Investigating whether HR Strategy can lend itself to the Competitive Advantage of a Company operating within the Transport and Logistics Industry in Ireland

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Abstract

This research investigates whether the Human Resources (HR) Strategy of an organisation can lend itself to the Competitive Advantage (CA) of a Company operating within the Transport and Logistics Industry in Ireland.

The research aims to investigate whether the current research within the areas of HR Strategy and CA apply to organisations operating with the Transport and Logistics industry or whether there may be some differences that come about as a result of studying this industry.

It asks key questions such as trying to determine whether the CA of a Company can accurately be described to those externally. This aims to support the theory that if it cannot be explained then it cannot be imitated.

The research also looks at the impact that culture plays in CA and whether this is influenced by the HR Strategy. The impact of trust between employees and managers is also reviewed in the context of the link between this and the success or failure of new practices, policies and procedures.

Lastly, the research looks at the role of HR in the Company and assesses whether it can and should support employees and managers in equal measure.

All in all, it looks at the HR Strategy and the overall effect that it can have on the CA of firms in these industries and also looks at the potential for disadvantage and what this can look like if there is not a HR Strategy or a HR Strategy which is an incorrect fit for the business.

Declaration

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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*(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)***

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: Master of Arts in Human Resource Management

Title of Thesis: Investigating whether HR Strategy can lend itself to the Competitive Advantage of a Company operating within the Transport and Logistics Industry in Ireland

Date: 15th August 2021

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my Research Supervisor, Pauline Kelly who guided and supported me throughout the past five months.

A special thank you to all my colleagues in the transport and logistics industry that have taken the time to take part in this research. Your knowledge, insight and experience has made this research what it is and without you, it would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my fiancé and my family, in particular my Mam, who has supported me since the beginning.

This research is completed in memory of my late Dad, Damien Carroll who always instilled in me the value of education and hard work.

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List of Abbreviations

HR – Human Resources

HRM – Human Resource Management

SHRM – Strategic Human Resource Management

CA – Competitive Advantage

SCA – Sustained Competitive Advantage

PM – Personnel Management

HRMP – Human Resource Management Practices

HPWP – High Performance Work Practices

SWOT – Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats

RBV – Resource Based View

VRIN – Valuable, Rare, Imperfectly Imitable and Non-substitutable

CS – Competitive Strategy

CP – Competitive Parity

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators

HRPs – Human Resource Practices

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This research investigates whether HR Strategy can lend itself to the CA of a Company operating within the Transport and Logistics Industry in Ireland. This industry has not previously been researched within this topic and as such provides some valuable insights.

The research demonstrates that the HR Strategy does lend itself to the CA of organisations operating within that industry but also, that it can cause considerable damage to the Company to be without one or to operate one that is mismatched or not aligned to the business strategy. The research demonstrates a clear disadvantage to Companies in the industry that do not have one.

Considerable focus has been given to the area of culture and linking how this is impacted by the HR strategy, confirming that culture is affected by the HR Strategy. Culture itself can be a key area which is difficult to explain and links in with the ability of competitors to accurately describe the CA of a Company in order to imitate it. This research displays the difficulty that a competitor might have in explaining the CA of a Company. It provides evidence that if employees cannot accurately explain the CA, then how likely would it be that a competitor with no involvement in the business could explain it and then imitate it.

It also gives credit to existing literature on the need for trust between Managers and Employees on the implementation of policies, procedures and practices.

Overall it builds on existing literature in relation to the connection between HR Strategy and CA confirming that it can lend itself and in particular to the Transport and Logistics industry.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review aims to travel through the most prominent theories in relation to using HR and HR Strategy as a CA.

The early years of HR or Human Resource Management (HRM) were initially referred to as the Personnel department or Personnel Management (PM). This is a function within companies which has evolved considerably throughout the years.

HR Strategy has become a popular topic in recent years with many theoretical frameworks to be found in the literature, although there are some which at the outset seem to have gained more traction than others, such as the Resource Based View (RBV).

Throughout the history of HR Strategy and CA, there has been a significant shift from an external view to one which encompasses the internal structures and an alignment with the business strategy. Michael Porters Five Forces Model is one which is particularly popular in the literature but only focuses externally. The focus has now shifted to achieving CA through a firm's own resources.

HRM and HR Strategy

HRM

Storey defined HRM as:

"*Human Resource Management is a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce using an integrated array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques*" (Wilkinson, et al., 2017, p. 6)*.*

This is not however the only definition and it has been defined many different ways by many different authors such as Boxall and Purcell when they defined it as;

"*HRM includes anything and everything associated with the management of employment relationships in the firm. We do not associate HRM solely with a high*

commitment model of labour management or with any particular ideology or style of management" (Wilkinson, et al., 2017, p. 6)*.*

The term HRM first emerged in the 1980`s as it gradually began to replace terms such as PM however there has been extensive debate over whether there is any difference or if it is just a change of name (Wilkinson, et al., 2017).

HRM has evolved over time and has been described as going through three waves to get to the point where it is now;

1. Administrative Wave – Focused in mostly on regulatory compliance and administration
2. Practices Wave – over time it developed to increase the level of innovative HR practices (HRP)
3. Strategy Wave – the most recent wave focuses on supporting the business strategy by ensuring the HRPs of the organisation are aligned (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

HR Strategy

HR Strategy has been defined as:

"the pattern that emerges from a stream of important decisions about the management of human resources, especially those decisions that indicate managements major goals and the means that are (or will be) used to pursue them (Dyer, 1984, p. 159)*.*

Authors such as Becker and Huselid, Boxall, and Schuler and Jackson have discussed the need for organisations to match their HR Strategy to the business strategy, in order for it to contribute towards the success of the organisation (Wilkinson, et al., 2017). A point which has been made by Dyer has been heralded as one of the most valuable contributions in relation to HR Strategy, argues that formal planning and informal adaptation should be included in any Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) plan (Boxall, 1992).

Certain HRM decisions may naturally be strategic. An example could be in relation to union recognition, job and pay levels which all impact and essentially define the path

that the organisation will take in relation to its people strategy (Purcell & Ahlstrand, 1989).

There is no single set of successful HR strategies in terms of managing people. There should not be an assumption that all HR strategies will be equal however, research suggests that most firms will not adopt a single set of practices for all of their employee groups anyway (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). Often firms will decide what human resource management practices (HRMP) suit certain groups within the firm such as management team, non-management team, executive or core labour group (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). The effectiveness of HRMP is dependent on two variables, being firstly if they have the ability to impact upon organisational performance and secondly whether they are aligned to the strategy of the organisation (Wilkinson, et al., 2017). HRMP cannot be used as a complete solution, in order to maximise their effectiveness, there needs to be a linkage between all of the practices along with performances variables or key performance indicators (KPIs) and management activities (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

In a firm that wished to join an elite group of firms, they must ensure that their policies, procedures are also of an elite standard such as proactive recruitment channels, high entry standards, high remuneration, employee ownership or extensive professional education (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). If any one of these elite type systems supports the organisations ability to attract and retain high calibre employees or does not necessarily undermine it, then it is said that the choice of what processes is used is not necessarily critical to the outcome (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

The future of HR Strategy should comprise of an outside inside approach which proposes that HR aligns its internal offerings to that of prospects outside the Company, which in short means looking at the current HRMP and seeing what it can offer to those external to the Company, such as the customers (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

Past experiences, values, expectations and other reasons can affect the way in which employees will perceive and react to certain practices in a firm so there will be some

variation in the response to implementation of new practices or polices (Den Hartog, et al., 2004).

