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'The perceptions of social care front line managers of human resource management (HRM) devolution: the evidence from an Irish non-profit organisation'

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Title

''The perceptions of social care front line managers of human resource management (HRM) devolution: the evidence from an Irish non-profit organisation'

Abstract

This qualitative research explores the opinions and sentiments of the front-line managers (FLM) of a Dublin based voluntary non-profit organisation (NPO) towards the devolution of human resource management (HRM) functions to them. The study explores the impact of devolution on Front line manager's (FLM) roles and what devolution implies for them. The study is expected to provide an understanding of the managerial role of those who start their careers as social/community care practitioners and develop into managers with HRM responsibilities. Insight was sought in this investigation as to how their operational duties interact with their HRM duties, and what they proposed would bring them success in their devolved HRM duties. The study was carried out in a case study organisation, Charity X, a NPO offering several social care services. Charity X has reduced their HR department due to funding constraints exasperated by the current Covid-19 global pandemic. The Primary data for this study was obtained using a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews held with 15 FLMs. The study found that the devolution of HR to FLMs in Charity X is necessary and inevitable, but the quality and outcomes of HR devolution depend on the investment and support that has been accorded to FLMs. Line managers perceived a lack of skills in devolved HR functions, time and role demands as obstructions to their full engagement in HR.

Declaration

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Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Management
HRBP	Human Resources Business Partner
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
FLM	Front-line manager

Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This paper explores the views of social care front-line managers (FLM) of the devolution of human resource management (HRM) activities to them in Charity X, a medium-sized non-profit organisation (NPO). Herzing and Jimmieson (2006) state that middle managers are people reporting directly to a senior manager. FLMs are those to whom only non-managerial employees report. For an organisation like Charity X, with a flat hierarchical structure, FLMs are also middle Managers. Senior managers are responsible for developing strategy which middle management must implement. Therefore, FLMs in Charity X who are also middle Managers are responsible for the implementation and effectiveness of HRM policy (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010). The act of delegating HRM practices and giving responsibility for them to line managers rather than HR specialists is called HR devolution (Brewster and Larsen, 1992, cited in Bainbridge, 2015).

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Non-Profit Organisations in Ireland

Across Ireland, community and voluntary organisations deliver a wide range of services across many sectors. According to the Department of Rural and Community Development (2018) some of their key services include campaigning and advocating for environmental causes and social justice for vulnerable groups and people experiencing poverty. In many cases, community and voluntary organisations provide supports and services that the government is unable to provide. According to the Charity Regulator (2020), in 2019, Ireland had approximately 29000 non-profit organisations, with 9000 registered as charities with the Charity Regulator. The Department of Rural and Community Development (2018) posit that the total direct, indirect and induced value of work carried out by charities in Ireland is an estimated €24bn per annum. The overall direct expenditure of charitable organisations is estimated at €16bn per annum or 5.8% of GDP. Charities support some 290,000 employees, with 189,000 directly employed in registered charities. These figures demonstrate how much

Ireland depends on the community and voluntary sector to solve many of its social and economic problems.

1.2.2 The effect of Covid-19 pandemic on Charities

The Wheel (2020) surveyed its members to identify the current and anticipated impact of the COVID-19 crisis on charities and the community and voluntary sector in critical areas such as income, fundraising, staffing and services. The Wheel (2020) found that charities were facing grave uncertainty about the security of their payments for 2021 and many were still dealing with the effects of a collapse in earned and fundraised income due to the Covid-19 global pandemic. Charities ability to meet existing, let alone increased demand, has been reduced, with many organisations cutting hours for paid staff. Despite innovative efforts to pivot supports and services online, the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on charity income has the potential to harm the quantity and quality of supports and the wellbeing of beneficiaries. The Wheel's (2020) survey found that 40% of organisations with paid staff had reduced their staff's working hours. 25% of respondents had employees working remotely.

Scarce resources in NPOs have the impact of restricting the investment on HR professionals and other supporting staff as well as impeding the introduction of costly HRM investments such as training facilities (Akingbola 2013). The scarce or uncertain income flow to NPOs also means that their workers are not as highly paid as those in for-profit sectors. Instead, NPOs often put a stronger emphasis on employees' intrinsic motivations, whereby the mission becomes an effective tool for fostering motivation, retention, and maintaining employees' focus on the organisation's purpose (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003; Kim & Lee, 2007).

1.2.3 About Charity X

This section offers the reader a summarised profile of the case study organisation Charity X. The profile can be used as a quick reference guide throughout the research report for the reader's benefit. This will give the reader a better understanding of the findings, discussion, conclusions, and recommendation sections.

1.2.3.1 Charity X Profile

Type of Organisation	Charity, company limited by guarantee
Brief History	Established in 1941 by the Catholic Arch Diocese of Dublin to meet the needs of those living in poverty in Dublin.
Governance	8 volunteer trustees appointed by the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, the CEO and company Secretary.
Charity X service users	The marginalised, have particularly complex needs, are socially isolated and those who find it difficult to access services.
Services offered	Youth services, Homeless Services, Food banks and low-cost food cafes, Information and Advocacy services.
Organisational structure	Flat hierarchical structure. FLMs report to Senior Managers who report to CEO, who reports to Board.
Mission	To help those most in need
Vision	Vision of a society where all people can fulfil their potential
Values	Love (genuine care towards others) Respect (non-discriminatory, tolerant attitude, treating everyone with dignity. Excellence (vigilance I every piece of work done)
Total number of staff	390 employees, up to 150 Volunteers
Total Number of Senior Managers	4 (at the time of this report)
Total number of FLMs	39
Structure of HR department	1 HR Business partner, 1 HR Officer, 1 newly appointed Administration staff. There are intentions to hire a part time HR Manager soon.
Geographical Scope	Greater Dublin Region covered by the Dublin arch diocese.
Glossary of Charity X terms	
Supervision	A monthly one to one meeting held by line managers with their direct reports to support wellbeing, coach, mediate, and to discuss professional development.

Servant Leadership	A 6-week course that every staff member of Charity X attends to imbed the values of the organisation.
H&S	Health and safety
KPIs	Key performance Indicators
CISM	Critical Incidence Stress management- 1 hour session to support a staff group who have witnessed a serious service user incidence. 2 members of the Management team facilitate. For example, DIS
DIS (death in service)	Death of a service user
Service User / client	Anyone who uses Charity X services.

1.3 Research Question

1.3.1 Rationale

According to (Hunter and Renwick, 2009), the FLM's role in HRM has a strong presence in devolution literature. Devolution literature typically starts with a reference to Hall and Torrington's, (1998) assertion that HRM is too vital to an organisation to be left to one specialist arm of an organisation and that the responsibility for employees should be spread to those who deal directly with employees daily, that is, FLM's. In 2020, Charity X found itself in the dilemma described by Brunt and Akingbola, (2019) of delivering high-quality services under the austere conditions and funding cuts imposed by a global phenomenon. Brunt and Akingbola, (2019) sentiments can be applied to what Charity X is facing now due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. The result was cost-cutting as suggested by Conway and Monks, (2010) , with amongst other measures, a reduction in the HR department from six people to two people for a period of 14 months from March 2020 to the start of May 2021. At the time of writing, in May 2021, HR personnel in the organisation now consist of a HR Business Partner, HR Officer and newly appointed HR Administrator.

The research question for this study is therefore:

'What are the perceptions of NPO front line managers working in a Social care Charity of the of the devolution of HRM to their roles?'

1.3.2 Research title

‘The perceptions of FLM of social care services of human resource management (HRM) devolution: the evidence from a medium- sized Irish non-profit organisation’

Front Line managers for the purposes of this study are those firstly, whose current professional practice is in the areas of Charity X’s frontline services namely, youth work, drugs/addiction work, advocacy work, homeless services and food services. Secondly, they directly supervise a staff team that delivers these social care services to vulnerable groups.

Using “perceptions” gives the opportunity to investigate how Charity X FLMs consider their HR role, which challenges they go through when managing their team, and what experiences they have with executing HR practices.

1.3.2.1 Aims and objectives of the research:

- To explore how devolved HR functions and operational functions interact in FLM roles.
- To discover how HR devolution interacts with FLM’s altruistic values.
- To discover what FLMs have to say about HR devolution during the current Covid-19 pandemic.
- To explore what FLMs view as the circumstances which might produce the best HRM devolution outcomes for them.

1.4 Structure of Research

The paper is structured as follows. A review of the existing literature on the devolution of HRM to line managers, and the context of front-line management in the NPO sector is presented. This is followed by an outline of the research methods and presentation of the findings. The paper concludes with a discussion of these findings and the researcher’s conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 1 gives an introduction to the study.

Chapter 2 is a literature review that is relevant to the issues related to HR devolution to FLMs and the NPO sector. The literature has been sourced mostly from online peer reviewed journals as due to the Covid-19 pandemic coupled with a cyber-attack on NCI, NCI's library both online and physically was unavailable.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study and the rationale used to carry out a qualitative study. Details of the sample, data collection methods, methods, ethical considerations, and limitations of the proposed study are given.

Chapter 4 Data analysis.

Chapter 5 will provide a detailed account of the findings of the study, highlighting the evidence from the original scripts of the participants.

Chapter 6 will conclude the report and make recommendations which are guided by the literature review and the researcher's findings.

Chapter 7 will be the conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines two bodies of literature. The first looks at literature on Non-profit organisations (NPOs) to illustrate the organisational context in which this study has been conducted – a medium-sized Non-Profit Organisation (NPO). The second body of literature focusses on the impact and implications of devolution for front-line managers (FLMs) The case study NPO, Charity X is unique regarding its comparatively large workforce as only 2% of charities in Ireland have a staff size of between 250-499 (Charities Regulator, 2020)

2.2 HR in NPOs

2.2.1The Impact of scarce resources on NPOs

NPOs include a wide variation of organisations that aim to meet the diverse needs of Irish society(O'Rourke, 2020). As with any other business enterprise, their use of HRM is determined by their categorization, policies and procedures, size, environmental context, and consumers. The non-profit or voluntary sector is known for its informal HR practices, including the absence of any HR specialists or function because of scarce resources (Hunter and Renwick, 2009). However, other pressures like employment legislation, reliance on donor or government capital, which, after competing for the funding, require enhanced accountability, and demonstrations of prudence and value-for-money, influence the necessity for HRM (Bartram, Cavanagh and Hoye, 2017).

To major funders like the Government, HR policies - the protocols that formalise talent resourcing, development, and retention - guarantee the organisation's legitimacy, compliance, and competence to deliver services (Hunter and Renwick, 2009) (Brunt and Akingbola, 2019) state that NPO's reliance on external funding has often swayed strategic decisions and programming in line with the funder's requirements. This might be why there is insufficient evidence of autonomous or self-regulated HRM strategies in the NPO sector (Cunningham, 2017). Those responsible for HR in the voluntary sector face an uphill task of developing HRM policies and interventions within the context of two contradictory imperatives, namely high-quality services delivered under government austerity measures(Brunt and Akingbola, 2019).

2.2.2 Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Charity income

There are current challenges in funding NPOs in Ireland, an aspect to which we must pay attention as we consider the position, role, necessity, and precarity of human resources in the sector. The Department of Local and Rural Affairs (2019) outlines how statutory partnerships of socio-economic interests (including the community and voluntary sector) were prevalent in the 1980s and 90s to facilitate the expansion and development of the sector. The Irish Government partnered with community agencies that were already working against poverty, social exclusion and inequality. It recognized the value in enabling the development of an internationally recognised community development infrastructure and a vibrant community work sector. However, the 2009-2011 recession caused a reduction in governmental funding and support bringing starkly to light the burdening of the NPO sector in times of government-imposed austerity measures (The Department of Local and Rural Affairs 2019).

