged and promoted or discouraged and eliminated. He required some means of determining with greater insight and clarity understanding of those managerial behaviours that were most effective (and conversely least effective or ineffective) for managing successfully within what had become an organizational environment

of constant change and uncertainty. In OD terms he wanted to hold up a mirror to his managers and help them decide how to make meaningful change.

### Developing a better understanding of the management culture through collaborative partnership research

In part to achieve his aim of changing the management culture, Dick Shepherd commissioned his internal research officer/OD consultant (Margaret Reidy) to carry out an in-depth empirical study of effective and ineffective managerial behaviour in conjunction with the aforementioned external scholar (Bob Hamlin) who had a proven track record of success conducting field research on the issue of perceived managerial/leadership effectiveness. A ‘collaborative partnership’ approach to research - equivalent to the collaborative ‘HRD Professional Partnership’ concept advocated in the USA by Jacobs (1997) - was adopted to meet not only the organizational needs but also to achieve an academic goal of advancing the field of HRD knowledge.

### ‘Anglia’ collaborative partnership research study

Margaret Reidy brought to the partnership an in-depth knowledge of the organization and an awareness of its overall drives and needs, whereas Bob Hamlin brought his expertise and knowledge of conducting managerial behaviour studies. The strong applied academic rigour was considered vital for the credibility of the partnership-research, not only in terms of protecting the anonymity of the research participants and managers who were the subject of the inquiry, but also to ensure data was not contaminated by possible pressures from management for ‘quick fix’ results that in turn might contaminate the ultimate findings.

### Research method

The research programme comprised two phases. The first focused on the management task of Higher Executive Officers (HEOs) and Executive Officers (EOs) who had significant managerial responsibilities within their respective roles, and the second phase on the leadership aspects of their management task only. Using Flanagan’s (1954) critical incident technique (CIT), concrete examples (critical incidents - CIs) of observed effective and ineffective managerial behaviour were collected from a balanced sample of managers

and non-managerial staff. Over 130 ‘Anglia’ people operating in HEO or EO grade roles were interviewed from 15 out of 21 offices geographically spread throughout the Anglia Region, and over 1,200 CIs were collected. These were open and axial coded, categorized, and sorted into discrete behavioural categories (Flick, 2002), to which were then attached short ‘behavioural statements’ (BSs) describing in essence the overarching meaning of each category.

The deduced BSs were used to create a behavioural item questionnaire (BIQ) rating instrument which comprised 83 items (43 positive and 40 negative) to which a Likert type scale was attached. The BIQ was widely administered throughout the regional organisation. The collected survey data was then subjected to statistical factor analysis to reduce, classify, and integrate the 83 items into a smaller number of factors/behavioural dimensions which could be regarded as behavioural criteria of perceived managerial effectiveness. Of the 43 deduced BSs relating to the leadership component of the management task of HEOs and EOs, 20 were selected and used to create a smaller BIQ which was widely administered. Factor analysis was again used to reduce, classify, and integrate the items into factors/behavioural dimensions to identify positive criteria of leadership effectiveness.

### Results

The outputs and outcomes resulting from each phase of the collaborative partnership research are summarised in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively. Full details of the specific behaviours comprising each of the positive and negative behavioural criteria of managerial effectiveness and leadership effectiveness, and of the research method and processes, can be found in Hamlin, Reidy, and Stewart (1998, 1999)

**Table 1**  
Behavioural Criteria of Perceived Managerial Effectiveness

Positive Behavioural Criteria	Negative Behavioural Criteria
1) Empowerment/ effective delegation and communicating widely	1) Tolerating poor performance and low standards
2) Active supportive leadership	2) Uncaring, self-serving management focus
3) Proactive management	3) Autocratic/ dictatorial management
4) Proactive team leadership	(lack of concern/ consideration for staff)
5) Active development of others (training, coaching, and mentoring)	4) Exhibiting gradist behaviour
6) Managing change	5) Narrow/parochial behaviour
	6) Resistance to change
	7) Lack of emotional control
	8) Manipulative behaviour
	9) Irrational management
	10) Entrenched management thinking

### The evidence based OCD and MLD initiatives

This section discusses the use of the research findings as ‘best evidence’ to inform and shape Dick Shepherd’s evidence-based OCD initiative for bringing about effective and beneficial change in the management culture of his organization, plus a description of the benefits of the collaborative partnership research from the perspective of both the organization and the university respectively.



**Table 2**

Behavioural Criteria of Perceived Leadership Effectiveness

Positive behavioural criteria: peer-rated	Positive behavioural criteria: self-rated
1) Empowering people; providing help and creating a supportive climate 2) Developing self; developing others and enabling involvement and participation of others in decision making 3) Promoting open and honest communication and a corporate approach	1) Empowering people and encouraging self-reliance in problem solving and decision making 2) Adopting a corporate approach and involving people in corporate issues 3) Building and developing effective teams; effective teamwork 4) Providing sound, expert advice, and professional support to people

**Evidence based OCD initiative**

Part way through the CIT stage of the first phase of the research programme, Margaret Reidy used the preliminary research findings to create a research-based OD instrument which could be used by Dick Shepherd at his annual management conference. Its purpose was to get 'Anglia' managers to discuss and confront various persistent managerial behaviours that were associated with the traditional "command and control" style of management that were now inappropriate for managing effectively in the new emergent "flexible" bureaucracy. Over 800 CIs were subjectively classified and clustered into eight categories of managerial behaviour, each comprising examples of effective and ineffective management behavioural practice. The OD instrument so constructed was used in syndicate workshops involving sixteen groups of managers. Each group was given one category to consider in depth and tasked to identify ways of increasing the effective and eliminating the ineffective managerial behaviours. All syndicate groups produced a wide range of ideas for change and improvement that were presented to the conference in plenary session. This approach elicited questions and resulted in intense debate on the floor. The managers felt secure because the CIs were expressed in the form of composite statements which they knew had been derived from a foundation of at least three CIs.