Research suggests that there are three different levels of involvement when it comes to business strategy for HR;

1. Implementation only – where the strategy has been developed and then is passed on to HR where policies, practices and procedures are created in response to and aligned with the business strategy

2. Input and implementation – HR provide information or input perhaps to the leadership or management team but they do not feed in at a direct level

3. Full partnership role – HR are fully involved in the process of strategy development (Lawler III & Mohrman, 2003). It is thought that it is at this stage that HR have the ability to really make a difference and impact upon the business strategy.

Trust as a Mediator

In order to view the HR Strategy and associated practices as a full set, consideration needs to be given for how these practices will be welcomed by the employees and the effect that they may have. How an employee feels about the firm and their direct manager will also have an effect on how they perceive the practices. Trust has been described as an important mediator in terms of HRMP and employee outcomes. High performances HRMP viewed through the eyes of an employee who has trust in their employer will more often than not view these practices as an investment, leading them to display even higher levels of discretionary effort (Alfes, et al., 2012).

Trust has been defined as;

"an employee's belief about the likelihood that the employer's future actions will be beneficial, favourable or at least not harmful to an employee's own interest, and is therefore a crucial factor influencing an employee's behaviour (Robinson, 1996, p. 576)*.

Increases to task related performance, organisational citizenship behaviour and a reduction in turnover intention can be present where employees have positive

perceptions of HRM practices (Alfes, et al., 2012). As such the perception on the HRM practices within an organisation is important.

An employee that feels positively towards the HRMP in the organisation, will generally believe that the remuneration they are paid for their work is satisfactory, that there were fair procedures for recruitment and selection and that there is a fair amount of opportunity for training and development (Alfes, et al., 2012).

In research it was found that HRMP has a powerful link with employee attitudes in situations where employees have high trust in their supervisor (Innocenti, et al., 2011). Other authors have found similar results in research in that the performance related aspects of high-performance work practices (HPWP) were positively affected by employees have high trust in senior management (Farndale, et al., 2011). It is important to note that where trust is removed, the results are not the same (Alfes, et al., 2012).

Building trust in organisations between management and employees will increase the potential success of a firm, any policies or procedures which have the ability to build trust between these two stakeholder groups will ultimately yield better results (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). If there is not an alignment between the employer and employees, the firm may suffer, affected badly by below standard productivity and turnover levels which make it difficult for the business to continue (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

Criticisms of HRM and HR Strategy

Criticisms of both HRM and HR Strategy have been identified throughout the literature. During its time, the concept of HRM has been debated back and forth with problematic areas arising from the concept of strategy (Boxall, 1992). HR Strategy has been criticised in literature arguing that it provides a general overview of how to proceed but really does not provide practitioners with any clear direction on exactly what to do (Boxall, 1992).

Competitive Advantage

CA can be discussed alone or as an additional term, Sustained Competitive Advantage (SCA).

A firm is thought to have CA when it is:

"*implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors*" (Barney, 1991, p. 102)*.*

An SCA is thought to be present when,

"When it is implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors and when these other firms are unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy" (Barney, 1991, p. 102)*.*

Sustained has been defined as:

"not a period of calendar time but refers to a long time" (Barney, 1991, p. 102)

Or,

"only sustained if it continues to exist after efforts to duplicate that advantage have ceased" – although there is still no implication that it will last forever (Barney, 1991, p. 102).

The first research in the area of CA centred around one model established within the 1960`s which focused on four key areas, strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT) (Barney, 1991). The model is still in use and often referred to as a SWOT analysis. This model allows firms to look at the four key areas in order to determine how to achieve CA through exploiting their strengths, foreseeing potential environmental opportunities and acting on them while preventing internal weakness from affecting the firm ahead of time and counteracting threats (Barney, 1991). The research in this area has continued to evolve and while the SWOT analysis is still popular in business, there are a lot of other very worthwhile theories that aim to predict CA.

Research advises that the key to achieving CA or SCA is through a firm's resources. Resources need to add value to a firm. Value has been defined as either

differentiating the product or service in such a way that the firm can charge an increased price for it or else cutting costs in order to generate a better margin (Barney & Wright, 1998). In certain sectors, it is possible to reduce costs. This can be done by choosing to pay low wages to staff however this can have a knock-on effect in terms of the levels of performance, knowledge or commitment to the firm (Progoulaki & Theotokas, 2010).

A firm's resources have been defined as:

"assets, capabilities, organisational process, firm attributes, information, or knowledge" (Barney, 1991, p. 101).

Firm resources are broken down further being described as fitting in to one of three categories, physical capital resources, human capital resources, organisational capital resources (Barney, 1991).

CA is not always easy to describe. SCA is often not achieved by firms as the HR team do not understand exactly what contributes to the CA and therefore do not succeed in matching directly their strategies in the appropriate way that will contribute towards attaining CA (Barney & Wright, 1998). This is an indication that CA is not easily identified even to those internally.

Conclusion

Many different authors and researchers have attempted to identify the reason for CA and even pin it down to one theory. There have been many popular theories over the years which all aim to identify the way in which firms can achieve a CA through their HR Strategy

Michael Porters Five Forces Model

In 1980, Michael Porter created the 'Five Forces Model' which was based on analysing the potential strengths and weaknesses of an industry in order to achieve CA (Barney, 1991). Porters Five Forces Framework is an example of the types of frameworks that dominated research in the 1980's focusing on factors which were external to the organisation rather than internal (Barney, et al., 2011). In the traditional models on CA, it is believed that only Companies that are able to utilise

the opportunities and counteract the threats will be able to achieve CA (Barney, 1991).

This model suggests that it can help to identify industries which may be attractive to join but can also be used to identify the potential threats and opportunities that exist within a firm's own industry (Barney, 1991).

If an industry has strong entry and mobility barriers, assuming that all resources are homogenous and not perfectly mobile, there is a potential for firms to obtain SCA over other firms which are not in their industry which may allow for them to excel in terms of performance within the industry (Barney, 1991). It is important that the resources are not mobile otherwise other firms may be able to obtain them.

There are two assumptions within this model which effectively eliminate the possibility of immobility and heterogeneity as a source of CA. The first, that strategically relevant resources that are controlled and pursued are equal within an industry or group, and the second, that due to resource mobility, any heterogeneity which develops will only be short term (Barney, 1991).

First Mover Advantages

Under certain conditions, some firms do obtain a CA over others, the first being first mover advantages. Firms which were the first to enter the industry, have had opportunities to develop relationships with customers, build their reputations and secure access to distribution channels all before other companies that entered the industry or implemented their strategies after the first mover company unless all firms have equal resources, in this case there is no benefit to be had from being a first mover (Barney, 1991).