The current Covid-19 pandemic has had a similar but hopefully short-lived effect on the Charity sector. Between 28 July and 24 August 2020, The Wheel (2020) surveyed its members to identify the current and anticipated impact of the COVID-19 crisis on charities and the NPO sector in critical areas such as income, fundraising, staffing and services. The survey findings indicate that revenue (both fundraised and earned) dropped significantly, meaning charities lack income security and are confronting uncertainty in the near future. Many of these organisations have been creative, pivoting to meet demand through technology and web-based supports and services. However, should the pandemic and its effects prevail, the quantity and quality of supports and the wellbeing of stakeholders may be irreparably harmed.

2.3 HR Architecture in NPOs

HR Architecture is a term used to describe the philosophical foundation on which HR is built. Ridder and McCandless, (2010), demonstrate four HR architectures for NPOs, namely administrative, motivational, strategic, and values based HRM. These are all different in the patterns of their configuration of HRM. The four architectures will now be discussed briefly according to (Ridder and McCandless, 2010)

2.3.1 Administrative HRM architecture

In the administrative architecture, the role of the HR department is reducing employee costs, not helping in the refinancing of social services in times of austerity. This results in employees receiving short term contracts and temporary work. Administrative architecture is accented by bureaucratic activities such as managing labour relations and tasks of contracts and compensation.

2.3.2 Motivational HRM architecture

In the motivational architecture, HR possesses a dominating presence inclined to humanistic ideals that are driven by the NPO's mission. HR focus on employees' strengths and invest in workers simply because they are good humans. In this regard, HR are not led by the employee's intrinsic motivations, their performance or their needs, just by the mission of the organisation. NPOs with a motivational architecture do not usually have a functional approach to HR because they are rigidly mission bound based on their humanistic principles therefore mixed organisational outcomes are common.

2.3.3 Strategic HRM architecture

In strategic HRM, the HR department is not mission-bound but operate from a market logic. HR is concerned with reacting to changes in the external environment so as to remain in sync with the organisation's overall strategic direction. This type of HR architecture focusses on similar principles as for-profit corporations to maintain a competitive advantage. NPOs operating in the strategic HRM architecture value and invest in HR as the people management agenda becomes about employees contributing to the organisation's long-term strategic development. Strategic HR in NPOs results in several goals sometimes divergent from the mission and values with the aim of remaining competitive in the market. This mission drift can have a mix of HR outcomes.

2.3.4 Value-based HRM architecture

NPOs functioning within the values based HRM architecture are dictated by the mission coupled with the perception of workers as important assets for delivering quality services. These NPOs respond to external market pressures with a robust belief in their organisational values in their HR approach. Thus, rather than income dependency dictating HRM, values based HRM delivers considerable proof of a combination of HR methods representing strategic goals while concurrently maintaining the terms and conditions of employment. This difference to the motivational and strategic architectures rests in the unambiguous translation of values into strategic goals. This results in HRM that balances the mission with strategic obligations for investing into employees to accomplish positive HR outcomes. In sum, in the values-based HR architecture, values and mission are balanced with strategic, quality-based outcome goals. This results in a reputable NPO.

2.3.5 Employee's commitment and values based HRM architecture.

A value based NPO is the most ideal for NPO workers as they are usually attracted to work in NPOs given their commitment and identification with NPO values and the mission. NPOs tend to offer lower salaries and less benefits than are provided to staff in comparable For-Profits even those with similar missions. (Kim and Lee, 2007). For those who view the altruistic, caring aspects of their job as part of their identity and possess a seemingly self-perpetuating commitment to the mission, a values-based approach to HRM is best. A values-based architecture aligns the organisation's values and the employees' values by emphasising on employees' intrinsic motivations. The mission then becomes a valuable means for nurturing motivation, retention, and sustaining employees' attention on the NPO's purpose Kim & Lee, 2007).

2.4 Devolution of HR to FLMs

Line managers were by tradition restricted to establishing and meeting the operational goals in their relevant specialties (Renwick, 2003).However, since the late 80s to early 1990s, the line management role has been expanded to include responsibility for core human resource management (HRM) functions(Navío-Marco, Solórzano-García and Palencia-González, 2019). Where line managers have responsibility for implementing human resources (HR) practices at the operational level (Bos-nehles, 2010; Alfes *et al.*, 2013)they become essential to the synergy between operations and HR in developing the competencies of their direct reports ((Renwick, 2003)). Within this purview, line managers are responsible for achieving

HR goals and ensuring that their employees show commitment, quality, and flexibility (Renwick, 2003)

Devolution is the strategic decentralization or reallocation of HR personnel tasks to line managers creating a dualistic role – operational and HR (Hall and Torrington, 1998). One of the major reasons cited for devolution is to enable HR staff to take on a more strategic, rather than operational role (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). Essentially, the effective implementation of these HR practices is dependent on the line manager's capability and commitment regarding their HR role (Woodrow and Guest, 2014). Research shows that the devolved responsibilities of personnel are formally geared to securing a commitment from employees by promoting an integrative culture of employee management, which makes line management the perfect conduit for HR (Power and Milner, 2008).

In the Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) sector devolving HR to the line managers serves a variety of reasons in a variety of ways. Devolution might be a cost-cutting measure. Or it may also facilitate HR centralisation and strategic focus (Conway and Monks, 2010; Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). For example, while funding is flowing into the organisation and things are good, devolution enables HR staff to take on a more significant strategic rather than operational role (Baluch, 2017) However, during economic downturns, devolution maybe viewed as a solution to lean times, resulting in HR job losses, causing HR strategic drift (Keegan, Huemann and Turner, 2012) An assortment of devolution rationales points to several potential devolution outcomes. For example, Whittaker and Marchington (2003) cite a study that found relatively disorderly approaches and poor people management due to a cost reduction rationale for devolution (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). There is a direct correlation between HR headcount and devolution as less HR personnel means more line manager focused HR practices (Gooderham *et al.*, 2015). Such reductions in costs, according to (Gooderham *et al.*, 2015) present an organizational challenge when fewer HR specialists address people management issues. The best thing to do for such HR functions is to pursue line manager focused HR practices that enhance the line's capacity, competence, motivation, and opportunity to perform their people management role without direct HR input (Gilbert, de Winne and Sels, 2010)

2.4.1 The Implications of Devolution

For effective devolution, a line manager must have the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes. This is according to Kehoe and Han (2020) who also include the line manager's personality, values, beliefs, and social status within their workplace as determinants of their level of engagement with HR processes and, therefore, the impact and implications that HR devolution will have on them. Kehoe and Han (2020) posit that contrary to assumptions that they are just being implementers of HR practices, line managers either adapt to or replace their organisation's HR practices suiting their skills, environment, and operational activities. This makes line managers critical players in the quality of the delivery of HR practices within their organisations.

In most organisations, devolution often entails allocating day-to-day tasks like frontline recruitment, staff development, training and performance management to line managers (Kulik and Bainbridge, 2006 cited in Bainbridge, 2015). This, according to Whittaker and Marchington (2003), is beneficial because the line manager has proximity to employees and their needs and therefore understand employee's contexts better. In addition, devolution enables line managers, who are better positioned, to make timely decisions (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). As previously mentioned, line mangers are synergistic to operations and HR, and in congruence with Conway and Monks (2010), this means that line managers are coordinators and mediators between the organisation's strategy and operations. Conway and Monks (2010), cite McConville's (2006) study of three public sector organisations, which revealed that most line managers relished HRM devolution and viewed it as part of their roles. However, these managers also felt caught in the middle of the pressure of operational directives from seniors on the one hand, and the pressures and demands of people management on the other.

2.5 The Challenges of HR Devolution for FLMs

The role of FLMs has long been accented by tensions and pressure(Watson, Maxwell and Farquharson, 2007; Gilbert, de Winne and Sels, 2011, 2015). Townsend *et al.*, (2012) contend that the increase in FLMs HR responsibilities is commensurate with a decline in their quality of work. Renwick (2003) notes that FLMs in spite of their high-pressure jobs, FLMs are willing to collaborate in sharing HR responsibilities with HR staff and that they take these responsibilities in an excellent manner, showing service-oriented attitudes. Townsend *et al.*, (2012) and Kellner *et al.*,(2016) highlighted the difficulties FLMs face in carrying HR functions. Reasons cited for this are that FLMs are not trained to do HR, having been trained in their own specialties. Many FLMs complain of the burden of workloads, and many avoid devolved people management tasks. (Bos-nehles, 2010) argue that FLMs may avoid, fail to collaborate or simply pay no heed to their HR obligations for various reasons, such as lack of trust between themselves and HR and/or high workload levels. Where managers do not reflect a belief that their devolved HR role can function with in their operational role, the impact of HR devolution is likely to be reduced(Alfes *et al.*, 2013).

Difficult processes such as bullying cases (Woodrow and Guest, 2014, 2017) or employment rights disputes (Walker and Hamilton, 2011(Fisher, Kinsey and Saundry, 2017) have been noted as particularly difficult for FLMs because of the length of time they take to resolve, their potential emotional intensity and the lack of competence FLMs in dealing with legislative issues. Walker and Hamilton (2011) found that in cases where HR personnel intervened early in such cases, resolution was reached sooner.

2.5.1 Role Stress

Evans, (2017); op de Beeck, Wynen and Hondeghem, (2017a) indicate that role stress can be a key contributing component to the challenges associated with devolving HRM to FLMs. In the 1960s-70s, Role Theory (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Merton, 1968; Rizzoet al., 1970; Turner, 1978 cited in Evans, 2017) distinguished between a variety of sources of role stress.

2.5.1.1Role conflict

Role conflict indicates contradictions in the expectations placed upon role holders with the result that complying with one expectation would make it problematic to comply with other requirements of the role. Role conflict has also been connected in some studies with evidence of tensions between different role expectations (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010).

2.5.1.2 Role overload

This occurs when there is an incompatibility between the volume of work and the time available to complete the work. This happens where there is organizational delayering; increased general workloads; and time pressures of line managers (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010; Gilbert et al., 2011).

2.5.1.3 Role ambiguity

This follows when there is little or no information about role expectations, or the role expectations lack clarity. It occurs where line managers lack institutional support and an effective HRM department to provide adequate training to develop their HR competencies; a clear definition of their HR role; or advice on managing the different expectations of their role partners (Renwick, 2003; McConville, 2006; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010).

Developments in role theory depict how various features of an organizational role can expose an individual to stress so that when the expectations of the role holder are 'conflicting, ambiguous, or overloading, the focal person will experience role stress' Evans (2017). In other words, role stress stems from interactions with individuals – role partners (Merton 1968, cited in Evans, 2017) - occupying other related positions who define the expectations of behaviour for the role holder – line manager. In the NPOs, role partners include senior managers, HR professionals, co-workers, and front-line employees.

2.6 Effective Devolution

The literature points to the necessary factors for effective HR devolution. These can be summarised as having effective HR partnerships that provide written policies and guidelines as well as training and support.