Hence, no statement could be attributed through its wording to any one person. This aspect of the applied academic code of anonymity encouraged and enabled managers to speak out freely, and to admit openly the problems of managerial and leadership effectiveness that did exist throughout the organization. As a direct outcome of the annual management conference, Dick Shepherd's managers were inspired to initiate a diverse range of MD/OD interventions based on the research findings.

**Evidence based MLD initiative**

The deduced behavioural criteria of perceived managerial effectiveness and perceived leadership effectiveness presented in Table 1 and Table 2 were used to develop several "self-analysis framework tools" to help bring about further change in the management culture of the organization, and to support 'Anglia' people through the change process. The initial framework tools were focused upon the behavioural criteria (competencies) of 'active supportive leadership', 'empowerment', 'training and development', 'mentoring', and 'coaching'. By employing the concept of self-analysis, managers and team leaders were invited to gauge their own managerial/leadership styles against the behaviours comprising the framework tools. The "leadership" tool was used as a supplementary document within the existing 360-degree performance appraisal system which enabled managers to obtain feedback from their peers and/or team members without the risk of compromising their positions within the organization. A further development was the use of these "self-analysis framework tools" as diagnostic and developmental instruments for a series of OD/MD workshops designed to address various problem issues revealed by the managerial effectiveness research. These workshops were focused on such issues as consultation and communication, gradism, co-operation within and across teams, corporate awareness, and parochialism. All these initiatives were highly successful in engaging the active interest and commitment of individuals to organizational change, particularly to the changes in management style and culture that Dick Shepherd considered essential for the future. The use of evidence-based MD/OD for the purpose of bringing about structural change in the organization had been particularly powerful. However, the perceived benefits and value of the MD/OD initiatives centred around the academic rigour and

credentials of the internal research effort, the strict codes of anonymity and confidentiality that were applied, the sense of organizational ownership of the data, and the relevancy of the research.

**Reflections on evidence-based practice**

Although initially it seemed to Dick Shepherd that an easier option would be to push through his planned structural changes for the organization at the 'hard' systems and processes levels, which historically had been the typical approach adopted within the British Civil Service, he realised increasingly from the research findings that unless the 'soft' people issues were identified and dealt with first his OCD plans would not be implemented successfully. The research told him that by ensuring people at the earliest stages understood and were supportive of and comfortable with the changes, the more successful they would become. Because of his position as Executive Head, he knew many of his staff, including some of his managers, would tend in public and in his presence to be on their best behaviour, overtly parading support but behind the scenes resisting or even undermining the changes. It was the results of the initial CIT data collection stage of the collaborative partnership research programme that quickly gave him a detailed understanding of the existing management culture in terms of what behaviourally distinguished effective managers from least effective/ineffective ones, as observed and perceived through the eyes of 'Anglia' people. The obtained critical incidents (CIs) of effective and ineffective managerial behaviour enabled him to "hold a mirror up to the organisation" which led to his managers recognising, accepting, and openly admitting ownership in public, both to the 'positive' and 'negative' aspects of the prevailing management culture. The research drew everyone's attention to those specific managerial behaviours from the 'old' culture that needed to be held on to and nurtured for the future, and those that had to be discouraged and eliminated. Important insights and lessons learned about evidence-based HRD-related (OCD/MLD) initiatives emerging from this British Civil Service case history included the following:

i) The need to develop an in-depth understanding of the culture plus the necessary insights to interpret emerging patterns of managerial

(manager/leader) behaviour.

ii) The need to have ready access to sufficient reliable empirical data - the 'hard facts' (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006) - to interpret accurately what is actually going on deep inside the organisation, particularly the cultural factors that can cause organizational change either to happen or not to happen.

iii) The value of OD instruments based on the findings of rigorous and robust internal research being used as powerful tools for stimulating and bringing about transformational shifts in the management culture of an organisation.

iv) A recognition that the stronger the foundation of research evidence used to inform, shape and measure organisational change, the greater will be the chances for its long-term survival and success.

v) The need for organisational leaders commissioning research into the culture of organisations to understand the nature of the research process, the importance of rigour, academic codes of ethical standards such as the issue of confidentiality, and the need to appreciate the significance of research data and to respect its complexity.

vi) The value of rigorous internal practice-grounded studies conducted through 'collaborative partnership research' arrangements, the results of which can profoundly influence and enhance the impact of HRD-related (OCD/MLD) initiatives within organizations, and thereby bridge the much talked about scholar-practitioner/research-practice gap in HRD (Hughes & Gosney, 2016).