Culture

Organisational culture has been defined as,

"A complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions and symbols that define the way in which a firm conducts its business" (Barney, 1986).

Culture can sometimes be a source of SCA however it has been said that the settings in which this can occur are restricted (Barney, 1986). A culture must be rare, valuable and imperfectly imitable if it is to generate any CA (Barney, 1986).

Often, even to those that are a part of the firm or are observing it, it may not be possible to say what it is that adds value from the culture, if the value cannot be identified, then it also cannot be imitated (Barney, 1986). A culture can also be heavily entwined with the founder's unique characteristics or personality and if this is such and these are rare, then SCA may be achieved through them (Barney, 1986).

Companies that have a great culture are often cited as examples of good management within research (Barney, 1986). It is said that organisations without a great culture, will not be able to and should not expect to be able to generate the same levels of performance (Barney, 1986).

Technology

Technological change is one of the most impactful changes that can occur in the competitive market, shifting industry structures and the rules of competition (Porter, 1985). Firms that are well established may find their CA affected as technological advancements work to level the playing field amongst rivals (Porter, 1985).

Jay Barney argued that this was not the case and that a firm's CA can be found internal to the Company within its own resources also known as the Resource Based View or Theory (Barney, 1991). As RBV began to get attention in the field, researchers started to look inside for resources which could be a CA (Hoskisson, et al., 1999).

The Resource Based View

Throughout the literature on HRM, the Resource Based View has been hailed as one of the key theories discussed for firms attempting to achieve SCA through their strategic planning (Progoulaki & Theotokas, 2010).

"Resource Based View, initially introduced by Wernerfelt, realises the firm as a bundle of resources and capabilities that combined develop competencies. Resources and capabilities constitute the base for the formation of sustained competitive advantage" (Progoulaki & Theotokas, 2010, p. 575).

The RBV has become one of the most popular theoretical frameworks in the study of management and holds that CA is achieved through a combination of valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable resources (VRIN) (Delery & Roumpi, 2017). It is said that the VRIN resources within a Company are the indicators that allow a Company to achieve SCA (Barney, 1991).

Some resources do have the ability to attain a SCA but in order for that to be so, they must have four characteristics:

1. **Valuable –** they are able to exploit opportunities and/or neutralise threats in a firm's environment
2. **Rare –** among the firms current and potential competition

An example of a Company that has achieved rarity is Nordstrom. A typical retail industry is characterised by requiring a moderate level of skill which is often associated with high levels of employee turnover. Nordstrom created a strategy which allowed them to attract talent from groups who were recently graduated with an interest in retail which was then incentivised so that employees were receiving up to twice the standard level of compensation of that is deemed industry standard allowing them to take a homogenous labour market and use it to their advantage in order to achieve a CA (Barney & Wright, 1998).

3. **Imperfectly imitable –** cannot be easily replicated

Imperfectly imitable is an important factor in the theory as CA can only be gained if a resource cannot be obtained by other firms and they also do not currently possess them (Barney, 1991). Barney also discusses some reasons why resources can be inimitable, firstly that they may be based upon historical conditions, secondly that there may be a degree of social complexity (SC) or thirdly that the link between the CA and the firm is causally ambiguous.

An example of historically dependant resources would be an organisation that has developed a certain culture which has been carried through from the founding stages, an organisation which was founded in a different time period cannot obtain the same culture, which may be down to the values and beliefs of that time period being significantly different and as such it is imperfectly imitable (Barney, 1991).

Different examples of SC have been described throughout research in terms of resources which may generate a CA, from the reputation of the firm among customers and suppliers to culture and interpersonal relations amongst teams (Barney, 1991).

Southwest Airlines have been described as a Company which has successfully used the SC of the firm to their advantage, it is effectively the culture of the firm that customers are buying when they decide to travel with Southwest (Barney & Wright, 1998). Other airlines have tried to copy their culture but they now believe it is inimitable.

Even in firms which are in the same industry can have considerable differences for example in terms of production, these differences can be either positive or negative but either way, it is not always possible for other firms to replicate (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). The aim for the firm then becomes creating a method in which these resources are utilised as an advantage and at the same time ensure that competitors in the market are thwarted from coping or substituting the advantage (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

If resources are both valuable and rare but are easily imitated then they can only be considered to be a source of temporary advantage however if they are not easily imitated they have the ability to provide the Company with SCA only if the firm has the ability to arrange its resources so that they can be exploited (Barney & Wright, 1998).

4. **Substitutability –** that substitutes which can be deemed to be the equivalent strategically for this resource that are valuable but neither rare or imperfectly imitable (Barney, 1991).

Examples of the substitutability may be a firm that performs to a high level due to a top management team versus a firm that performs to a high level due to similar set up that may not match exactly what the initial firm had in terms of resources (Barney, 1991).

Firms may have the ability to create other options which rather than imitating, substitute for or replace methods used by competitors (Barney, 1986).

In comparison to Porters Five Forces Model, the assumptions made within RBV are that first, heterogeneity may be long term and second, resources may not be perfectly mobile (Barney, 1991). Wright argued that it is not possible for HR resources to be VRIN (Delery & Roumpi, 2017).

Some have suggested that it has not been examined how resources or skills evolve from simply existing within the organisation to becoming a CA through effective utilisation (Davis, 2019). It is thought however that it is the combination of these resources working together that can lead to SCA and not necessarily the individual policies and procedures, an example being team interaction that occurs as a result of the policies and procedures. In addition, what develops over time as a result such as systems or interconnected processes may be become unique to the firm and influence the creation of skills (Barney, et al., 2001).

Davis added that it is easier for organisations to achieve RBV if they are recruiting for VRIN from the beginning instead of trying to create it later (Davis, 2019). This suggests that Companies which are looking to attain SCA through the use of RBV should be attracting and recruiting talent based on a VRIN framework. One author explained that an organisation may be able to gain CA by validating the qualifications of employees responsible for training and then ensuring that the actual resources used in training are VRIN (Davis, 2019).

There has also been discussion on the point that the SCA of a firm may not remain so forever. There are factors which affect it and are outside of the control of the firm including customer preference and technological advantages and as such diminish the value that the capabilities and resources were creating (Barney & Mackey, 2016).

It is said that temporary CA may be achieved if a resource is classified as rare whereas if it is not, it is deemed to be competitive parity (CP) (Barney & Mackey, 2016). This does not mean that if they are not rare they should be stopped or removed as they would become a competitive disadvantage (CD).

Long competitive advantage may be achieved where a resource has a high cost associated with imitation or substitution (Barney & Mackey, 2016). There needs to be a reason why another Company is not able to imitate or substitute the resources

if they are to be either a temporary or sustained CA along with being able to add economic value (Barney & Mackey, 2016).

Others researchers have said that rare and valuable resources can be imitated by competitors over time and as such can only add to short term competitiveness however, complete systems which are interconnected are not so easily imitated (Progoulaki & Theotokas, 2010).