2.6.1 Human Resources (HR) Partnerships

Notwithstanding the many benefits of devolution, Whittaker & Marchington (2003) and Bos-Nehles (2010) believe that line managers cannot acquire sufficient people management skills to progress organisational effectiveness without support for human resource management (HRM). Human resources (HR) support is positively related to effective HRM implementation (Bos-Nehles, 2010) and negatively associated with HR role stressors,(Gilbert et al., 2011). In fact, line managers should be able to rely on an entire support network – the organisation, HR professionals, senior managers, and co-workers regarding their HR role. Without adequate support, line managers lack the capacity and commitment required to successfully function in their HR role (Gilbert, 2012). In other words, access to support creates the favourable conditions necessary for line managers to perform their HRM responsibilities effectively. When seeking support to execute their HR tasks properly, line managers are more likely to turn to the ones closest to them, their supervisor and colleagues who may have experience dealing with similar issues(Bos-nehles, 2010; Alfes *et al.*, 2013; op de Beeck, Wynen and Hondeghem, 2017b).

Certain HR tasks, however, highlight the need for an HR consultant or specialist working with line managers as endorsed by Whittaker and Marchington (2003) and Gilbert, de Winne and Sels (2011). This is particularly when they wish to take action that is more demanding such as disciplinary action. The line manager also consults the HR department for more specialist expertise in personnel matters such as recruitment and selection, training and development, or on knowledge of regulation and personnel administration(Cascón-Pereira and Valverde, 2014; op de Beeck, Wynen and Hondeghem, 2017b).

HR in an advisory role can increase line managers' capabilities (Intindola *et al.*, 2017), which Conway and Monks, (2010) suggest may be done in several ways including setting down a broad-themed HR strategy instead of a prescriptive plan; creating opportunities for line managers to combine their operational expertise with the HR strategy; and providing learning and development for line managers. As such, (Gollan, Kalfa and Xu, 2015) conclude that the focus of HR professionals should be on developing systems that support line managers to implement HRM policies systematically and impartially. The literature points to two general recommendations:

2.6.1.1 Written Policies and Formalized Practices

In NPOs line managers require formal written policies and procedures as guidelines when they are taking on HR responsibilities. However, even in organisations with clear HR policies and detailed guidelines in HRM for line managers, HR outcomes appear to vary according to the perception and approach of the line manager (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003). It could be that there is a gap between what is formally required by an HR policy and what is delivered by the line manager in HRM, and there may also be uncertainty about where responsibility lies in some areas of HRM between HR and the line manager (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). Government regulation of the employment relationship highlights the need for more knowledgeable and experienced line managers to understand and interpret employment law and written policies in HRM to ensure legal compliance. Even where there is no HR support, a line manager with a thorough understanding of legislation and detailed written HR policies will provide quality HR compared to those without these formalized measures.

2.6.1.2 Training

Training is an integral part of the success of devolution to line managers. Whittaker and Marchington, (2003); Conway and Monks, (2010) and Cunningham, (2017) reported that line managers said they would like more training, preparation, and guidance before taking up HR devolved duties. Cunningham (2017), found that some line managers were not committed HRM specific training as they viewed it as "common sense" compared to their more specialised operational roles for which they are better rewarded and equipped. For Cunningham who has examined this problematic in the NPO sector, line managers who take responsibility for HRM without training or low skill levels are concerning as they tend to be inequitable and erratic in their application of HR policies and procedures. Especially because line managers are viewed as strategically placed due to their proximity to employees, sustainable devolution depends on their skills, capability, and confidence (Fisher, Kinsey and Saundry, 2017).

Training is pertinent in the NPOs sector where health-care professionals and, similarly, social-care professionals must have clinical and managerial competencies (Fanelli et al., 2020). For effective HRM devolution in such organisations, transversal competencies are required to achieve effective people management, operational management, and resource management. Often line managers are individuals with clinical training rather than HR therefore, NPOs must have a learning and development strategy for the new line management role of the Social Care professional (Fanelli *et al.*, 2020).

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review sheds light on HRM devolution in the NPO sector and considers what is required for the success of line managers in taking up devolved HRM tasks. Adverse consequences of devolution include more impoverished people management outcomes and increased frustration and staff conflicts experienced by line managers (Conway and Monks, 2010). Positive results of devolution have enhanced HR capabilities; enhanced line capabilities; improved HR business focus; the improved business partnership between HR and the line; and enhanced employee management outcomes. A partnership model is ideal in NPOs that have reduced their HR headcount (Op de Beeck, Wynen and Hondeghem, 2016). The partnership involves the line leading in people management and HR supporting the line in an advisory role (Op de Beeck, Wynen and Hondeghem, 2016). The impact and implications of HRM devolution to the line are contingent on the rationale for devolution (Conway and Monks, 2010) and the line manager themselves (Kehoe and Han, 2020).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodology used in carrying out this qualitative enquiry. The target population, the sample and the intended sampling procedure will be identified. Interpretivist is the paradigm of choice for this inquiry. The ethical considerations taken by the researcher specific to the participant group for this study will be outlined. The researcher ensured that the study was carried with ethical guidance and ethical decisions were made throughout the whole life of the research project. An account of the interview protocols will provide the reader with the ethical considerations and sensitivity the researcher used to collect data.

3.2 Aims and Objectives

The researcher set out to find answers to the question.

'What are the perceptions of NPO front line managers working in a Social care Charity of the of the devolution of HRM to their roles?'

With four objectives:

- To explore how devolved HR functions and operational functions interact in FLM roles.
- To discover how HR devolution interacts with FLM's altruistic values.
- To discover what FLMs have to say about HR devolution during the current Covid-19 pandemic.
- To explore what FLMs view as the circumstances which might produce the best HRM devolution outcomes for them.

The methods used to find answers to the research question will now be described.

3.3 HR structure of Charity X

In order to lay the foundation for this case study on the perceptions of FLMs in Charity X of HR devolution, the researcher requested meetings with Charity X's HR business partner (HRBP) and CEO for the purpose of providing context of the organisation's HR structure.

Below is a summary of the researcher's Questions and answers given.

Table 1

Question	Answer

What is our current HR strategy?	CEO: We don't have one on paper. HR has grown organically from a desire by Senior Management and the Board to provide a great place to work for employees. Our HR is not about policies and procedures to protect the organisation or to keep us out of court or to keep litigation away, or to control people. There are structures like supervision (coaching and mentoring), servant leadership training, peer support, EAP so that staff could have a great job experience in Charity X.
What is the purpose of the HR department in Charity X?	CEO: To be champions of the process, ensuring fair procedures, providing templates and letters, guiding decision making throughout the whole process… but ownership of the decisions lies with line management and to educate managers on HR areas relevant to their role.
Have you achieved the above?	HRBP: HR definitely have a plan to achieve all the above but the areas such as policies are a little slow because there are few staff in HR. Training FLMs is high on the agenda but only a few bits here and there have been rolled out because at present queries from line managers and admin-based tasks take precedence.
What are your thoughts on HR devolution to line managers in Charity X?	CEO: Again, there was no intentional "devolution" plan. It was logical that the people who are closest to the staff be the ones to take responsibility and accountability for the people they manage. The HR team are there not to intervene but to be champions of the process.
What is the future of the HR team in Charity X?	CEO:

	The team is only reduced due to funding constraints but there is every intention to restore the function.

Ridder and McCandless, (2010), demonstrate four HR architectures for NPOs: administrative, motivational, strategic, and values-based HRM. Ridder and McCandless, (2010), propose that the value-based method is the highest ideal for an NPO. The value-based NPO HR architecture is one in which values and mission are balanced with strategic, quality-based outcome goals. Strategic HRM architecture pays minimal attention to the mission and values. It focuses on competing in the external environment, whilst motivational HRM is very heavy on the mission and values and does not pay adequate attention to market forces. From the statements above, Charity X can be located on a spectrum between the motivational architecture which is inclined to humanistic ideals that are driven by the NPO's mission and a value-based architecture that balances the mission and competition with market forces well. Charity X is more motivational (good at looking after staff but no documented HR strategy in place) than values-based (balanced between good staff incentives and strategic structure).

3.4 Research Strategy

In carrying out this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach to conduct a case study on Charity X. A single case study design allowed the researcher to conduct an intensive and focused analysis of one VNPO, Charity X (Yin, 2009). The nature of the inquiry, requiring to express opinions, inferences and perceptions of HRM devolution, demanded a qualitative methodology to satisfy the exploratory and descriptive aims of this study (Yin, 2009).

According to Jacob (1988 cited in Cresswell, (2007):

'*Qualitative research is a generic term for investigative methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. It emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found. Interaction between variables is important. Detailed data is gathered through open-*

ended questions that provide direct quotations. The interviewer is an integral part of the investigation'.

A case study was used mainly because it aims to explore a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and in its actual context. It tackles a descriptive question: What are the impact and implications of HRM devolution to line management (Yin, 2009).

Cresswell, (2007) articulates that the qualitative approach is based on a holistic "worldview". This means that there are many realities that are based on individual perception and context. These realities can also change over time. The researcher took a loosely phenomenological stance in conducting the research, using the interpretivism paradigm. In Phenomenology, the researcher develops an understanding of subjects' 'reality', however they perceive it. In essence, this approach investigates an individual's or group's perception of reality as they construct it. These realities may be expressed as an event, programme, relationship, emotion, etc. The researcher often has a significant personal interest in the phenomenon under study, which is true in this case study as the researcher is a FLM in Charity X.

3.5 Research Philosophy

According to Quinlan (2011:95)

'every research project is underpinned by a philosophical framework that evidences the worldview within which the research is situated, which can be seen in every step of the research process. This is where the issue of 'fit' becomes critical'.

Ontology as a field 'concerned with nature of reality' can be also distinguished between objectivism and subjectivism, in the latter the individual perspective is more important than objectivity (Saunders et al. 2012:130). On the other hand, epistemology 'concerned what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study' (Saunders et al., 2012:132), also implying three major frames: positivism, realism and interpretivism classifications.

There are two main categories dealing with these issues: ontology and epistemology, or 'positivist/interpretivism research philosophies' (Saunders et al., 2012:129). In other words, positivism is linked to quantitative methods, whereas interpretivism is related to qualitative research. The researcher took an interpretivist, subjective stance instead of a positivist, objective approach to gain understanding through the emotional experiences of Charity X FLMs.

Saunders et al. (2012:143) explain the differences between deductive and inductive reasoning:
'deductive reasoning occurs when the conclusion is derived logically from a set of premises, the conclusion being true when all the premises are true.'
and
'in inductive reasoning, there is a gap in the logic argument between the conclusion and the premises observed, the conclusion being 'judged' to be supported by the observations made.'

For this study, the researcher used inductive reasoning. The researcher chose inductive reasoning because, as Saunders et al. (2012) notes, context is essential in inductive logic. It is suitable for small sample sizes that suit better in a case study inquiry. Furthermore, an inductive approach is necessary for developing theory and aims to find plausible meanings for perceptions the behaviours observed. Inductive approaches also accept researcher involvement in the investigation process, which is useful in this study as the researcher is familiar with the case study organisation (Quinlann, 2011).

3.6 Sampling

Sampling included the process of identifying a Target population, deciding an appropriate sample size, planning a sample strategy and sourcing the sample (Creswell 2007).