**Concluding comment**

A key message for professional HRD practitioners, managers, and organizational leaders is that being 'evidence-based' in their HRD/OCD change agency practices through engagement with collaborative professional partnership research, as illustrated by this 'reflective case history', is likely to lead to them being more effective in facilitating and bringing about beneficial behavioural/cultural change within organizations. Furthermore, this type of research has the potential to build up the extant body of 'best evidence' in support of EBP, and thereby help bridge the 'scholar-practitioner' gap that currently exists in both the 'management' and 'HRD-related' fields of practice. In conclusion, I hope this 'reflective case history' will spur more professional HRD practitioners and line managers to embrace the concepts of evidence-based HRD and evidence-based management.

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## About the author



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Bob is Emeritus Professor of Human Resource Development, University of Wolverhampton, UK. His main research interest focuses on perceived managerial and leadership effectiveness within public and private sector organizations within the UK and 17 other countries. Bob has authored/co-authored 52 peer-reviewed journal articles and contributed 32 chapters to various HRD-related books. He is author of *Universalistic Models of Managerial and Leadership Effectiveness* (VDM Verlag Dr Muller, 2009), and lead co-editor of *Organizational Change and Development: A reflective guide for managers, trainers and developers* (FT Prentice Hall, 2001) and *Evidence-Based Initiatives for Organizational Change and Development* (IGI Global, 2019).

# Leading and managing organizational change: a reflective case history from the UK's chemical manufacturing sector

**Rick Holden & Bob Morton**

## Introduction

This case history offers a reflective account of practice in relation to the leadership and management of organizational change. It unfolds as follows.

It first seeks to explain the culture change journey taken by CaseX between 2013 and the onset of the Covid Pandemic. The formal and informal HRD related initiatives deployed are discussed. The latter part of the paper seeks to move the account from a record of the journey to a more reflective discussion of key issues and themes, tensions, and questions regarding the change. What the case history provides is insight into the sorts of conversations about the leadership and management of change which need to take place and which, appropriately harnessed and informed by both theory and the knowledge and experience of those 'living the organization', can enrich our understanding of the challenges faced by organizations in managing change. Ultimately it provides one further evidence-based initiative to further bridge the scholar practitioner gap in HRD and related professional practice.

## Background

CaseX is a large well-established plant in the UK but one with a recent history of takeover and acquisition. The parent company of CaseX operates in over 80 countries worldwide. When acquired by its current owner in 2009 it was a

site with a workforce of approximately 950. The plant is engaged in the manufacture of products used to enhance industrial processing in various industries. Whilst CaseX's corporate head office (located in mainland Europe) acknowledged that the overall performance of the plant was poor it recognized its potential within its business strategy for the future. Major change was needed, but there was a level of uncertainty as to the detailed nature of the plant's problems and thus no clear basis from which to develop a plan on how best to move forward. A review of operations from corporate head office had identified the main technical, process, and investment needs for the site to be profitable. However, senior management within the UK recognized a different approach to implementation was required. The appointment of a new site director (SD) in 2013, recruited from another company site in the UK was both symbolically and strategically significant. It was an acknowledgement from the most senior levels of the company that change at CaseX required leadership from someone experienced in the sort of site reflected in the case study. Critically the SD and the leadership at CaseX would be given autonomy. Change would not be imposed via a consultant led, corporate approach. The SD would determine the most appropriate leadership team to operate over coming years and any change programme would be internally driven. CaseX would be the 'masters of its own destiny'.

A three-year operational improvement programme was initiated. Its objectives were to achieve a transformation of the site to become a lean and reliable supplier and successful cost leader (constantly improving the cost structure to keep ahead of competition) with the agility to respond to customer and market needs. A significant capital investment programme was earmarked to replace outdated equipment, introduce new technologies, change operational processes, and make the site safer.

### **Problematizing: ‘Context is king’**

Initial discussions amongst the small leadership group reflected an iterative process of diagnosis, futures thinking, and theory-practice challenges. The latter saw the group engage ‘intellectually’ with their master’s level knowledge and understanding of classic models of change (e.g., Burke & Litwin, 1992; Kotter, 1996). Such models were important in feeding the dialogue rather than any sense that they could offer a prescriptive pathway for CaseX. The significance of the Burke & Litwin model, for example, was most pronounced in helping the steering group appreciate the vital importance of ‘context’. The crucial question was “what will work here?” There were no neat and simple solutions which could be transported from elsewhere; these had to come from within. Importantly, though, there was a need to move away from assumptions, preconceptions and generalizations about the problems. Crucially, whilst CaseX’s corporate head office supplied a stream of financial data on the performance of the site there was a need to understand the current situation in terms of cultural and behavioural characteristics. There was a sense within the leadership group

that morale, attitudes, and behaviours were all problematic. There was information on the level of customer complaints (more than one per day) but no insight into what they meant in terms of work performance, behaviours, and attitudes. Similarly, there was information regarding the internal communications within management and between management and the workforce in relation to both listening to and understanding what was happening at ground level.

Culture diagnostic instruments (drawn from Deal & Kennedy, 2000, and Cummings & Worley, 2004) confirmed a pervasiveness of behavioural problems. Overall, the workforce was unwilling to take chances and/or express controversial opinions. Employees were working hard but not smartly. High performance was mistaken widely throughout the site for ‘being busy’. A process of problematizing against this emerging contextual clarity enabled key principles to be constructed by the leadership group which formed the basis of a blueprint for a change plan. Any transition to a future state needed to be collaborative and engaging. It needed to recognize the potential impact of the psychological effect of change. Thus, it needed to give voice to the employee and promote key values such as fairness and honesty throughout all levels of the workforce. A senior leadership team needed itself to embrace such values (see also Leadership Development, below).