HR should work in order to provide the company with systems, polices and processes which will deliver resources that are valuable and rare but not easily imitated by other Companies (Barney & Wright, 1998). An example being that HR are responsible for developing and maintaining a culture of trust and teamwork in which employees are committed to delivering service excellence or superior products (Barney & Wright, 1998).

If HR policies and practices are a source of CA, they may only remain so until another Company imitates them however even if they are no longer a source of CA, they may be a source of CD if they did not exist (Barney & Wright, 1998).

The importance of good management is emphasised with it being noted that even employees who are rare and inimitable will be a wasted resource if their potential is not recognised and acted upon by the Company (Davis & Simpson, 2017). In order to stabilise trust and the feeling of employment security, organisations should devote resources to maintaining the firm's relationship with employees to prevent the loss of the valuable and rare HR characteristics (Progoulaki & Theotokas, 2010). Managers should also work to consistently evaluate their resources as value can shift over time, resources classified as valuable may not always be so, where as non-valuable may shift to valuable (Barney & Mackey, 2016). This has the potential to be an important point for talent development and succession planning.

Attention has also been drawn to resources which are not rare. These resources are also important as they ensure that the business is not at a CD by ensuring that there is CP amongst firms (Barney, 1991). An example being where a Company chooses not to use a very high standard of recruitment and selection practices, this would see them at a CD in terms of other firms in the industry which do (Barney & Wright, 1998).

Criticisms of The Resource Based View

Godfrey and Will argued that there are considerable issues with the RBV as most of the resources are intangible, leading to difficulties with measuring and as such leave methodological challenges (Barney, et al., 2011). Kaufman added to this by asking how useful can the RBV be when there is such little guidance on how to measure the value of resources along with there being very little in the way of advising and helping managers to establish which resources are actually valuable (Barney & Mackey, 2016). Demsetz expanded on this when he said that in terms of performance, it is often difficult to see why one firm tends to perform better than others (Barney, 1991). In addition to difficultly in measuring, difficulty in determining exactly how rare a resource is, has also been cited amongst literature (Barney, 1991).

Kaufman criticised the theory stating that RBV cannot be added to SHRM if it is not able to provide Managers with a 'rule for riches' (Kaufman, 2015). Barney and Mackey argued back this point stating that although the 'riches' as Kaufman describes them cannot just be created that Companies will experience advantage through CP (Barney & Mackey, 2016). An example discussed was that of Southwest Airlines. If a 'rules for riches' existed then other Companies could easily imitate what they do and become successful. That, however, is not the case as many competitors have failed to imitate the Southwest Airlines model successfully which can be down to many factors including inflexibilities from prior investments or lack of complementary resources (Barney & Mackey, 2016). Kaufman also argued that in terms of further work on strategic HRM, that the RBV could not be considered as it was not an appropriate theoretical model (Barney & Mackey, 2016).

RBV has also been criticised for implementation difficulties with turning RBV into a practical application and describing how resources are able to transition from existing into becoming sources of SCA (Davis, 2019). It seems there is no clear direction how to achieve SCA through RBV.

Firms are not able to test which resources bring them CA as there may be many reasons for it with other potential explanations. As such the idea that SCA or CA can be achieved through RBV is one which sometimes can be quite vague (Barney, 1991). This may also be problematic for Companies which are looking to imitate the

resources in that often it may not be obvious what exactly is the reason for SCA within a firm (Boxall, 1996). An example being when Continental Lite and United Airlines attempted to imitate Southwest Airline (Barney & Wright, 1998). It seemed to be obvious what they needed to imitate but they failed perhaps because their own culture could not support the strategy they were trying to implement or because there were other factors contributing to the Southwest Airline strategy that they were not aware of.

Kaufman expanded on this, criticising RBV for not clarifying that rareness and inimitability only become important once it has become apparent that there are resources of value while Barney and Mackey argued this is not the case and this point has been addressed in other RBV texts (Barney & Mackey, 2016).

There have been few studies which explore the effect of RBV in the context of SHRM (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

David Ulrich's Business Partner Framework

David Ulrich developed the business partner framework of HR based on two axis, strategic and operational which comprised for four different roles that HR may hold in the firm, strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion or change agent (Francis & Keegan, 2006).

1. **Strategic Partner** – Strategy formulation and execution is the key outcome of this role, working with line Managers to ensure achievement
2. **Change Agents** – responsible for ensuring that both transformational and culture change occurs through the change strategy
3. **Administrative experts** – Improvements to processes and procedures increasing productivity by finding a better way of doing things
4. **Employee Champion** – combines the operational side of HR with a specific focus on people

In this model, HR collaborates with the line managers coaching them through the people management aspect in order to deliver value to the firm (Caldwell, 2003). The purpose of the framework also aims to release HR from the day to day administrative

tasks and transactions, supporting it in delivering better value to the business (Francis & Keegan, 2006).

The strategic partner role is becoming increasingly popular with HR practitioners however it has also been addressed in the literature that those aiming to advance their career, often in favour of the strategic partner role, have abandoned the role of employee advocate (Keegan & Francis, 2010).

It has been argued that in redirecting HR towards a strategic role, there is less opportunity for employees to liaise directly with HR as they step back from the transactional work (Francis & Keegan, 2006). This results in line managers often being responsible for areas and tasks which were previously that of HR, bringing up the question of how effectively the work is now being done given the demands on line managers in terms of time (Francis & Keegan, 2006). An additional point to consider is that line managers may not only be limited in terms of time but may actually not be interested in completing this work and employees may then lose trust in HR in terms of them being an advocate for their needs (Francis & Keegan, 2006).

The Employee Champion should be able to effectively represent both the employees needs and management agendas in order to avoid extreme alienation from being affiliated to closely to either one side or the other (Francis & Keegan, 2006).

Criticisms of the Business Partner Model

Two main criticisms of the theory have been the reduction in accessibility to HR for employees and alongside a disconnection in terms of operational and strategic mindsets (Francis & Keegan, 2006).

HR have held the role of duty of care to the employee which this model does not take account of and seems to be reducing (Keegan & Francis, 2010). The question that needs to be addressed is that if HR is not the advocate for employee needs then who will be? If employee needs are not being met, then what is the impact in terms of performance and in turn any competitive advantage for the Company.

The Best Practice Model

The theory of best practice (BP) suggests that in order to improve the performance of a Company, that the organisation must adopt certain practices,

Seven key practices had been advised by Jeffrey Pfeffer in 1998 which had initially come from a list of 16. These practices were,

"*employment security, selective hiring, self- managed teams/teamworking, high compensation contingent on organisational performance, extensive training, reduction of status differentials and sharing information*" (Wilkinson, et al., 2017, p. 42) (Boxall & Purcell, 2000, p. 189)*.*

Four main practices have been associated with the BP approach, being selection, training, appraisals and pay (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). Work organisation and employee voice is often left out when it comes to the BP model (Marchington & Grugulis, 2000).