3.6.1 Target population

Emphasis was placed on explanatory capacity of FLMs rather than their representativeness in choosing a sample Cresswell (1994) because the aim of this study was not to make statistics-based generalisations but rather to arrive at an in-depth understanding of personal experiences of HRM devolution. To do so, a context was sought in which the phenomenon to be studied was clearly observable Denzin & Lincoln (2011). The devolution of HRM to managers is widespread and has been taking place for many years (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003);

therefore, it was decided to conduct the field work in a context where the phenomenon was relatively new (Ridder, Piening and Baluch, 2012) and where the individuals affected could freely articulate their responses and reflections on it (Quinlann 2011). In this regard the researcher's workplace seemed ideal because at the time of the field work, Charity X was undergoing the changes instigated by the Covid-19 pandemic affecting most of the VNPO sector. The target population of Charity X line managers is 39 FLMs. The chosen sample is all Social Care frontline line managers, a total of 26.

3.6.2 Sample size

Researchers using Interpretative Analysis are given a guideline of 3 to 16 participants for a single study, with the lower end of that spectrum suggested for undergraduate projects and the upper end for larger-scale funded projects (Yin, 2009) . This sample size range provides scope for developing cross-case generalities. For these reasons, the researcher decided to interview a sample of 10 to 15 social care FLM within Charity X.

3.6.3 Sample strategy

Participants were chosen by purposive homogenous sampling. This is a non-probability sampling method based on judgments about which persons will be most informative for the investigated phenomenon and who have a shared set of characteristics (Cresswell, 1994). The alternative to purposive sampling would have been random sampling which is the process of selecting cases from a list of all (or most) cases within the sample universe population using a random selection procedure. However, the researcher has access to Social Care FLMs in the organisation as they are her peers.

3.6.4 Sample sourcing

A research approval to conduct this study was sought from the CEO, and HR Business Partner of Charity X. Criteria guiding the selection of participants included their availability and their interest in participation. Study participants were informed of the research through an announcement in a monthly manager's meeting attended by the total sample population. The researcher received support from the CEO to encourage participation. The 26 potential participants were then emailed as a group to solicit participation and further explain what the study was about and the research participants' expectations. The researcher emphasized that interviews would be recorded and that they would take place on an on-line meeting platform, Zoom. 17 out of a possible 26 participants emailed the researcher back expressing an interest to participate in the study, the first 15 became the research participants. Interviews were scheduled via email with a research information letter (Appendix 2), a consent form (Appendix 3) and the day before their interview, an interview schedule (Appendix 4).

3.7 Data Collection

3.7.1 Research Instrument

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were the data collection method of choice in order to gain rich data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher uses an interview schedule to direct the interview. Semi-structured interviews were used because they allow the interviewer to interact directly with the respondent (Cresswell, 2007). Unlike with surveys that require very short, undetailed responses, the interviewer can ask follow-up questions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Using in-depth interviews provides information that may otherwise not be possible even if one were to use reliable and valid scales of measurement Saunders *et al.* (2012).

3.7.2 Interview Schedule

The interview schedule consisted firstly of introductory, closed questions of a demographic nature and secondly, open questions directly relating to the role of the FLM and devolution of HRM and lastly, normative questions about recommendations and conclusions on the how devolution could be a success. The interview schedule was designed in such a way that the researcher could vary the sequence and format of the questions and ask further questions (Quinlann, (2011). The guideline of the interview was derived from the themes in the literature review and the aims of the study.

The interview schedule was divided in to six sections for discussion. The section headings which were extrapolated from the literature review included:

1. Demographics
2. Introduction, covering their journey into management and their experience so far of devolved HR responsibilities namely,
   a) Recruitment and onboarding
   b) Performance Management
   c) Training and development
   d) Payroll
   e) Absence Management
   f) Employee Relations: Disciplinary and grievance procedures
   g) Employee Relations: Unions, employee voice and engagement
3. Day to day tasks
4. Training
5. HR decision making
6. General thoughts on devolution and what makes it successful.

(see Appendix 4) for a more detailed schedule.

The interviews were semi structured in that questions were prepared under several themes that were drawn from the literature. Adopting a semi structured interview approach allowed the researcher to explore each answer further as appropriate. It also allowed the researcher to explore the actions reported by the managers within organisation that were themselves evolving and gave the opportunity to access the experience of the managers as they dealt with the challenges and opportunities unfolding before them (Saunders et al. 2012), particularly in relation to managing their services during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Interviews can be time-consuming (Cresswell, 2007). The researcher intended for each interview to last an hour. To shorten the interview process and later, data analyzing time, the interview schedule was sent to the interviewees a day before the interview. This approach facilitated faster interviews that were more easily analyzed and compared as it gave participants a good idea about what was going to be asked (Creswell, 2007)). Giving only one day to think about the answers avoided over preparation for the interview and facilitated some spontaneity in answers. The researcher acknowledges that an unseen interview would have yielded greater spontaneity from interviewees (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). However, open interview questions allowed for thorough exploration. This result would not have been possible had the researcher used a quantitative approach which restricts the information received, since the questions are predetermined, and the respondent has to select one of the options provided for each question/item. Because of the uncertainty of the present Covid-19 restrictions on meetings and gatherings, interviews took place on the Zoom online webinar platform. This platform is chosen for its ability to record interviews and to simultaneously transcribe conversations.

3.7.3 Data collection process

Conducting interviews yields rich information that may not be otherwise possible to obtain. However, getting the participants to give time for an interview is often not easy. A minimum of one hour was sought for each interview to accommodate rapport building and to reach a stage where the participant could share his/her experience openly. Some participants were able to talk more about their experience than others. Throughout the phase of data collection, there was constant learning on how to improve interviewing skills. The main advantage of this technique is that it is flexible in nature and allows the researcher to experience the interview beyond the words that were exchanged.

Despite the advantages, the use of interviews as a method of data collection also has some problems. Participants are a little wary of the information they share, particularly if the interview is being recorded. In summary, the process followed to conduct data collection was the one outline by Cresswell, (2007). This included orientation and welcome of the participants. Describing the study and the interview process and clarifying any expectations regarding attribution. After the questions were exhausted, the interview was closed by reviewing the key points, any issues, or action items, and confirming accuracy with the respondent. The interviewee was invited to provide feedback on the interview process and thanked. Lastly, the interviewer asked for permission to make future contact, if needed.

3.7.4 Ethical issues

Ethical approval was sought from NCI's ethics committee. Four ethical considerations were used as a guide for ethical conduct throughout the research process, namely, risk, respect, confidentiality and informed consent (Cresswell, 2007). All participants were shown respect and thanked for their valued contribution to the study. The researcher was sensitive to all participants' wishes including the request to. break or discontinue the interview. The right to self-determination was upheld (Crewell, 1994). The right to confidentiality was protected by protecting the identity of the respondent using codes (numbers) in place of names (Denzin and Lincoln, 2001). Furthermore, the organization was given the pseudonym Charity X in order to further reduce the chance of identifying participants. All participants were briefed about the research through a letter detailing the research and all were asked to complete and sign a consent form (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). All interviews were recorded and transcribed barring a handful occasions where the respondent requested some segments of the interview not to be recorded. Those inputs were not noted or used for data analysis. Findings will be shared with participants.

3.7.5 Dealing with researcher's bias

In conducting a research where the researcher has close interaction with the phenomenon under investigation and the case study environment, it is important to keep one's biases in check Saunders *et al.* (2012). It was of necessity for the researcher to start the research on a clean slate, having experienced directly as well as vicariously, through the experience of others, the dynamics of HRM devolution in the organisation. The researcher had to bring to conscious awareness all their own opinions, feelings and experiences of HRM devolution and ensure that they did not impose these onto interviewees in any way. Therefore, before speaking to the first participant, the researcher wrote down their own understanding of HRM devolution in Charity X. Questions were open ended and the interviewer ensured that the participant did most of the talking. The interviewer ensured that all verbal and non- verbal ques did not project the interviewer's own biases onto the participant (Creswell, 2007).

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Credibility in research is achieved by following a rigorous process of data analysis and being as close and grounded to the data as possible. This ensures an authentic picture of the real experience of the participants. The intention of qualitative research is to interpret events and not to generalize findings (Merriam, 2002). However, for any qualitative research, internal validity (Merriam, 2002) is the main issue. In other words, "how congruent are one's findings with reality?" (Merriam, 2002). Addressing these issues, Denzin & Lincoln (2011) state that interpreted qualitative investigational information can be improved by credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability. Comparison, the main tool in qualitative analysis, is used to identify constructs and group them into themes Braun & Clarke (2019). As such, the key objective of qualitative analysis is to identify conceptual similarities or differences and to discover types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns or wholes (Braun & Clarke (2019).

In analyzing data, Braun and Clarke's (2019) notion that data analysis is a collaborative process, that merges the data, the researcher's position and the context of the research will be upheld to avoid misinterpretation. According to Braun and Clark (2019), TA is flexible, simple and leaves deduction to the interviewer.

Qualitative research can produce vast amounts of information (Quinlann, 2011). The researcher was able to cut down on this time by using a plug-in software that transcribes Zoom meetings. Transcripts were checked against the interview replay and corrections for mis-transcribed words were made.

Data analysis for this study consisted of six major steps as recommended by Braun and Clarke's (2006,2019) Thematic Analysis (TA):

4.1 Getting familiar with the data and identifying items of potential interest

To familiarise with the data, the researcher wrote notes and highlighted the key points during each interview. A reflective piece was written out after each interview. Further familiarisation was gained by listening to each interview again during the correction of the transcripts. Anything of interest was noted. Replaying the interviews in sequence was useful in helping the researcher to pick up recurring statements in the interviews.

4.2 Generating codes

To generate codes, transcripts were read and notes made on the transcripts. During qualitative analysis, the data is broken up into manageable pieces, which the researcher then reconstructs to reflect a view of reality (Braun & Clarke 2019). Coding is a key step in qualitative data analysis. Data material was reduced by paraphrasing the interviewees' statements and assigning a colour code to themes that seemed to recur in all interviews. After the first round of coding was done, the data now were divided into over 80 codes. Some of these codes were sentences.

4.3 Generating initial themes

Next, the researcher identified similarities between the codes. If the codes were similar, they were grouped. For this research, if the code referred to the same set of activities or sentiments, they were treated as similar. Once codes were combined, the list was now considerably smaller. Once coding was concluded, the researcher proceeded to development of code families in line with research objectives and theories outlined in the literature. Braun and Clarke (2019) explain that a theme is a recurring concept in the data set. A theme offers the different sides of a singular idea. The initial themes were thus generated.

4.4 Reviewing initial themes

Clusters of meanings were then developed from the paraphrased statements, forming themes.Recurring themes were given a color code in each transcript. Common codes were clustered to create themes. The process of thematic analysis was a long one which started during the first interview right through to the time of writing up the findings of the research. Themes were reviewed several times for clarity of wording, sometimes subthemes were made into themes but on further review, put back into sub-themes. At the time of interviewing, everything the participant said did not seem important or relevant to the topic.

4.5 Defining and naming themes

Finally, with much guidance from the literature, 3 overarching themes were generated that seemed to the researcher to tell the interviewee's stories of their perceptions of HR devolution in Charity X. The themes also answered the four objectives of the research.

4.6 Producing the report

The three themes generated from the data analysis process are:

1.The FLM role,

2.FLM HR devolution challenges,

3.HR devolution supports for success.

The researcher aimed to reflect the sentiments of participants authentically and congruently therefore, data were read and re-read several times to make sense of it. The process was not linear and there was a lot of back and forth. The entire process was very time consuming. The breakdown of the line manager's perceptions will now be reported in more detail along with their sub themes in the next Chapter on Findings. After the findings are presented, a discussion

Chapter will give the reader insight into the meaning of the findings using literature and the context from the case study.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter summarised the stages of the thematic data analysis process used in this study. A inductive qualitative approach was used in drawing meaning from the data. The three dimensions that resulted from the analysis process were the FLM role in Charity X, HR Devolution Challenges in Charity X and HR devolution supports for success. These will be discussed in broader detail in the next chapter.