Two key ‘organizing’ principles in this context were (i) structural change within the senior leadership team and (ii) the initiation of a Guiding Coalition. The former saw a proposal to reduce the leadership team from 14 to 8 as part of an initial radical re-structuring of operations. The construction of a Guiding Coalition drew directly on Kotter’s (1996) model of change management as a way of both signalling a distinctive approach to the change programme and providing a potentially catalytic vehicle to move things forward.

The Guiding Coalition continued the process of problematizing. From its inception it was engaged in a continuation of the diagnostic discussions and the early mapping of a direction of travel for the change journey. The Guiding Coalition created a unified Mission and Values statement describing the desired future state for the plant and which endeavoured to capture the new culture and degree of transformation required to be a successful cost leader. It also began work on conducting a high-level gap analysis of ‘present vs future state’ for each work group, in terms of

working practices and processes, changes required, and the scale of such changes.

In any attempt to sum up the problematizing processes within CaseX there is a danger that a smooth and linear chronology appears to characterize its outcomes. It is more realistic to depict this a complex, inter-related, at times intense, bundle of discussions, formal and informal, producing ideas, initiatives, processes, and events and all taking place simultaneously. The initiation of the Guiding Coalition and the development of its initial agenda took place at the same time as the senior leadership team (SLT) were moving through its development phases (see ‘Leadership Development’ below). Whilst the Guiding Coalition became the principal vehicle to underpin the wider operational improvement programme and a distinctive approach to change leadership, it did not displace existing established consultation and negotiation agreements with the main trade union. Indeed, ongoing negotiations to shift to annualized hours and 24 hour working (narrowly rejected in 2011), were crucial also to the success of the overall change programme and were successfully agreed.

Importantly, the one central pillar to an otherwise complex, dynamic, and often uncertain set of deliberations and emergent initiatives was that ‘context is king’. A genuine understanding of the problems faced by the plant produced the proposed strategy for change.

### **Leadership development**

There was an aspiration to move away from a style of leadership which was historically ‘command and control’ within the SLT. Reform of the SLT enabled clearer responsibilities to be established; responsibilities which facilitated focused attention on an emergent change programme. A series of clusters were created, each headed up by a member of the SLT, in both the production and support sections of the site. They were designed specifically to make a statement about breaking down existing silos and positioning the SLT in terms of their leadership of the change programme.

A series of three one-day workshops, off site, were implemented to establish a leadership team capable of taking the necessary steps towards a more collaborative approach to the change process, and with the culture change blueprint clearly in mind. Figure 1 captures the essential features of the formal HRD initiative. The workshops were designed to develop the group into a high

performing team, one equipped with a collective capability to lead the culture change initiative. Led by the external change agent involved in the problematizing processes discussed above, together with another external professional (a business psychologist specializing in both occupational and educational psychology). The focus was personal development - as an individual, as part of a leadership team, and in relation to those they would need to work with most closely. Importantly, the change agent perceived the need to develop the notion of effective leadership judgement which pushed participants beyond leadership styles. He wanted to nurture what he termed ‘rounded leadership’ to encourage a shift from directive to more collaborative decision making but with care and sensitivity to quality decision making.

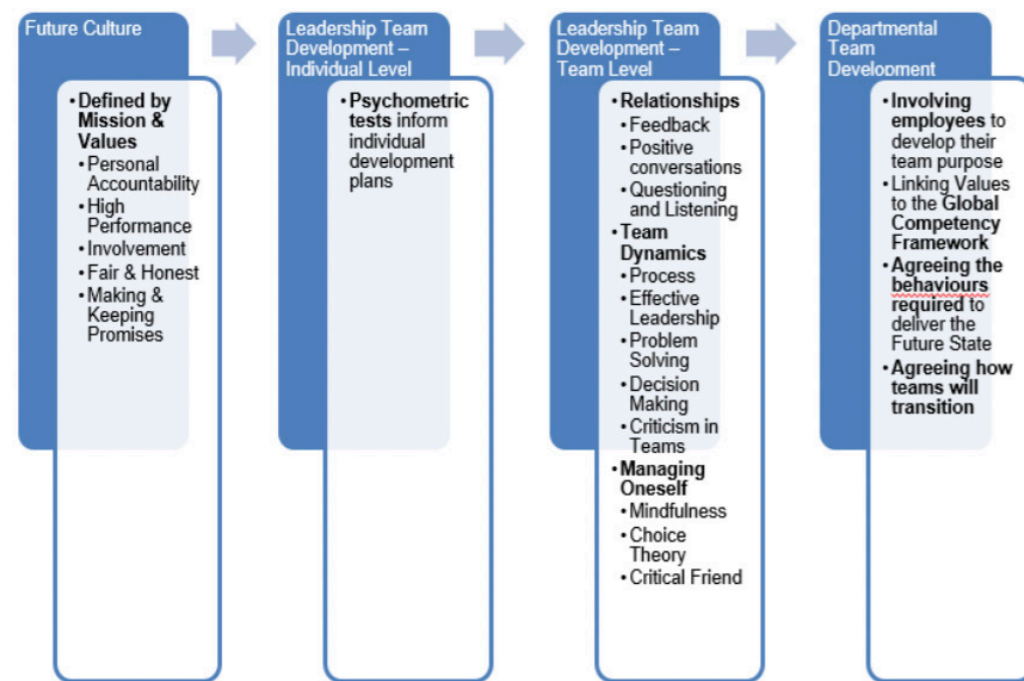
Progress was initially slow. There remained ambiguity around an understanding of what high performance meant for the SLT themselves. Individual development work was patchy. Stronger personal commitments to areas needing developing were needed. The notion of a critical friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993) was introduced. A critical friend is someone who is encouraging and supportive, but who also provides honest and often candid feedback that may be uncomfortable or difficult to hear (Glasser, 1998). In short, a critical friend is someone who agrees to speak truthfully, but constructively about weaknesses, problems, and emotionally charged issues. Members of the SLT were ‘coached’ in the skills of engagement in such processes with the help of the external change agent; this ensured such a process could be devolved to the various teams led by SLT members. By the end of the third workshop the external change agent considered sufficient progress was being made for the SLT – in relation to their teams (and in respect of the Guiding Coalition) - to discuss the behaviours required to deliver the future state.