Wright argued that in terms of BP, it may be likely that certain businesses perform better and as such they have the resources to invest more in to their practices and that actually it may not necessarily be a result of those practices that the business performs well (Wilkinson, et al., 2017). It has also been suggested that the cost associated with these practices may not be feasible for every business. Transport and Logistics would be a prime example of this where these is a large headcount in terms of the driver pool and as such the organisation would not be able to afford to invest in all of these practices with such a large headcount (Wilkinson, et al., 2017). There are differences in terms of occupational group and it is not always necessary to apply the same principles of 'good HRM' universally amongst them (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

Firms will vary due to cultural differences, traditions which may be ingrained in the firm or market regulation and as such, one standard set of universal HRPs is thought unlikely to be successful (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). If the policies say one thing but the actions of the firm do not match to the policies, there is potential to cause unrest amongst employees, ensuring that the actions of the firm match the policies and procedures will reinforce the strategy (Grant, 1999).

The Best Fit Model

The best fit (BF) theory is different to the BP approach and suggests that any HRP are very much dependant on the fit between them and the internal and external environment of the organisation (Wilkinson, et al., 2017). This would be similar to the earlier discussed point of ensuring that the HR Strategy is fully aligned to the organisation strategy in order to improve business performance (Wilkinson, et al., 2017). It is suggested that best fit is when the HR Strategy for the organisation is aligned in terms of the specific organisational and environmental context (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

Baird and Meshoulam add to this point stating that it must also fit the current stage of development for the organisation which they say is vertical fit but can be known as external fit (Baird & Meshoulam, 1988). They also refer to the need for internal fit within the organisation and in particular that the chosen processes and policies complement one another to form a coherent system known as horizontal fit (Baird & Meshoulam, 1988).

Where there are high costs or numbers of employees in a firm, productivity within the firm may be achieved through careful recruitment trying to select people that 'love the gear' (Koch & McGrath, 1996).

Some examples of BF include Porter, Miles and Snow and Schuler and Jackson (Wilkinson, et al., 2017).

Miles and Snow

The model developed by Miles and Snow suggests that in order to attain CA, that a firm should link their HR Strategy to one of three potential business strategies (BS):

1. **Defenders** – generally direct their hr strategy towards internal pay equity and internal process orientated training in line with a narrow and reasonably stable product line

2. **Prospectors** – innovation is key in the firm and products are prone to change and in order to ensure there is a continual flow of it throughout the

organisation, the HR Strategy will focus externally ensure market pay equity and results orientated compensation

3. **Analysers** – Have both changing and stable products and as such the HR Strategy will require the need to focus both internally and externally (Wilkinson, et al., 2017).

Michael Porters Generic Strategies

Michael Porter developed the theory of generic strategies for CA in 1985 (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). The model attempted to link CA to the product and market within which the Company operated (Chopra, 2017).

(Schuler & Jackson, 1987) said that there are behavioural implications for the generic strategies and in order for a Company to achieve them they must ensure that the HRP are able to reinforce the behaviours and that there may be an opportunity to improve the performance of the firm if the HRPs selected are able to reinforce the strategy choice of the company in terms of cost leadership, differentiation or focus (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

1. **Differentiation –** otherwise can be referred to as the innovation strategy attempts to provide the firm with a CA through products or services that are different or unique in some way to those being offered by their competitors

2. **Focus/Quality Enhancement –** is to gain CA through providing a product or service at a better quality or higher level of service than competitors

3. **Cost leadership/cost reduction –** aims to lead the market in terms of being able to provide a product or service at the lowest price (Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

The Generic Strategies acts as a base for their work on linking the HRP to the generic strategies.

Schuler and Jackson

Schuler and Jackson suggested that businesses would need to adapt the HRPs in order to achieve one of three of Porters generic strategies, cost leadership, innovation, or quality enhancement (Wilkinson, et al., 2017). This method provides a general direction of the policies that a Company should follow having adopted a certain competitive strategy (CS) in relation to key areas such as pay, training,

development, recruitment and selection and the type of investment in skills and what skills.

To follow an Innovation Strategy, it is said that a Company should seek the following employee behaviours;

1. A high degree of creative behaviour
2. A longer-term focus
3. A relatively high level of co-operative, interdependent behaviours
4. A moderate degree of concern for quality
5. A moderate concern for quantity
6. An equal degree of concern for process and results
7. A greater degree of risk taking
8. A high tolerance for ambiguity and unpredictability (Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

An example of a Company doing this is 3M. They allow their employees to spend up to 15% of their working time on their own projects as they are following an innovation strategy and have put this measure in place so that their team has the time to spend on innovative projects (Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

To follow a Quality Enhancement Strategy, it is said that a Company should seek the following employee behaviours;

1. Relatively repetitive and predictable behaviours
2. A longer term or intermediate focus
3. A modest amount of co-operative interdependent behaviour
4. A high concern for quality
5. A modest concern for quantity output
6. High concern for process
7. Low risk-taking activity
8. Commitment to the goals of the organisation (Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

Xerox is a Company which follows a Quality Enhancement strategy and in order to link their HRPs they have put in place opportunities for teamworking, alongside flexible job descriptions, while all employees have autonomy in terms of their role

and the associated responsibility followed up with feedback systems to ensure that any issues or potential improvements can be captured (Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

To follow a Cost Leadership Strategy, it is said that a Company should seek the following employee behaviours;

1. Relatively repetitive and predictable behaviours
2. A rather short-term focus
3. Primarily autonomous or individual activity
4. Modest concern for quality
5. High concern for quantity output
6. Primary concern for results
7. Low risk-taking activity
8. A relatively high degree of comfort with stability

Examples of cost cutting include a reduction in the number of employees and a reduction in wage levels leading to an increase in productivity. Where it is not possible to reduce costs in the current base, it may be possible to move the labour to other site or countries where the cost of wages is cheaper (Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

It is thought in the research and through many case study examples that the success of a firm in achieving their CS does not hinge solely on the HRPs but it has been noted as a critical factor that Companies need to adapt their HRPs (Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

Criticisms of the Best Fit Approach

The needs of the organisation should be aligned to the interests of the employees. There will usually be some legal requirements and prevailing social norms and it is said that the theory does not recognise either of these points (Boxall, 1996).

The CS is one of great complexity, the BF approach has been criticised for not explaining that (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

There is ongoing environmental change and Boxall suggests that rather than as the strategy suggests, implementing the human dimension of any strategy, there should be more than this done, taking into consideration the dynamics (Boxall, 1992).

The fourth criticism of the model is similar to ensuring that there is internal fit between the policies and practices but to analyse combinations of such to ensure that there are none working against one another or that they are an opposite in nature (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

Purcell argues against the theory stating that organisations that are trying to implement a BF approach are essentially chasing a dream (Wilkinson, et al., 2017).

Conclusion

What does seem to be clear from reviewing the literature is that there is no one single framework to be followed in terms of achieving CA through the HR strategy but it also cannot be denied that each framework holds its own merits and contributes significantly to the field.

What does seem to emerge from the literature is that often Companies will have different practices or strategies for different groups of employees and that in order to be successful in achieving CA, the HR strategy and associated practices should be linked to the BS in order to support and maximise any potential impact.