Thematic data analysis resulted in 4 levels of abstraction. At the first and lowest level, open codes indicated concepts that emerged directly from the data and were words that participants themselves used in their narratives. The second level resulted from paraphrased groupings of sub- themes or categories and in the third level, six major themes were identified. On reviewing the themes again, 3 themes resulted at the fourth level of abstraction.

Appendix 1 demonstrates the process in more detail.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings that answer the research question:

'What are the perceptions of NPO front line managers working in a Social care Charity of the of the devolution of HRM to their roles?'

The researcher set out to find out what the perceptions of FLM's in Charity X were with regards to HR devolution in the organisation. Four objectives accompanied this inquisition:

- To explore how devolved HR functions and operational functions interact in FLM roles.
- To discover how HR devolution interacts with FLM's altruistic values.
- To discover what FLMs have to say about HR devolution during the current Covid-19 pandemic.
- To explore what FLMs view as the circumstances which might produce the best HRM devolution outcomes for them.

The findings are presented under three themes generated from the rich qualitative accounts of the FLM’s themselves. The themes are:

1.The FLM role

2.FLM HR devolution challenges

3.HR devolution supports for success.

5.2 Profile of Research participants

7 males and 8 Females were interviewed in total.
Table 2. presents the profile of the 15 Managers that were interviewed.

Table 2

Years in Org	Years as FLM	Team size
8	8	5
15	7	20
15	13	6
28	11	20
18	12	31
6	6	9
19	14	13
15	10	29
12	4	13
23	13	8
11	2	20
29	6	6
21	8	5
20	11	22
15	10	32

5.3 Themes

5.3.1 FLM Role in Charity X

The theme FLM Role provides the context of the FLM's role in Charity X. It constitutes the FLM's descriptions of the various responsibilities they have daily, periodically or as the need arises. This theme describes different perspectives of the FLM's role that are parallel to that of their devolved HR tasks. FLM's identified that their roles were busy and had no set routine and thus autonomous. This is in line Whitaker & Marchington's (2003) assertion that FLMs have opposing priorities together with ever-growing workloads. Because of the myriad of tasks FLMs have, the focus of any given day depended on who or what needed the most attention: staff, service users, the building or various administration tasks with deadlines. Three sub-themes namely Role structure, Role stress and Role commitment will be discussed next.

5.3.1.1 Role structure

In most organisations, devolution often entails allocating day-to-day tasks like frontline recruitment, staff development, training and performance management to line managers (Kulik and Bainbridge, 2006 cited in Bainbridge, 2015). This, according to Whittaker and Marchington (2003), is beneficial because the line manager has proximity to employees and their needs and therefore understands employee's contexts better. The role is multifaceted as summarised well by 3 FLMs.

FLM 1:

> *….Checking with staff to see how they are; Working with clients; responding to emails and phone calls both from clients and other organisations; attending relevant meetings/conferences etc. Rewarding staff and recognising significant occasions…Assisting them with their career development during supervision. I only spend time on other duties, like Petty Cash returns, funding proposals, KPIs, H &S, absence tracker, when I have to do them…*

In addition, devolution enables FLMs, because of their proximity to employees, to make timely decisions (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). As previously mentioned, line mangers are synergistic to operations and HR, and in congruence with Conway and Monks (2010), this means that line managers are coordinators and mediators between the organisation's strategy and operations. In Charity X, the Manager mediates between the employee and the organisation through, and process called Supervision, which a monthly one to one meeting FLMs have with each staff member on their team. Supervision was identified in all cases in this category as a responsibility that is enjoyed by FLMs but time consuming.

LM 1:

I enjoy supervision with the individual team members.

LM9:

…trying to get in supervisions, particularly at the moment (during Covid-19 pandemic)… I'm doing them all online, and then writing them up and sending them notes. like so…. it takes three hours to do the supervision now like…

5.3.1.2 Role stress

Role stress will be demonstrated from FLM's statements in 2 sub- categories, namely role overload and role ambiguity. Evans, (2017) and op de Beeck, Wynen and Hondeghem, (2017) indicate that role stress can be a key contributing component to the challenges associated with devolving HRM to FLMs.

5.3.1.2.1 Role overload

The findings show how a combination of organisational structures, increased general workloads and subsequent time pressures for FLMs were related to perceptions of role overload. This occurs when there is an incompatibility between the volume of work and the time available to complete the work. This happens where there is organisational delayering; increased general workloads; and time pressures of line managers (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010; Gilbert et al., 2011). Out of the 15 FLMs interviewed, 8 identified that they managed more than 1 service or one service but on different sites which was identified as scope creep by one Manager.

LM10:

The role gets bigger and bigger, funders want more reports and responsibility for another service is given to you. It happens over a long period of time… you could call it scope creep.

LM13:

We are always short staffed so I'm always on the floor, running to check my emails then back to the floor then going again to send the absence tracker and back to the people at the door…

One manager identified role overload as being caused by the number people in vulnerable situations a FLM in Charity X has to deal with constantly.

LM14:

Our model of HR devolution is by its nature, one that is constantly about juggling people, be it the people we work with, the vulnerable young people or adults, our own staff, their feelings, their worries, their stress, their anxiety, so everything becomes a constant and I think that's probably the biggest drain on managers that I've seen over the many years.

Some Managers affixed role overload to an unexpected activity that needed their attention and brought their already full schedule to beyond saturation point.

LM4:

GDPR is going to be a classic example. "I want to see all my GDPR everything you have on me"... but who has to do that? the managers have to do that! That is serious work for somebody to.... you know…

LM6:

Just one child protection disclosure and your whole well-planned day is off…

5.3.1.2.2 Role conflict

Role conflict indicates contradictions in the expectations placed upon role holders with the result that complying with one expectation would make it problematic to comply with other requirements of the role. Role conflict has also been associated with evidence of tensions between different role expectations (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010). Role conflict was described well by a of the FLMs.

LM5:

I think sometimes …at times maybe there could be conflict of interest? I don't know, I just feel… I just feel like it's a lot of times managers are given this extra work, because then you're doing sometimes death in services as well. or you're doing CISM... Or… do you know?... you've all these other really serious, important things to be doing as well. But throwing an investigation in there as well….

5.3.1.2.3 Role ambiguity

This follows when there is little or no information about role expectations, or the role expectations lack clarity. It occurs where line managers lack institutional support and an effective HRM department to provide adequate training to develop their HR competencies; a clear definition of their HR role; or advice on managing the different expectations of their role partners (Renwick, 2003; McConville, 2006; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010). Role ambiguity is a term used to explain the lack of clarity, confidence and/or consistency one might face in a job. This was demonstrated by some of the FLMs.

LM 2:

I think more and more is placed on managers without the skill base or time. My skill base is social care and although I enjoy different aspects of the job- my skill base and experience in managing / leading investigations/ disciplinary's or dealing with unions and court is something I don't believe I have the skill set for and these are areas I believe are HR people management duties.

LM10:

And I think what has happened to a lot of middle managers is they're being pulled both ways. … they're being asked almost to.... I don't know, oversee their staff, who they have in front of them, which rightly so… And yet at the same time, don't necessarily have the support structures behind them. So, they become a jack of all trades.

5.3.1.3 Role Commitment

Despite their hectic schedules, and role stress, Charity X FLMs are committed to their roles and show a willingness to do their jobs as best as they can. Their commitment was found to fall into two sub-categories, namely commitment to their devolved HR duties and commitment to the shared values and culture of the organisation.

5.3.1.3.1 Commitment to devolved HR duties.

Most FLMs embraced their devolved HR duties and displayed a willingness to do them all. Below are the comments from FLMs regarding their devolved HR responsibilities. Renwick (2003) notes that FLMs in spite of their high-pressure jobs, FLMs are willing to collaborate in sharing HR responsibilities with HR staff and that they take these responsibilities in an excellent manner, showing service-oriented attitudes.

LM 15:

It's just your job… I just get on with it.

LM6:

It's not something I am overly comfortable doing although I understand its part of my role.

LM3:

You know, I suppose just get on with it and just to do it!

Some participants felt that the willingness to carry out their duties was linked to having no outlet to express how they really feel about some HR functions. Kehoe and Han (2020) posit that contrary to assumptions that they are just being implementers of HR practices, line managers either adapt to or replace their organisation's HR practices suiting their skills, environment, and operational activities. This makes line managers critical players in the quality of the delivery of HR practices within their organisations (Kehoe and Han (2020). A statement by one of the managers illustrates this point.

LM4:

I think there's a certain resignation to an inevitability. And I think part of that is because people don't feel that there's any constructive way to kind of move against that. And so, people are just simply adapting, but they're adapting in a way, which is, I think, not necessarily productive.

5.3.1.3.2 Commitment to shared values and culture.

The commitment to the values in Charity X acts as a glue that holds everything together. In spite of the role stress, FLMs expressed in different ways how their personal values align with the of the organisation. FLMs portrayed their commitment to the values of the organisation. For those who view the altruistic, caring aspects of their job as part of their identity and possess a seemingly self-perpetuating commitment to the mission, a values-based approach to HRM is best. A values-based architecture aligns the organisation's values and the employees' values by emphasising on employees' intrinsic motivations (Ridder and McCandless, 2010). The mission then becomes a valuable means for nurturing motivation, retention, and sustaining employees' attention on the NPO's purpose (Kim & Lee, 2007).

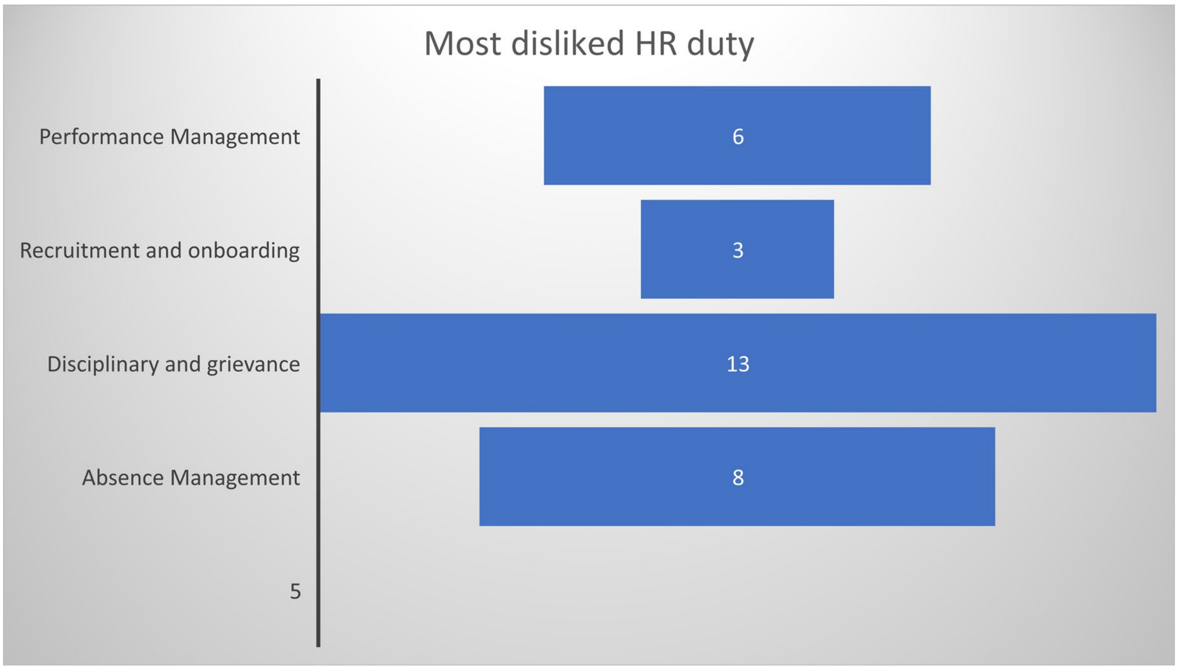
LM1:

Our core values are Love, Respect and Excellence, is how we treat one another and what we expect from them. I don't think of Charity X's culture ever! We try to create an environment, where the team work well together, share their frustrations, successes and support one another – I think in a way we create our own culture but in an indirect way being aware of our strategy.