### **Making connections: unleashing potential**

As noted above, there was to be no imposition of any ‘packaged’ or ‘formulaic’ solutions. The proposal to utilize Kotter’s notion of a Guiding Coalition helped crystallize many of the emergent principles and values surrounding a different approach to leading and managing the necessary change. The coalition needed to include individuals from all levels and areas of the organization, with the influence, energy and momentum to lead the change effort. “We wanted people who would tell us, honestly, what they thought (SLT)”. The



**Figure 1**  
The journey to changing culture



Changing culture requires leadership time, commitment and persistence  
Source: Case X

formation of the Guiding Coalition marked the start of a more informal HRD initiative; more of a political process to change hearts and minds. It was acknowledged that mistakes would be made, that there would be uneven progress and that challenges and barriers would have to be faced. The key was to remain consistent to a set of principles encompassing involvement, listening, fairness, honesty, and consistency.

In very practical terms the Guiding Coalition operated as follows. Small teams from the Guiding Coalition facilitated transition workshops (essentially problem-based discussion groups) linked directly to specific operational improvement programme projects e.g., safe working, lean manufacturing. The success of these workshops depended upon the message and communication coming not from the SLT but from members of the Guiding Coalition with whom the workforce could identify and empathize.

Importantly, the workshops were not about ‘telling’ what was to change but more of a collective conversation about work; discussions about what the participants knew best in terms of their roles, their jobs the processes, issues, and problems that they were involved in on a day-day

basis. The Guiding Coalition was the resource to make connections and help make ‘conversations about change’ take place. Importantly it also gave people at all levels a ‘voice’ which was listened to by colleagues and by management.

### Impact

An internal document produced a year or so before the pandemic highlighted a sense that organizational change was definitely evident, importantly noting an increasing level of active involvement and contributions to workshops and local initiatives to improve work methods and effectiveness. This assessment was supported by both quantitative and qualitative evidence, for example:

- The successful conclusion of a complex consultation on headcount reduction, job changes, working arrangements, and terms and conditions.
- The increase in the Guiding Coalition (see below) from its initial size of under 30 employees to a group of over 350 drawn from all levels of the organization.
- People who were “problem people” in the

old organization are becoming stars and flourishing in the new organization where they enjoy the engagement, participation, accountability, and their voice getting heard.

- Performance data indicating::
  - Production capacity increases by over 10% at the same time as the site headcount had been reduced by over 20%.
  - A 30% reduction in samples tested as a result of Quality Control and Production working together.
  - Customer Complaints decreased from 105 in Q1, 2015 to 55 in Q4 of the same year.
  - Transfer of 25 ‘ideas’ from the Guiding Coalition workshop and with a value added of over 50 million Euros, into a five-year strategic plan.

### Discussion: towards shared leadership

Hamlin et al. (2019) argue powerfully that one of the major challenges facing HRD professionals is how best to help organizations manage change. That many change initiatives fail to achieve their intended aims casts a shroud of uncertainty over the voluminous literature produced over the last 50 years to guide and influence those involved in its practice. In the absence of a new orthodoxy the ‘great man’ theory of leadership continues to be hugely influential - underpinning many chief executive appointments who are charged with turning the organization around’ Importantly, though, the evidence from CaseX reveals a much more nuanced picture. Undoubtedly a ‘new man at the top’ was influential in getting things moving and setting a strategic direction, but the new site director was first and foremost an internal appointment; someone who ‘knew the business’ and who was able to avoid the tag of leadership from the corporate centre. Furthermore, the CaseX story is not one of a change programme initiated and delivered by a single charismatic individual. It reveals the significance of a leadership team and a scenario which over time saw the emergence of a more collaborative approach to the delivery of the change process.

Leadership in any context has historically been described in relation to the behaviour of an individual and their relationship to their followers.

This has resulted in an emphasis in leadership development on the behaviour, characteristics, and actions of leaders. However, in recent years - and in part reflecting the lack of research evidence for single individuals having the kind of dramatic impact on organizational performance that is so often claimed (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019; Thorpe, Gold & Lawlor, 2011) - ‘post heroic’ ideas have emerged emphasizing the value of more collaborative and less hierarchical practices (Collinson, 2008). Thus, ‘shared leadership’ implies an activity that is distributed among members of a team, and which characterizes its way of working.