The level of input from HR in creation of the business strategy also has an impact upon the potential that the HR strategy can have on the business with it important for HR to have a seat at the table in terms of strategy formulation.

HR policies and practices should not be looked at in isolation and it is important that a firm is able to consider how these may be perceived by employees and the type of reaction to be expected. There has been significant research on the topic of trust as a mediator which upholds the theory that generally more successful outcomes will be delivered in firms where trust is present between managers and employees. Should trust not be present, the outcomes are not the same and not as successful.

Porters Five Forces Model in relation to competitive advantage and focused solely on external fit considering the environment and the market of which the Company

operates within giving no consideration for the internal resources or structure of the Company.

Barney changed the school of thought arguing that CA was internal in the form of the firm's own resources through the RBV. It has been hailed as one of the most important models in terms of HR strategy and CA and claims that a firm can achieve CA through the VRIN model, although not without its criticisms either. Many have questioned the ability of HRP to ever be or remain as CA although other authors have argued back that it is the bundles of HRPs and outcomes of those bundles that are the CA rather than the individual practices. There have however been significant difficulties in trying to measure and prove the theory.

Ulrich's model also focuses internally on the organisation but is silent in terms of using it to generate CA. Francis and Keegan discuss the removal of HR from frontline, transactional work with employees and the effect on them and potentially the business in turn. It could be argued that Ulrich has already identified this issue in the model and created the role of Employee Champion. It is however thought that due to popularity and career boosting prospects that it is the role of the Strategic Partner that is sought after which may leave the role of Employee Champion somewhat neglected.

The BP Model has identified 7 key HRPs that should be implemented. This model has not been as popular due to several criticisms. The first being that the cost of these practices is unfeasible for all firms. Secondly, it is unlikely that these 7 key practices will fit across all industries, companies and employee groups.

The BF Model is given some greater merit, being popular with different authors who have created their own variation, the most notable one being that of Schuler and Jackson which is grounded on Porters Generic Strategies model. The criticism of this framework includes not taking account of the complexity involved in firms with Purcell noting that this model is not realistic.

The research on the topic suggests that a competitive advantage generated by the HR strategy will likely be as a result of the complete systems which are formed as a result of the HRPs rather than as a result of individual policies or practices

themselves. This research aims to seek confirmation that it is in fact the bundles or outcomes of these bundles that can create CA within a firm. It also aims to support the research that proposes that the CA of a firm can be a rather complex blend of many different areas including culture, HRPs, good management and mediated by trust between employers and employees. All of these areas link together and in effect create a type of "perfect storm" which is in itself inimitable. While HR is not solely responsible for the CA of a firm, this research aims to argue that it does significantly contribute towards the creation and upholding of the CA.

Chapter 3 - Research Question

The research question to be answered in this dissertation is to investigate whether or not the HR Strategy can lend itself to the CA or SCA of a Company operating with the Transport and Logistics Industry within Ireland. It does not seek to prove or disprove that a Company does or does not hold either a CA or SCA.

It also aims to support the research that proposes that the CA of a firm can be a rather complex blend of many different areas including culture, HRPs, good management and mediated by trust between employers and employees. All of these areas link together and in effect create a type of "perfect storm" which is in itself inimitable. While HR is not solely responsible for the CA of a firm, this research aims to argue that it does significantly contribute towards the creation and upholding of the CA.

Overall Objective

The overall objective is to investigate whether the HR strategy can lend itself to the CA of a Company operating with the Transport and Logistics industry in Ireland.

Research objective 2

The second objective of the research is to look at whether a CA can accurately be described by those within a Company or whether certain elements will remain unexplained. Within this objective, the aim would be to determine whether the CA of the Company could be imitated easily or whether for those seeking to imitate it, it would be difficult.

Research objective 3

To investigate whether culture has an impact on the CA of a company and whether Company culture is affected by the HR strategy essentially questioning whether culture is one of the key HR areas that can lead to CA.

Research objective 4

To investigate whether the levels of trust between Manager and Employees impact upon the success of new policies and procedures that may be brought in as a result of the HRS. This is to say that the HR strategy is not looked at in isolation but the

success or failure of any strategy may be down to employee perceptions and the relationships within the firm that may make a huge impact.

Research objective 5

To determine whether a lack of HR strategy could be classified as placing the Company at a competitive disadvantage

Research objective 6

To query whether at all levels of the organisation, the purpose of HR is to represent the interests of both management and employees which could impact upon levels of trust within the organisation

Chapter 4 - Methodology

Research Sample

The research sample has been selected from a group of employees covering all levels including Director, Senior Manager, Middle Manager, Team Leader and Non-Managerial employees within three different Irish Transport and Logistics Companies. The Companies are a mixture of both family run and internationally owned firms.

A sample of employees from all the Transport and Logistics Companies in Ireland would have been too large. Inclusion criteria is that the employees must be a current or past employee of the Company with at least one years' experience in the Logistics or Transport sector. Provided that all the inclusion criteria are met, there will be no exclusion criteria.

The target population of the research was to interview as many individuals as possible from various levels within the organisations however due to time constraints, individuals were selected from the population of each Company that would accurately represent the views of those across the Company. The participants selected were those who the researcher believed could make meaningful contributions in the areas of HR Strategy and CA. Nine participants were selected in total. Accessibility was checked early on in the research to ensure that there were participants available to the researcher to take part.

The type of sampling that has taken place was that of non-probability sampling as it is not possible in this case to ensure that everyone within the population has an equal chance of being selected as they are being handpicked to represent the population (Quinlan, 2011).

The proposed participants were invited to take part in the research via email (Appendix 1). In this email, they were issued with a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2). They were also issued with a copy of the questions that would be asked during the interview in order to prepare (Appendix 3).
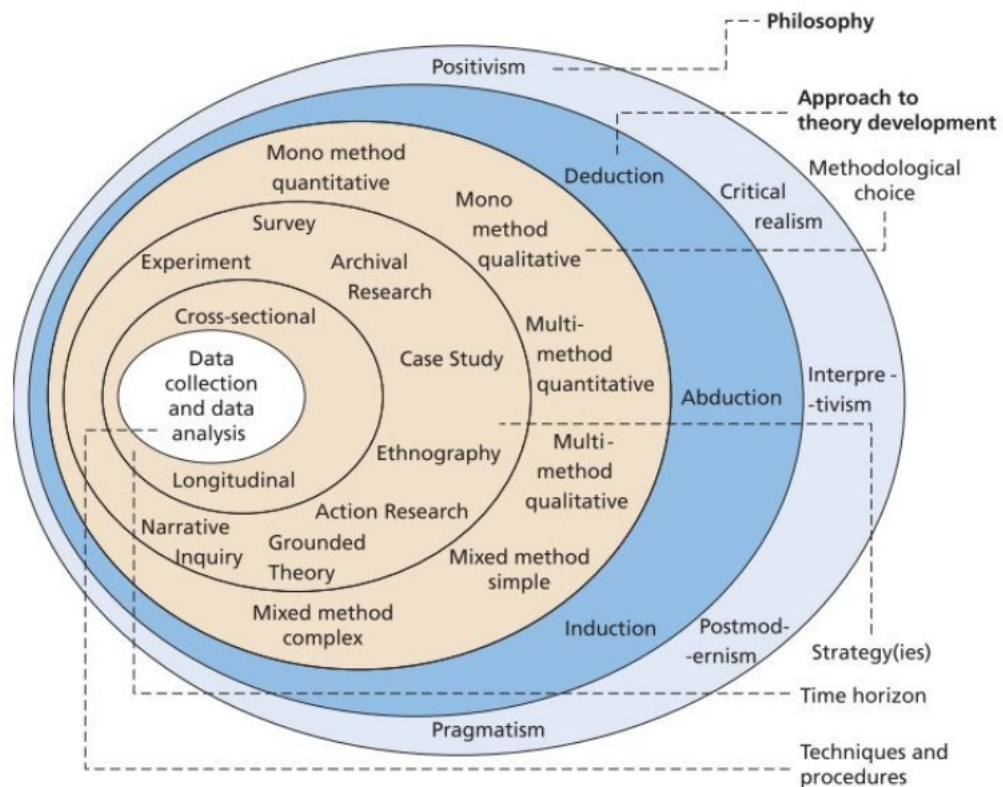
Research Instrument