Overall, whilst the role of the FLMs is a   busy role with many different responsibilities, FLMs in Charity X embrace their roles. A particular reason for this is the alignment of their values with that of the organisation.

5.4 HR devolution challenges of the FLM role in Charity X

The challenges spoken about the most by FLMs were managing their teams during Covid 19 and the difficulties they feel when involved in disciplinary and grievance process. These are now discussed as two sub-themes under the dimension of HR devolution challenges. Procedures that involved investigation processes and possibly negative deliberations were identified as the most disliked. Desk-based HR administration tasks had a neutral response. This is illustrated in the chart below.



5.4.1 Disciplinary and grievance procedures

Disciplinary and grievance procedures which included investigations were reported to be particularly difficult for line Managers:

LM2:

Taking part in investigations is a lot more complicated as the process could result in a disciplinary or someone losing their job.

Many FLMs complain of the burden of workloads, and many avoid devolved people management tasks, especially the more difficult ones that involve potential legal intervention. Bos-nehles, (2010) argue that FLMs may avoid, fail to collaborate or simply pay no heed to their HR obligations for various reasons, such as lack of trust between themselves and HR and/or high workload levels. Where managers do not reflect a belief that their devolved HR role can function with in their operational role, the impact of HR devolution is likely to be reduced (Alfes *et al.*, 2013). One FLM aired their sentiments in line with this.

LM5:

I just personally wish there was a HR team that could take control of the whole situation. I think the managers- we run really busy services, with big teams, we have so much going on as well. And then to try and find spaces to be doing investigations, interviewing people, getting those notes together, sending those notes, you know, there's is just so much that comes with an investigation or a grievance or disciplinary.

The length of time for investigations and the relationship damage on staff teams caused by the lengthy process were cited as reasons for the stress accompanying them. Difficult processes such as bullying cases (Woodrow and Guest, 2014, 2017) or employment rights disputes (Walker and Hamilton, 2011; Fisher, Kinsey and Saundry, 2017) have been noted as particularly difficult for FLMs because of the length of time they take to resolve, their potential emotional intensity and the lack of competence FLMs in dealing with legislative issues. Walker and Hamilton (2011) found that in cases where HR personnel intervened early in such cases, resolution was reached sooner.

LM5:

The length of time for investigations and the back and forth…. That's really frustrating and you lose your team, they start gossiping…if they are unhappy, they will let everyone know… Yeah, I know, not all investigations or grievances are, like really heavy or really in depth. But they're still very time consuming. You know, unfortunately, there's only five days in a week.

LM9:

I understood why we had to keep going softly, softly. But I found it… you know… if somebody is saying something, and you're not in a position where you can actually challenge what they're saying, because they're, you know, still out of work, … on stress leave or whatever, and you're just nodding, and you're sitting there going, that's not what happened.

Conflict of interest and the possibility of breeching fair procedures when investigating cases from ones own service or department was also named as reason for the unpopularity of disciplinary and grievance processes:

LM2:

… a lot of investigations are related to people we know personally or have crossed paths with before and our knowledge of the individual could be seen as biased in court.

LM7:

The problem with it is that all the people who could be supporting you are tied up into the process. Your senior manager has to deliberate later so can't really openly… or maybe officially discuss the case with you. As manager you become a key witness, so you have to be careful what you say, especially to your peers, you still have to manage all the staff in the conflict, it's hard.

5.4.2 HR devolution during Covid-19 pandemic

Motivating teams that were working remotely and managing teams online was one of the challenges faced by FLMs. "Zoom" calls seemed to cause a lot of frustration because of how often they occurred. For some services, Zoom was the only way of staying together as a team due to Covid-19 restrictions. Covid- 19 pandemic restrictions proved to present a new challenge to FLMs and at the same time alienated FLMs for their teams and their colleagues.

LM1:

Working from home, I feel like someone in a 'call centre' that any 'new clients' I have worked with since last March, I have no rapport with them.

LM3:

Remote working is inefficient, I think. I think that's my main problem is that you end up having duplicate conversations between people or you might have one phone conversation, then it comes up in a team meeting and everyone else has to be informed and you probably end up like spending more time on the same issue than you would if you're just in an office.

5.5 Supports for Successful Devolution

Researcher: do you enjoy your HR -related tasks?

LM2:Yes, I do but sometimes there's an expectation to lead without much support

FLMs were asked who they go to first for support with difficult HR issues.

Figure 4. below shows who FLMs reported that they go to first with HR-related issues.

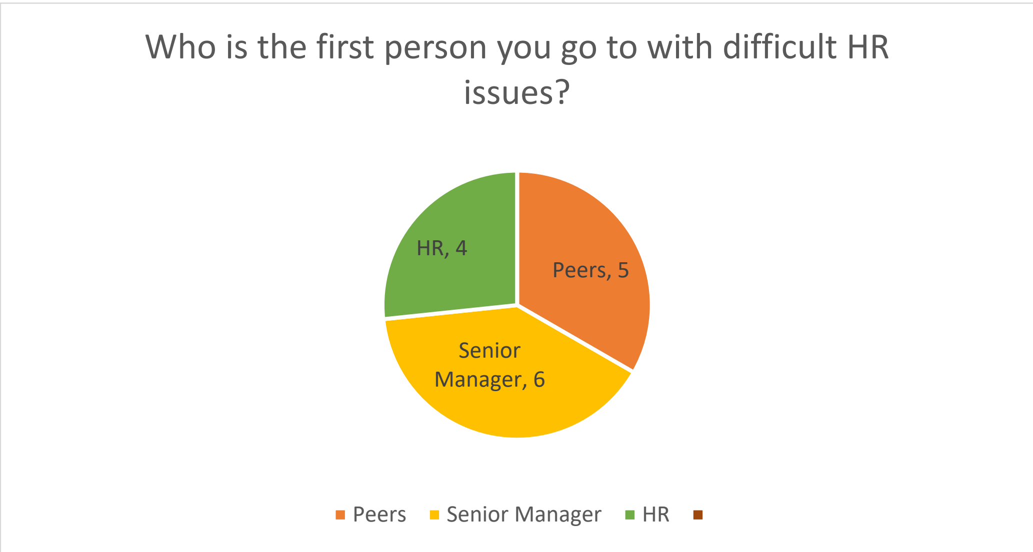


Figure 1. Who is the first person you go to for support?

The FLM's support needs were then categorized into 4 sub-themes attached to the role-partner who was expected to resolve the issue. The support required from HR, and role partner support.

5.5.1 HR Department- Availability, Training and Policies

FLMs cited the need for a more available HR team. They also cited the need for clear policies FLMs described the culture as 'informal' and 'very laid back'. In line with this, the devolvement of HRM to FLMs was accompanied by a few policies or processes that seemed unclear to FLMs, which while giving FLMs a high level of discretion in how they executed HRM, also compromised their ability to consistently implement HRM as intended.

Notwithstanding the many benefits of devolution, Whittaker & Marchington (2003) and Bos-Nehles (2010) believe that line managers cannot acquire sufficient people management skills to progress organisational effectiveness without support for human resource management (HRM). Human resources (HR) support is positively related to effective HRM implementation (Bos-Nehles, 2010) and negatively associated with HR role stressors,(Gilbert et al., 2011).

HR involvement was viewed as necessary to processes as it protected the Manager from over involvement at a personal level which could compromise the investigation process. Certain HR tasks highlight the need for an HR consultant or specialist working with line managers as endorsed by Whittaker and Marchington (2003) and Gilbert, de Winne and Sels (2011). This is particularly when they wish to take action that is more demanding such as disciplinary action. HR in an advisory role can increase line managers' capabilities (Intindola *et al.*, 2017), which Conway and Monks, (2010) suggest may be done in several ways including setting down a broad-themed HR strategy instead of a prescriptive plan; creating opportunities for line managers to combine their operational expertise with the HR strategy; and providing learning and development for line managers. As such, Gollan, Kalfa and Xu, (2015) conclude that the focus of HR professionals should be on developing systems that support line managers to implement HRM policies systematically and impartially.

LM7:

HR ... They're the best people to talk to. And it's like having a negotiator... doesn't mean the right doesn't mean the wrong, it removes the personal.

5.5.1.1 Availability

The limited availability of the streamlined HR team was highlighted throughout the interview process. The first support required from the HR department was availability. The non-profit or voluntary sector is known for its informal HR practices, including the absence of any HR specialists or function because of scarce resources (Hunter and Renwick, 2009). However, other pressures like employment legislation, reliance on donor or government capital, which, after competing for the funding, require enhanced accountability, and demonstrations of prudence and value-for-money, influence the necessity for HRM (Bartram, Cavanagh and Hoye, 2017). The streamline HR team meant limited availability.

LM12:

I think the HR team is too small for the number of staff working in the organisation.

LM3:

Because the reduction in the number of people there does actually mean that there are no real supports arranged for remote working, working from home. So, from my perspective, like, nearly everything that I had to do, again, was experiential.

The FLMs clearly expressed a preference for HR to be more available to them. This is in line with Whittaker and Marchington (2003) who cite a study that found relatively disorderly approaches and poor people management due to a cost reduction rationale for devolution (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). There is a direct correlation between HR headcount and devolution as less HR personnel means more line manager focused HR practices (Gooderham *et al.*, 2015). Such reductions in costs, according to (Gooderham *et al.*, 2015) present an organizational challenge when fewer HR specialists address people management issues. However, the limited availability of the current HR team did not seem to diminish the quality of the work they did as stated by a number of FLMs. FLMs noted the helpfulness of the HR team, felt valued and in turn valued the HR team and only did not contact them because they felt that they would be overloaded with work. This shows that goodwill between FLMs and the HR team in Charity X which contradicts a number of studies that point out polarity and sometimes animosity between HR and the line.

LM15:

The ladies are still great but there's only 2 now…

LM6:

The girls are great! But there is only two, so I ring them sparingly because I know they have a lot on

5.5.1.2 Training and accompanying guidelines

The need for not so much policies, but training in procedures and guidelines were also alluded to by FLMs. The best thing to do for such HR functions is to pursue line manager focused HR practices that enhance the line's capacity, competence, motivation and opportunity to perform their people management role without direct HR input (Gilbert, de Winne and Sels, 2010). The FLMs called for HR to provide training in HR responsibilities. For effective devolution, a line manager must have the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes. This is according to Kehoe and Han (2020) who also include the line manager's personality, values, beliefs, and social status within their workplace as determinants of their level of engagement with HR processes and, therefore, the impact and implications that HR devolution will have on them.