A key distinction between shared and traditional models of leadership is that the influence process involves more than just downward influence of subordinates by a positional leader (Pearce, Manz & Simms, 2009). Leadership is distributed amongst a set of individuals instead of being centralised in the hands of a single individual who acts in the role of leader. Each team member’s individual experience, knowledge and capacity is valued and is used by the team to distribute or share the job of leadership through the team in response to each context and challenge faced. Shared leadership works on the principle that teams work together more effectively to deliver high quality. This does not mean no-one takes ultimate control but, if the team leader has a day off or moves, the team continues to work effectively.

This point about control raises important questions about change and change management/ leadership at CaseX. Kotter’s model of change management, influential within this case history not least because of the Guiding Coalition, could be interpreted as a top down, formal HRD intervention; a set of steps driven by the site director, together with clear plans and schedules for each stage. Undoubtedly the new Site Director saw the ultimate control as resting with himself. It was in his power to develop a new senior leadership team, initiate the Guiding Coalition, embark on leadership development (for the senior team) and prepare plans for how culture change was to be realized to support and feed into the ongoing operational improvement programme. Whilst an overt, and theoretically driven strategy to bring about shared leadership was not evident, nonetheless an attempt to engender engagement and collaboration vis-a-vis the change programme was clearly part of the adopted leadership approach. The CIPD (2022) are right to note that a shared leadership approach “can only be

successful if the organization structure and culture are designed to support it rather than being centred on individual leadership". In CaseX the evidence suggests that issues of control and the relationships necessary to build a different culture were central to the Senior Leadership Team and Guiding Coalition deliberations.

## Concluding reflections

Accounts of the positive impact of shared leadership practice in organizations are steadily increasing in a range of sectors; for example, education (Bolden, Jones, Davis et al., 2015), construction (Ali, Wang, Soomro et al., 2020), nursing (Aufegger, Shariq, Bicknell et al., 2020; engineering (Wu & Cormican, 2021). This account adds an evidence-based account from manufacturing; a sector not renowned for innovative people management practice. We draw the account to a close with a number of reflections; key insights for any HRD professional with an interest in organizational change.

For many years change has been equated with learning (Stewart, Gold, Holden et al., 2013) and clearly the CaseX story is no exception. A spectrum of formal and informal learning has underpinned the culture change, facilitating the emergent shared leadership development. The importance of leadership development to 'manage in a different way' is a critical feature of this case history. And it is important to note that the learning which has underpinned the change thus far forms part of the ongoing leadership development agenda as CaseX seeks to strengthen its inclusive approach to leadership capability throughout the organization.

Whilst initially driven from the top, this account of practice at CaseX and the illustrative evidence upon which it draws, provides strong testimony to processes of shared leadership beginning to take hold and facilitate the change journey. They have helped to secure context specific culture change; change which underpinned performance improvements in line with the imperatives of the operational improvement programme and a return to profitability.

In an earlier article in this Journal Cole (2017) questions the continued adherence to traditional notions of 'training' and advances a practice framework integrating ideas about 'connections', 'conversations' and 'knowledge'. He argues that for an organization to change and develop, knowledge needs to flow freely and be pooled where it is

required. Connections are critical to making an organization work well, and conversation is the key way to support both the flow of knowledge and the essential connectivity of people. From the initial leadership group and newly formed SLT through to the Guiding Coalition and the dialogue at shop floor level, an integration of connections and conversations to enhance knowledge flow provides a powerful summary of how a critical level of (sustainable) shared leadership was nurtured and became impactful at CaseX. It is testimony to how 'connections', 'conversations', and 'knowledge' are at the heart of shared leadership. Conversations about change were central to a programme of culture change at CaseX; intellectual conversations about change leadership through to practical and pragmatic conversations about the realities of making transition journeys.

The evidence presented in this case history makes no strong claim regarding prescriptive 'best practice'. Nor does it seek to make neat translations from the language and discourse of those providing testimony of the change process in CaseX to the textbook check lists of "this is what do" and "these are the competencies of effective change agents". But, read between the lines of the 'conversations' and 'connections' presented as central in this case and we find a degree of resonance with those seeking to identify and present implications for change management practitioners (e.g., Burnes & Randall, 2016). In conclusion we would highlight understanding context; addressing assumptions; critical questioning; workplace – problem based - learning; openness and an acceptance that the knowledge and skills to see through a change process are widely dispersed in an organization. The case history provides a contextually specific account of 'evidence-based practice' which highlights how an inclusive approach to leadership development brought about beneficial organizational change and development. We end with the hope that reflective case histories such as this provide modest, yet robust, steps towards restoring confidence that people centred HRD practice can make a real difference in matters of organizational change and development.

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# Leadership development as a mechanism for organization change

## **Jim Stewart**

### **Introduction**

This case history provides an account of a leadership development programme which led to a number of local level organization change programmes. Local level here means within departments which are part of the wider organization and change programmes refers to changes initiated and led by participants on the leadership development programme. Thus, the focus is not organization-wide change but rather small-scale initiatives brought about by the particular design of and participation in leadership development. Those initiatives achieved positive performance benefits for the organization, which is a large UK National Health Service Trust. An additional interesting feature of the case is that it was the focus of an impact case study in the UK Research Evaluation Framework (REF). The REF will be explained later in the article after first describing the organization and the leadership development programme in more detail.