Figure 1 The Research Onion

1. **Interpretivist Philosophy**

In this research, it is the opinion of the researcher that the truth in research is determined by the individual opinions of those taking part leading to a mostly subjectivist stance.

The research project is based on subjectivist assumptions based on the grounds that the reality of the truth is based on the perceptions and actions of those in the social situation (Saunders, et al., 2019).

The research will be based in an interpretivist approach. Interpretivism holds that, "*the important reality is what people perceive it to be*" which brings about descriptive data (Heath & Tynan, 2010, p. 157).

Interpretivism holds that the social and human world cannot be studied in the same way that physical beings as the SC of humans and the way they view the world can lead to meaning (Saunders, et al., 2019). During the research, using an interpretivist

approach it is assumed that different groups of employees will perceive things differently and as such will have different opinions, thoughts and views which may lead to different results within groups or even within individuals throughout the research.

2. Inductive Approach

The approach to theory will be inductive in that it aims to gain an understanding of the way in which the social world is perceived. The deductive approach does not follow this and as such would not make for a suitable approach for the purposes of this research. Induction supports a more unstructured approach to research allowing the researcher to perhaps uncover additional information or reasons for what was previously believed to be true. In induction, the researcher must sift through and decipher the data collected and is usually matched with qualitative data which generally works well but also takes account of the context in which the data has been collected. The conclusions formed as a result of inductive research may be able to point the researcher back towards the appropriate theory. An inductive approach is also likely to be completed by interpretivists.

3. Mono method qualitative

In this project, the researcher will use a mono method qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research focuses on words rather than numbers or can also be described as non- numeric data whereas the quantitative approach has been described as numeric data (Quinlan, 2011). Qualitative research has been known to be able to assist with developing a more profound theoretical perspective or enhancing or adding to existing literature.

Meaning has the ability to be found by studying the responses or images rather than numerical data and may be able to identify the relationships and meanings amongst the data (Saunders, et al., 2019).

Throughout the research process, it is possible that the direction, or questions may shift depending upon individuals' perceptions and or responses and it is said that often qualitative data may be paired with non-probability sampling. The data is not

usually in a standard format but following completion it may be then be reviewed and categorised in order to create meaning and derive patterns from the data (Saunders, et al., 2019).

The research will be carried out using a semi structured interview technique. Interviews have been commonly associated with qualitative research and interpretive philosophical frameworks (Quinlan, 2019).

Structured interviews tend to be made up of closed questions. Closed questions have been defined as,

"questions that elicit a defined limited range of responses, e.g. yes/no. Often used to establish factual information" (Quinlan, 2019, p. 254). This type of questioning is not suitable as it does not allow for in depth exploration of the topics.

Open questions are more likely to be used in a semi structured interview setting being described as,

"*used to explore understandings, feelings and beliefs. Usually require thought and reflection on the part of the respondents. Tend to generate relatively long responses*" (Quinlan, 2019, p. 254). This type of questioning is suitable as it allows the respondent to answer the question without restriction as to what type of answer may be given.

There are various different types of interview technique which may be used including one to one interview, group interview, telephone interview, online interview or photo elicitation interview (Quinlan, 2019). The interview will be carried out using a mix of face to face interviews and virtual interviews using Microsoft Teams. The interviews that have been carried out on a face to face basis have been held in the office. The team are currently working in the office and it was possible to complete interviews in a safe manner using social distancing, PPE and ventilation. In both cases, it is possible to complete the interviews in a private setting so that participants do not have to be concerned about being overheard or amending their views.

The reason that the research will be completed using interviews is that this topic can branch out in many different areas with multiple viewpoints. The researcher would

like to be able to explore the topic in depth with the interviewees. Interviewing allows the opportunity to explore topics in greater detail, gaining deeper perspectives and discuss more complex questions. It also allows the opportunity to explore the subjective and personal experiences of the interviewees. Other researchers have also used interviewing as a technique when researching this theory (Davis & Simpson, 2017) (Progoulaki & Theotokas, 2010).

Benefits of using a semi structure interview technique includes developing rapport or a comfortable and communicative relationship with the participants. The interviewer also has the opportunity to observe the body language and their expressions to questions or answers that they give (Quinlan, 2019). During a face to face conversation, the researcher can probe responses in a gentle and delicate manner and interviewer is the sole focus and the participant has space and time to reflect or explain their perspectives.

Disadvantages include the time required and bias, the potential for the interviewer to lead or influence the responses given by the participant (Quinlan, 2019).

Bias has been defined as,

"Anything that contaminates or compromises the research or data" (Quinlan, 2019).

4. Research Strategy

The strategy used in this research is that of case study. Case study research allows for a particular phenomenon to be researched in depth (Saunders, et al., 2019). This is a suitable choice for the topic in question as it aims to look at HR Strategy in depth in the context of competitive advantage. Case study research has been identified as useful when seeking to research a topic in a particular context (Saunders, et al., 2019).

5. Time Horizon

A cross sectional research study is one in which the phenomenon in question is observed or researched at a particular point in the time rather than across a scale of time which would be considered to be a longitudinal study (Saunders, et al., 2019). The length of time assigned to this project does not support a longitudinal approach

and it is also possible that a longitudinal approach would only show a different outcome as changes in HR strategy or trends occur or develop over time.
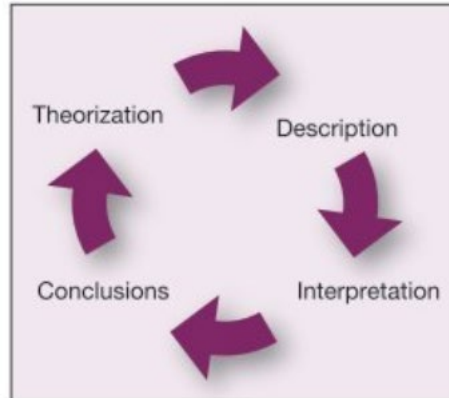
Data Analysis

Figure 2 The Data Analysis Process

The data will be analysed through four stages of analysis (Figure 2) (Quinlan, 2019).