LM2:

I'm okay with them (HR duties) but as already discussed, I don't like " winging it" so I'd like more training to be more confident in areas we are asked to lead.

LM10:

I think we need a HR Handbook for Line Managers with a Q and A section, a better selection process for managing an internal investigation, training section on different areas of HR.

LM15:

I believe more training is needed for recruitment, disciplinary, employee relations, investigations.

5.5.2 Role partner support

Receiving support from role partners like HR, Senior Management and Peers was expressed as an element of high importance in the success of HR devolution. Not receiving the expected support was a source of stress for FLM. In other words, role stress stems from interactions with individuals – role partners who define the expectations of behaviour for the role holder – line manager (Merton 1968, cited in Evans, 2017).

One manager who viewed their senior Manager as a peer stated:

LM2:

I go to the senior Manager…. A member of the HR team out of no fault of their own doesn't have a clear picture of the services we manage so they sometimes "delegate" people management back to the service manager.

Some of the Managers who interchanged Senior Manager and HR support gave availability as a reason for interchanging.

LM15

So, a number of occasions, I would have had conversations with senior manager and with HR, whoever is available first and I found them very supportive…

LM6:

We have had a lot of change in the senior managers over the last few years and there does seem to be less availability at times. This is understandable as a lot of senior managers are doing different duties themselves.

Deputy Managers were highlighted by most Managers as a valuable peers for emotional support and empathy. Deputy Managers were heralded as understanding what is going on.

LM 9: I suppose (service names a Charity X service) was great, because there was a manager and a deputy manager there.

Similarly, Managers who shared a common site had the same sentiments about their colleagues.

LM1

I am lucky that (Names of fellow Managers) and I work very well together and support one another …I would ask my colleagues ______ and _________ before I would contact HR.

LM4:

I think people handle it by simply talking to each other. That's partly it. So, they, there's a lot of that kind of consult back and forth with each other with people they trust.

Chapter 6 : Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide context for the three themes generated by the researcher from qualitative interview data by demonstrating how each theme answers the research question. To make sense of the findings, the themes namely 1. The Frontline role in Charity X, 2. HR devolution challenges in Charity X, and 3. HR devolution supports for success will be related to what is already known in the literature. Meaning will also be sought from the foundation that already exists for HR devolution in Charity X.

6.2 Objective 1

To explore how devolved HR functions and operational functions interact in FLM roles.

6.2.1 Theme 1: The Frontline Role in Charity X

Role Structure

The HR responsibilities of Charity X FLMs did not differ from those described in the literature. FLMs covered a wide range of areas including recruitment & selection, performance management and appraisals, training and development, staff rotas, and job allocation. Paper-based desk duties such preparing absence trackers, or payroll summary sheets drew no particular emotion from the FLMs, most of them resigning to the notion that it is their job to do them. In addition to their HR role, FLMs also had considerable operational responsibility such as ensuring Health and safety and devolved financial responsibility. Managers with fewer staff were practitioner/ managers, reported spending more time with service users than with staff and looked after health and safety themselves. Managers with bigger teams spent more time with staff, less time with service users but were more likely to have admin staff and staff who looked after building maintenance. Moreover, FLMs were accountable to a wide range of role partners, including service users, front line workers, line management colleagues, senior manager and HR professionals. This contributed to the range of HR roles they play and the wide remit their duties found in previous studies (e.g., Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010). Further analysis of the data identified a variety of work role stressors for FLMs.

Roles Stress

Role overload was primarily caused by the reduction in human resources and the increased responsibilities through larger spans of control, reduced staffing budget and, intensified responsibilities for service users and employees due to the Covid -19 pandemic. Role conflict was triggered by Funder's demands for evidenced and reported productivity and quality continuous implemented HRM whilst concurrently securing cost savings due to funding controls and restraints. Previous research has found that such strategies exacerbate work role stress for front line employees (Evans, 2017)).

Charity X services are very busy with day-to-day operational tasks including trying to keep the teams together during the Covid 19 pandemic. This research study established that FLMs also experience role ambiguity citing a lack of clarity in Charity X's HR strategy and limited support from the smaller team of HR professionals. FLMs complained of a lack of clear HR systems and processes. These findings confirm the importance of the context of HR devolution as found in previous research e.g.,(Melo & Machado, 2013; Renwick, 2003), especially clear organizational strategies combined with effective and supportive HR professionals to reduce experiences of role ambiguity for FLMs. The length of time it takes for investigations to take place coupled with the stress it causes those it involves are factors that require resolution. Resolution is not only through drafting policies, which would be a very welcome response to mitigate this, but also to include support systems for all involved.

6.3 Objective 2:

To discover what FLMs have to say about HR devolution during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Objective 2 was covered in all themes as the Covid-19 pandemic was the environmental back drop during this study. However, theme 2 highlighted Covid-19 as a devolution challenge for FLMs. FLMs reported remote working, trying to manage remote teams, attending online meetings and staffing reductions as some of the HR devolution issues, they had to face during the Covid-19 pandemic. What exasperated the situation was that the HR team, due to Covid - 19 related funding cuts, was reduced meaning that mangers were left in a remote situation with scarce HR support.

6.4 Objective 3

To discover how HR devolution interacts with FLM's altruistic values.

Theme 1: FLM commitment to HR Devolution

Creating a great place to work was the motive that drove HR devolution to FLMs in Charity X. Devolution, although not called devolution was the result of a desire to empower FLMs which in turn was hoped would empower front line staff and service users.

FLMs do not always accept the role stressors associated with their managerial status, but instead renegotiate the expectations imposed upon them by accepting what is and defaulting to the altruistic motives they began with. Most FLMs in this study were committed to the vocation of Social care, their reported aim for doing charity work was altruistic in nature and their values aligned to that of the organisation, notion also found by Baluch, (2012). This caused a lot of internal turmoil when their role demanded them to make decisions like disciplinary action and worse still, dismissal. Charity X line managers reported enjoying those devolved duties in which they perceived themselves as actively helping people, for example, supervision and coaching sessions, training and development, recruitment, and performance management- if there was no possibility of employee termination.

(Shipton et al., 2016) discovered that favourable responses to HRM in low pay social care work have been accounted for by social norms that privilege altruism, thereby mitigating employees' negative response . Additional studies point to VNPO employees' seemingly self-perpetuating commitment regardless of wages and working conditions along with their astounding resilience and ability to tolerate increasing levels of stress and even increased violence and harassment at the workplace (Renwick, 2003; Walker & Hamilton, 2011) Line managers like making the decisions and doing their job but feel unsupported regarding the length of time it takes to solve employee's issues in partnership with HR.

Objective 4:

To explore what FLMs view as the circumstances which might produce the best HRM devolution outcomes for them.

Theme : HR devolution supports for success.

Supporting FLMs in terms of role partner availability and readily usable policies along with regular refresher training was resoundingly emphasised as a necessity for successful HRM devolution. Remote working and reduced HR staffing has limited casual calls with HR resulting in HR support being a scarce commodity which is being used sparingly in the organisation.

The supports identified by FLMs include:

1. **True partnership** with HR staff occurs when HR have a contextual understanding of the issues at hand and have the time and conducive conditions to freely provide guidance and training to FLMs. True partnership also entails providing clear HR policies and procedures for Managers to follow, that are in line with the organisation's culture. Charity X can be located identify our NPO according to Ridder et al.'s typology (2012) as having a high missional and moderate strategy orientation, and consequently, adopting a semi-values-based HRM system. These two HRM systems – values-based and high performance – appear to have separate and potentially conflicting objectives. They are coming from 2 different perspectives of operation. HR are there to provide guidance that protects the organisation from legal and reputational damage, whilst line managers are at the forefront of operations and are present and involved in

the day-to-day damage and impact a certain situation is causing to their teams and their service delivery(Ridder et al., 2012; Walker & Hamilton, 2011).

3.**Support from role partners** in circumstances where a difficult HR process such disciplinary or grievance procedures especially when they involve investigations. Peers provide empathy and relatable experience. They are also used as an informal "sounding board". FLM with smaller teams who do not ordinarily face such occurrences are primed to be good candidates for providing such support. This is because whilst supporting others, they can also learn how to deal with those issues if they are faced with them in the future. The unheralded supporter for most of the Managers in the study are their Deputy Managers. Deputy Managers are important peers in the decision-making process because they run the service alongside the Manager and have an experiential perspective that other supporters might not gain. This is not to say Manager and Deputy always agree on a course of action, but the DPL has a part in influencing the course to take when an issue arises.

4. **Scheduled training and refreshers** as well as **HR availability** embedded into the organisation's culture. HR is the FLMs job in Charity X but FLMs were not given formal training into management. The culture of learning for FLMs in Charity X has always been learn-as-you-go. This learn as you go approach has the advantage of building focussed expertise through experiential learning but limiting in that once the saturation point is reached, there are no new things to learn. This will create stress for those Managers who have been in the role for a long period when they suddenly have to implement a litigation-prone grievance or disciplinary procedure which is they have to learn whilst doing.

5. **Policies and practical Guidelines**. The lack of a distinct devolution framework drafted through a consultative process with accompanying implementation guidelines can be a source of frustration for managers. A distinct policy entails, for example, ensuring HR practice understandability (degree to which the content and functioning of HR practices is clear) and relevance (degree to which HR practices are perceived as useful, supportive, and relevant). Furthermore, an HR system is high in consistency when there is, for instance, validity of HR practices (degree of consistency between what HR practices purport to do and what they

actually do) and consistency of HR messages (degree of congruency between championed and inferred values; of internal consistency of HR practices, of the stability of practices over time). FLMs firstly, need to be involved in HR devolution decisions as these will affect them directly. Next, training needs to be provided. Post training, reporting templates and feedback channels and formal debriefing networks will need to be developed.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings of the inquiry into the perceptions of FLMs of HR devolution in Charity X. The findings in this study lead to the conclusion that it is not what is devolved that matters, but how its devolved. Charity X FLMs are committed to their busy and sometimes stressful roles and seldom ask questions about the structure of their roles. Trust and support are essential elements of successful devolution. In Charity X, where almost all HR functions are devolved to the line, trust is demonstrated by the act of devolution itself. However, it is necessary for supports to be put into place for Managers to succeed enthusiastically in these devolved tasks.

Accountability for devolved HR functions requires well supported FLMs, bearing in mind that they were trained in social care disciplines and HR duties do not come naturally or by profession to them. To increase the expertise of FLMs in devolved HR functions, a more formal training approach and discussion forums targeting difficult issues and areas need to be established. Such a structure will compensate for the fact that a significant number of Charity X FLMs learn the role of Management on the job from someone who also did not get formal training. This means that Charity X FLM's skills are only as good and as varied as the person who inducted them into the role. The diagram below summarises the factors that are necessary for successful HR devolution in Charity X from the FLM's perspective.

6.5.1 Limitations of the study

According to Quinlann, (2011) the process of understanding cannot avoid preconceptions. The researcher chose the topic from professional experiences. These experiences will help to capture the participant's stories more vividly and sensitively. However, familiarity with the researched phenomenon may introduce researcher's bias thus compromising the robustness of the findings. The researcher dealt with this potential bias. A second limitation of the study is that it is confined to one organisation leaves little possibility of generalising the results.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The Researcher set out to discover what the perceptions of Social Care FLMs in Charity X of HRM devolution were. The question had the following accompanying objectives:

- To explore how devolved HR functions and operational functions interact in FLM roles.
- To discover how HR devolution interacts with FLM's altruistic values.
- To discover what FLMs have to say about HR devolution during the current Covid-19 pandemic.
- To explore what FLMs view as the circumstances which might produce the best HRM devolution outcomes for them.