### **Background**

The case organization is a large NHS Foundation Trust which was created on 1 October 2019 following the merger of two adult acute hospital Trusts. The Trust provides secondary, or acute, services and operates through four hospitals. It serves a population of 630,000 people and employs over 12,000 in most clinical and non-clinical professions and roles. As stated, the Trust is the result of a merger of two previously separate trusts and so embarked on the leadership development programme in part as a means of integrating the two organizations. The development programme, known as the Senior Leaders Development Programme (SLDP) was commissioned by the Trust to be designed and delivered by Liverpool

Business School (LBS). The school worked closely with stakeholders from the organization in the design phase to ensure relevance and effectiveness. However, there was an agreed commitment to apply underpinning principles in the design which were derived from research conducted by staff of LBS. These principles are captured in what is known as the LBS Integrated Model of Leadership Development.

An additional background feature of interest is that the case was one of three Impact Case Studies submitted by LBS to the UK REF. The REF is the UK's government's approach to evaluating the quality of research conducted by UK universities. Among other purposes, the evaluation is used to allocate sums of money to each university, from one of the two main government research funding budgets, based on the assessed quality resulting from the REF. There are three elements to the assessment: judgements of research outputs, most commonly in the form of journal articles; the level and quality of societal impact associated with the research of the assessed staff of each university, judged by impact case studies (ICS) and against the criteria of significance and reach of the impact; and an assessment of the research environment supporting the research activities in the university. The focus here is on the ICSs. ICSs are written in a standard and prescribed format and are required to be based on, or derived from, research of at least, in REF terms, 2\* quality. To achieve 2\* status research must be recognized internationally in terms of its originality, significance, and rigour. The standard format of ICSs requires evidence supporting the implied claim that the associated research meets that quality standard. It also requires statements and sources of evidence of the impact.



The REF is a significant point in the context of this case and article since these explanatory points indicate that impact cases submitted to the REF comply with the arguments of Hamlin, Jones and Ellinger (2020) on evidence-based organization change and development. As stated, ICSs have to be linked to some piece of original research, and also have to provide evidence of the application and impact of that research. Within the REF criteria, impact does not have to be in an organization; for example, impact on public policy or within a defined community are also acceptable. However, impact within a single organization does meet the REF criteria. Hamlin and colleagues also specify what they consider to be the forms of ‘best evidence’ to use in organization change and development. In respect of this case, a combination of both Mode 1 and Mode 2 research and evidence as described by Hamlin and his colleagues was used to inform the design of the SLDP.

## Underpinning research and theory

The LBS Integrated Model of Leadership Development has a number of components which were derived initially from research on master’s level degrees in business and management provided by LBS. These components and the model itself have been subsequently applied in doctoral level programmes and in a number of organization-based leadership development programmes (see Lawless, 2008; Lawless, Sambrook & Stewart, 2012; Wilson, Tucker, Hannibal et al., 2021). The model defines

leadership as a collective willingness to tackle wicked issues. Such issues are characterized by having no clear or single solution and by having complex interrelationships between competing demands and stakeholders. It will be clear from this definition that the model rejects conceptualizations of leadership as being vested in a single individual and instead leadership is seen as being distributed, as well as a collective endeavour and responsibility. The focus on wicked issues is one reason for this as such issues require collective agreement and action to resolve them. Derived from the definition, the model is focused on the relationship between leadership development and management practice with the aim of identifying the barriers to, and enablers of, the translation of learning to facilitate action in the organization.

A central component of the model is the use of action learning sets. This supports integration of additional components of critical reflection, questioning insight, and collaborative action. These components constitute both the process and the content of programmes derived from the model which in turn promotes the development of communities of practice (Lawless, et al, 2012). Application of the model starts from the point that organizational learning occurs when key organization decision makers are directly involved in both design and delivery of development programmes (Corley & Thorne, 2006). This was applied in this case by LBS working closely with the Trust in all stages of the SLDP. Adopting critical approaches is also central to the model and so to the SLDP. This though needs to be handled sensitively to enable participation and to avoid exclusion (Lawless, 2008). However, achieving the needed sensitivity within the use of action learning enables the transfer of action and of learning within educational and organization contexts (Lawless, et al, 2012).

Promoting and developing reflective practice is another key component of the model and the SLDP. Prior research by LBS staff and other colleagues shows that reflection is not a simple process of transferring learning to a work context. It requires the ability to transfer learning into individuals’ practice and their specific professional contexts (Griggs, Holden, Rae, et al., 2016). Developing that ability is integral to the SLDP. The use of action learning as a central component of the model reinforces the application of the definition of leadership which informs the

model. Action learning challenges the individual-focused nature of leader development in favour of collective and collaborative approaches to leadership (Edmonstone, Lawless, & Pedler, 2019).

Wilson, Tucker, Hannibal and Qu (2021) provide a fuller account of the use and application of the LBS model in a doctoral level qualification programme, the Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA). DBAs are generally aimed at senior and aspiring senior managers who are in employment and who study and research part time. The particular focus of Wilson and her colleagues is on how participants on the LBS DBA programme learn together and learn apart. The together element is not limited to the regular block release study periods held in Liverpool since the programme, in line with the LBS leadership development model, utilizes action learning sets. The learning together in sets is facilitated between the Liverpool study periods by use of technology since participants are widely geographically spread. This use of technology is the basis for Wilson and colleagues’ analysis of the DBA programme as a socio-technical system. An additional interesting finding of this research on use of the LBS model on an educational programme is the development of participants’ social capital within and outside of the action learning sets. Outside of the sets can be with both the wider group of participants on the programme but also with organization colleagues, with such relationships being developed through participants’ research projects. This outcome of the DBA programme reflects the findings of Lawless (2008) and of Lawless, Sambrook and Stewart (2012) on development of communities of practice. It also reflects the outcomes of the case of interest here and the processes which supported the achievement of impact.