Regarding implications of devoution, the case study show that the overall degree of devolution to Charity X FLMs is intentionally high. The reasons for the HR Devolution to FLMs in Charity X is to decentralise and distribute power in the organisation, which ensures that decisions are made at the point where employment issues occur, the Frontline. Indeed, although a number of HR responsibilities are devolved Charity X FLMs (middle Managers) , they are unable to carry out these tasks effectively because of a lack of confidence in carrying out more difficult decisions like investigations and because of the structure of the investigation process. Thus, one can talk of devolution in terms of the autonomy given to carry these tasks out but not in terms of the equipping to carry them out.

Equipping in its full sense is conceived by the FLMs in this study as the availability of supports such a role partner supports and HR training and policy guidelines support. Role partner supports consist the availability and partnering provided by Senior Managers, HR personnel and Peers whilst structural supports are formalised training, policies and procedures, and consultation forums and feedback mechanisms for inclusivity and continuous improvement.
Thus, devolution of Human resource management responsibilities without the support structures in place is far from leading to a sense of empowerment as proposed by some of the literature and leads FLMs to feelings of stress because they are unable, in their own perspective, to fully carry out the responsibilities devolved to them.

Another important finding of this study is the fact that FLMs in Charity X are dedicated to their roles and even when things are difficult, they continue to view Hr devolved tasks as part of their role. This result suggests that the different aspects of management are inseparable at these levels and are just seen as the job. Therefore, making a distinction between management functions is to some extent artificial in the context of devolution to FLMs in Charity X, and this highlights the importance of integrating the organisations' various functional areas. Consequently, one must consider not only the perspective of those who devolve management responsibilities (HR departments, top management, etc.), as indicated in the literature, but also the possibly of differing perspectives of those to whom these responsibilities are devolved.

7.1 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations drawn from the findings of this study.

- Establish a robust support system for Manager's who have to carry out disciplinary procedures.
- Re-connect the organisation by facilitating small groups after the easing of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.
- Continue with plans to hire more HR staff.
- Establishment of consultative process with FLM's for a written HR framework, supporting policies and training needs analysis.
- Make use of organisation's intranet to upload, and update policies and guidelines regularly.
- New managers handbook detailing what new Managers need to know about HR.
- Training in difficult procedures

7.1.1 Training Budget for 4 HR modules (CIPD requirement)

Training will have to be outsourced as HR department is still short-staffed. Training should entail a theoretical element and a practice / role play element. Training will therefore take place over 2 days.

<u>Modules covered.</u>

Training will be provided to all FLMs in areas that have been reported as difficult procedures in this study, namely:

- Ending probation
- Disciplinary and Grievance investigation procedures
- Performance Management
- Dealing with Protected Disclosures

Budget for outsourced training

	Cost
Cost for 2-day training for 1 module for 20 FLMs	€3000
Cost per person for 2 days / FLM	€150.00
Cost per person for 1 day/ FLM	€75.00
Cost for all FLMs (39) per day	2925.00
Cost per module for all FLMs for 2 days	5850.00
Total cost to train 39 FLMs for 4 modules	23 400.00
*Training will take place over a 12-month period	

7.1.2 Contribution of the study

The study is intended to add to the existent body of literature concerned with HR devolution with the unique reference to Social Care front line manager's perceptions in a VNPO setting. The study is intended to offer strategic enlightenment to senior personnel in Charity X as to the nature of HR devolution from the implementers' viewpoint. It will inform of organisational adjustments to be made in the devolution of HRM to line managers in VNPO with social care specialisation. It will offer insights to the organization and its funders of any training needs and costs of a formal devolution plan. While the intention of Charity X may be to create an autonomous middle management, the supports necessary for this are not always prioritised either consciously or unconsciously, thus leading to a gap between rhetoric and reality. Conway and Monks (2010) have also detected these differences between stated intention and reality in action.

7.1.3 Personal learning statement (CIPD)

In choosing my research topic, I wanted to study something meaningful, and that would be beneficial to my organisation. It had to be an idea that interested me, an idea that I was passionate about. Therefore, I decided to study the involvement of line management in HRM.

Studying during the Covid -19 pandemic has not been an easy feat. As a wife and working mother, it was important that I schedule time to do my research. There was no library to resort to for quiet times, no fellow students to talk to face to face with and no actual books to borrow. The new online learning has been interesting. I have acquired many skills for online learning like transcribing software. I chose to do qualitative research because I wanted to hear peoples personal stories, albeit on Zoom. I chose to use Zoom because it would help me to see their faces and read their expressions. In this way, I found that I had progressed in my interview skills by the time I was interviewing my last participant.

I found that my challenges came after I finished interviewing participants. As we were all familiar with each other discussing a topic were all interested in, interviews took long, and I was left with about 27 pages of transcribed data per participant. It took many evenings after work to listen to recordings, make notes and colour code. I had not anticipated the length of time data analysis would take.

This process has improved my writing and analytical skills as well as my online meeting skills. I also have gained a wealth of knowledge about HR devolution to FLMs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 : Thematic coding pathway

Open Codes	Total times keywords were mentioned	How many participants mentioned it?	Category	Theme (Level 3)
Busy service Many staff Many hats Compliance Admin Health and safety Maintenance No two days the same It's my job to… Priorities Vulnerable groups Young People Service Users	41	15	The day to day of the role Commitment to the role	FLM role structure

Recruitment Ending contracts Probation Performance Investigations Disciplinaries Long term absence policies	45	12	Motivating certain groups of Staff Enjoyed and disliked tasks Disciplinary and grievance procedures	HR Devolution Challenges
Staff issues Stressful Feeling alone Pulled in all directions. Short staffed Complaints Don’t want to say/do the wrong thing. Not experts (in HR) Its HR’s job Knowledge gaps Vocation Social care	50	15	Role overload Role ambiguity and fluidity Availability	FLM Role stress
Our values The Strategy Love, Respect & Excellence Informal Nothing written. Communication Consultation It’s my job to… Get on with it. Laid back Prolonging issues	32	9	Mission, vision, values, and ethos A Great place to work. Communication Loyalty Willingness	Organisational culture and HRM decision making

Zoom meetings. Working from home Redundancies Frozen recruitment Remote team Dispersed I miss the office. It's not the same anymore. policies	29	11	Remote Working Motivation &Team drift Reduced staffing	HR devolution during Covid-19 pandemic
Senior Manager is: -strong -available -gets it -decisive Discuss with Deputy. Our circle the other managers, Training HR is busy. There's only two of them (HR) Availability relationships	42	15	Senior Managers HR Peers	Devolution Supports

Appendices

Appendix 2

Participant Information sheet

TITLE OF THE STUDY:

*‘‘The perceptions of social care front line managers of human resource management (HRM) *devolution: the evidence from an Irish non-profit organisation’*

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT?

My name is Tari Chimbganda. I am currently undertaking a research project as part of a course of study in the National College of Ireland for a master’s in human resources management (MA HRM) qualification.

The aim of the research I have chosen is:

Aims and objectives of the research:

- To explore how devolved HR functions and operational functions interact in FLM roles.
- To discover how HR devolution interacts with FLM's altruistic values.
- To discover what FLMs have to say about HR devolution during the current Covid-19 pandemic.
- To explore what FLMs view as the circumstances which might produce the best HRM devolution outcomes for them.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether to take part.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

I am doing case study based solely on our organisation using semi-structured in-depth interviews. As the study is based on the views of line managers, you have been requested to take part. I request your participation by answering some interview questions. I understand that we are all busy so I will email a set of the type of questions we will explore ahead of the interview.

All participants will be respected, and their contribution will be valued. *Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to refuse participation, refuse any question and withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.* I aim to be sensitive to your wishes and will offer a break or discontinue the interview at the first sign of distress. Your right to self-determination will be upheld. You can discontinue the interview at any point. If there are questions you do not want to answer, they will be skipped. The findings of the research will be shared with all participants. The proposed way to protect your right to confidentiality is to protect your identity by using pseudonyms and or codes (numbers) in place of the names of people and places. All participants will be asked to complete and sign a consent form.

<u>Contribution of the study</u>

The study is intended to add to the existent body of literature concerned with HR devolution with the unique reference to Social Care line managers in a NPO setting. The proposed study is intended to offer strategic enlightenment to senior personnel in the organization. It will inform of organisational adjustments to be made in the devolution of HRM to line managers in NPO with social care specialisation. It will offer insights to the organization of any training needs and costs of a devolution plan. The proposed study will also serve to highlight those areas that the interviewees are happy about so that these areas are enhanced and emphasized.

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, the interview will take place on the Zoom online meetings platform. The meeting will be audio and video recorded, and the research data will be transcribed electronically. The transcribed data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Data will be kept in line with National College of Ireland's data retention policy, that is, until after my degree has been conferred. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under GDPR you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The research report will be disseminated within the case study organisation.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

Please contact Tari Chimbganda:

X19125691@student.ncrl.ie

Mobile: 0858570754

THANK YOU

*devolution=

HRM devolution has been defined as:

"the degree to which HRM practice involves and gives responsibility to line managers rather than HR specialists".

(Brewster and Larsen, 1992, p. 412 cited in Bainbridge, 2015).

Appendix 3

CONSENT FORM

I……..………agree to participate in Tari Chimbganda's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Tari Chimbganda to be audio and video-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)
I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview X☐
I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview X☐

Signed:
Date: ……
PRINT NAME:

Appendix 4

HR devolution questions for line managers

Demographics

Name:

Gender:

Years in the organisation:

Years in Management position:

Qualification:

Department:

Process of induction/ training into management

Which of these HR related duties have you participated in?

- Recruitment and onboarding (induction and probation)
- Performance Management
- Training and development
- Payroll
- Absence management
- Disciplinary and grievance procedures (investigations, conflict Mgt)
- Employee relations (Unions, employee voice, engagement, and motivation)
- Leading organisational change in your project

What was your role in each of the above?

How high on your list would the above HR – related duties be placed?

Day to day

Can you describe your day-to-day duties?

Which tasks are a priority and why?

What percentage of your time do you spend on operational tasks ie?

What percentage of your time would you say you spend on people management?

What People management duties do you consider to be a line manager's job?

What People management duties do you consider to be HR's job?

Training

Describe how you learnt to carry out your HR- related duties?

Do you enjoy your HR -related tasks?

If so, which task do you enjoy?

Which tasks do you not enjoy?

Do you think that you are adequately trained for HR tasks?

What training or knowledge would help you with your HR duties?

Have you received training in any HR related fields?

What would help you do HR related tasks better?

HR Decision making

Which HR-related tasks are hardest for you to make decisions on?

What HR – related tasks would you usually consult for?

Who do you turn to first for advice on HR- related tasks?

Do you consult specific people for specific tasks?

What has been the hardest HR-related or people management decision you have ever had to make?

Who supported you? Did you feel supported?

How could you have been better supported?

How often do you consult with HR? What do you consult HR for?

How can the organisation best support you?

Current HR Department

What effect, if any, has the reduction in HR personnel had on you and your workload?

Are you aware of the organization's HR policies ?
Are you aware of the organization's HR strategies?

Do you think you need to know HR policies and strategies?

Conclusion

What are your main thoughts about the devolution of HR to line managers?
What makes it work not work /?