## Outcomes and impact

The Senior Leaders Development Programme led to a number of changes which were initiated and led by participants on the programme. A key process in achieving change was the use and application by participants of elements of the LBS model in modifying their own leadership practice and in working with their teams and, crucially in many instances, with others outside of their work teams. Four examples of organization change are detailed below.

The first example concerns ophthalmic services. Prior to the SLDP, compliance with targets was at 69% with more than 1,000 patients waiting

for more than 18 weeks for treatment. Following changes made to the scheduling process as a result of participating in the SLDP, compliance reached 92% and patient waiting times was reduced to 8-10 weeks. The participant in this example credited reflection and the way of working with the team for achieving this improved performance. Benefits to the ophthalmic service and the Trust included reduced waiting times target penalties, improved patient care, and reduced reputational risk.

Receiving results of blood tests in urgent and emergency care provides the setting of the second example. Processing blood tests and receiving the results was taking up to 120 minutes prior to the SLDP. After making changes to procedures, the time was reduced to an average of 90 minutes. The participant who led the change highlighted new social networks, working across boundaries and being more inclusive as decisive in achieving the change. Benefits included speedier starts to treatment of patients and related health benefits for patients.

The third example comes from urology and is another example of utilizing social networks and working across boundaries to effect change. Here, changes were made in scheduling and resource allocation procedures to eliminate previous conflict between departments. Training for nurses in operating the new procedures was also significant in implementing the change and making it work. The participant who initiated and led the change credited becoming more self-aware and increased ability in having open conversations as a result of attending the SLDP as enabling her to achieve the new and improved process. Benefits centre on reduced waiting times for treatment and improved patient care.

The fourth and final example occurred in community care. There were in fact two separate initiatives taken by a participant in this context. The first related to heart failure services in community care. Prior to the SLDP, there were no such services in community clinics. Resources, including financial, were secured to start the service. This also applied to the second initiative which was to rectify the absence of TB testing for recently arrived migrants (within the previous five years) aged 16 to 35. The participant used network analysis and increased social capital to achieve provision of these two new community services. The first means that unnecessary hospital admissions are reduced, anti-heart failure treatments are optimized, and patients experience

improvements in their quality of life. The provision of TB testing provides migrants with speedier results and reduces inconvenience of travel time, as well as reduces their costs.

As well as these examples of specific change and performance improvements, the senior managers of the Trust identified a range of more generally applied and experienced changes and associated benefits from the SLDP. These included new ways of working and leading, which in turn led to greater autonomy over decision making in operational work groups and teams. The programme increased confidence, skills and collaborative leadership style among participants which led to improved performance in a number of areas across the Trust.

### Concluding reflections

There are a number of observations that can be highlighted from this case. The first is that leadership development programmes can be a catalyst for organization change and development. This is perhaps not a new insight but the case reinforces that such programmes can be deliberately designed with that intent. It also suggests that this is more likely to happen if there is an emphasis on collective and collaborative leadership rather than a focus on individuals as leaders out of context.

A second observation is that the validity of the arguments of Hamlin, Jones and Ellinger (2020) on evidence-based organization change and development has been supported by the impact of the senior leaders' development programme. The programme design is based on solid evidence collected through a number of research projects conducted over a number of years, and in a variety of contexts and settings. That evidence provided a sound and persuasive rationale for the programme in discussion with the Trust in the early stages of its development. Representatives of the Trust accepted the evidence and were happy to adopt the LBS model of leadership development in their programme. The case of the SLDP as reported here, and its use as a REF impact case study, reinforces the value of evidence-based practice.

The third observation is that organization change and development does not necessarily or exclusively have to have organization wide change as a focus. The examples detailed here are all local change programmes aimed at and conducted within organization units, which themselves varied in size. Each example produced improvements in performance in their individual units. However,

each of the improvements contributed to overall organization performance. Indicators such as waiting times, health outcomes and patient satisfaction are key performance measures for the Trust. As an organization, the Trust cannot achieve improvements in those measures without individual units first achieving improvements. So, overall organization change as measured by key performance indicators does not have to require or involve large scale, organization wide change. One caveat to that statement is that, in the case of the Trust, there has been a wider organization change in the approach to leadership as a result of the SLDP. This may suggest that leadership development is an effective way of achieving organization change and development. However, the number of participants on the programme so far is relatively small; 75 at the time of writing. It is not possible therefore to say that there is a consistently applied approach to leadership across the whole of the organization.

A final set of observations concerns leadership and leadership development. The case of the SLDP reinforces the value of collaboration and the development of social capital. The work of Wilson et al. (2021) emphasizes social capital as a valuable outcome of an education programme, which is commonly viewed as an individual-focused experience. The changes and improvements achieved in the Trust owe a lot to similar outcomes on an organization leadership development programme. Central to both contexts is the use of action learning as one of the main development methods. Both the DBA programme and the SLDP seem to reinforce the value of action learning as a means of management and leadership development and, through that, as a method of organization change and development.

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