Firstly, the research will layout the data and begin to describe what appears to be evident within the data that has been collected. In the second stage, the researcher has attempted to interpret what it is that the data is saying followed on by the third stage in which the researcher works out what the potential conclusions are based on the interpretations which have been drawn and what meaning is there, within the data for the industries which are being researched. In the fourth stage, the conclusions are measured against the information collected during the literature review in order to determine whether it fits with the theoretical frameworks or potentially contradicts it or perhaps could be a combination of findings (Quinlan, 2019).

The data will be analysed using Thematic Analysis which has been used in order to identify themes or patterns by coding the data in a matrix (Appendix 4) (Saunders, et al., 2019). Once themes have been identified, the researcher will aim to begin telling the story that these themes represent. The data will be the interview transcripts (Appendix 5) of the oral testimony of the participants.

The data will be held in digital format on a password protected computer. The individual documents will be password protected. The participants names will be redacted and replaced with a number in order to anonymise their identity. The document which holds the number linking to the participants name will be password protected.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was completed on the first two participants. During this study, it was found that the researcher was perhaps more focused on taking notes than interacting with the interview. A conscious and deliberate effort was then made going forward in order to ensure that the responses and listening to those responses was the key focus. Notes were adapted to bullet point format with the back-up of the recorded audio testimony of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher has considered whether the participants may suffer any disadvantage as a result of taking part in the process and the answer to this question was that they would not. This research discusses HR as a function and does not aim to delve into the performance or otherwise of the people holding that position within the Companies in question.

As the research relates to CA of companies which is most cases has been hard won throughout previous decades, the decision was taken to anonymise the Company names and any further information which may direct towards suggestions that certain companies had taken part.

All participants had their names redacted in order to protect their identity and any potential outcomes as a result of their opinions or taking part in the research. All participants were issued with a consent form (Appendix 6) and informed of their right to refuse or withdraw consent throughout the process. They were also advised of the process of confidentiality and that their data would be protected throughout the research and that it would be disposed of and at what period.

Limitations

There are some limitations to the research that has been completed.

There was not a like for like research completed across all companies and in some cases, there were less or more participants from certain companies.

It also should be considered the different approaches taken by an international company versus a family run business and perhaps the resources that are available to that Company. This research also does not aim to accurately reflect the transport and logistics industry in its entirety as there was only a handful of companies selected. The research however does aim to identify whether the existing research on the topic can be applied and is relevant for the transport and logistics industry.

Chapter 5 - Findings and Analysis

Introduction

In this research, nine participants from three different transport and logistics companies were interviewed. They were all asked the same questions however certain areas were probed further based on how they answered.

The aim of the research is to investigate one overall research objective and a further five that branch out. The research investigates specifically the transport and logistics industry in Ireland.

Findings and Analysis

Establishing Background and Context

In the interview, the first three questions were designed to establish background, context and experience levels of the candidates participating.

1. **Select your occupational category:**

The participants ranged from non-managerial up to Director. Six of the participants were Senior Managers or Directors.

2. **How many years' experience do you have in the Transport or Logistics sector?**

The years' experience of the participants ranged from 2.5 years to over 30 in some cases. Three participants had over 20 years' experience in the industry with a further two falling into the 10-20 category.

3. **How many years have you been employed in the organisation**

One interesting finding that emerged from the research was that in all but two participants, their experience level came from the organisation they currently work in, meaning that outside of this current organisation, they do not have experience in other transport or logistics companies.

1 Overall Objective - HR Strategy as a Source of Competitive Advantage

The questions 4, 5, 12 and 13 were designed to support the overall research objective which was to investigate whether HR Strategy can lend itself to the competitive advantage of a Company operating within the Transport or Logistics industry in Ireland.

4. Do you believe the HR Strategy is a source of Competitive Advantage to this Company and discuss the reason for your answer?

All participants answered yes, they felt that HR Strategy does act as a source of CA within the transport and logistics industry. Some of the key findings that emerged during this stage of the research included the difference that HR Strategy can make to a team when it is correctly aligned to the business strategy. Some of the key points noted by participants included:

- Better able to match calibre of talent and reduction in turnover
- Runs parallel to organisational structure
- Important for workforce planning, reward, recognition, training, development, retention and culture

One participant discussed the consequences of not having a strategic approach as,

"the downside can be these unforeseen and unrecognised costs, not just financial, and we know the cost of replacing leaders and team members in general through attrition and the impact it has on the bottom line, but also that on the sense of the motivation on the culture, the engagement, based on the fact that people see other people leaving and think oh what's going on here and then that other effect where people thinking to join the company think oh I hear there's a lot of leavers, what's going on there, so the brand is affected in that respect as well".

It was noted how important it is for HR Strategy to be not only understood but owned at top level,

"If strategy in HR isn't from the top down isn't understood and owned from the top down it can be a thing to do the fold out of the business strategy".

Research suggests that at Full partnership role in the creation of HR Strategy is where HR really have the opportunity to make a difference. These points mentioned by participants support this.

5. **What key HR areas specifically contribute to the Competitive Advantage of the business**

Training, culture and retention were brought up in six interviews with these three areas leading as the most important collectively. Recruitment and selection followed coming up five times and development of employees mentioned three times. One interesting point that emerged was that reward and remuneration was only mentioned twice. Other areas that were mentioned just once include talent management, engagement, organisational structure, exit, communication and analytics.

One participant mentioned that products are for the most part, the same,

"Everyone is trying to deliver the same product, everyone's trying to deliver the same service".

One Company that describes having delivered a HR Strategy with great success noted,

"Customers want what we have not what competitor has and that definitely give us a competitive advantage. But that comes down to recruiting the right guys, training the right guys, paying them properly, giving them development opportunities, giving progression opportunities and giving them a proper salary so that they want to stay with the business long term".

It is interesting to note that this Company mentions the importance of rewarding the team correctly in order to retain them. This was not a point that was given great importance by other participants in the interviews.

The literature matches the research that culture can be CA in certain circumstances. However, under both the BP and BF model reward is mentioned as an important key HRP. The research does not reflect this part of the literature.

12. **The Competitive Advantage of a firm is internal or external to the Company**

Five participants said that it is both while four said that it is internal to the business. While almost all participants seemed to mention that either the people or the culture are the internal competitive advantage, it is worth noting that in some cases, where the respondents said both, there seemed to be some misunderstanding as to what external elements could be classified as such as,

- Better customer experience
- Ability to respond to change, adapt the business model

These are elements that are internal to the Company. Had the participants listed these as internal advantages, the results may have been the other way around which would lead the results to read as mostly internal.

One participant discussed external factors,

"It shouldn't be external, it shouldn't be on factors that are outside of your control. For example, if you rely on something outside of your business for something else to work fair enough. But if you need that to be successful and then all of a sudden that stops, what are you going to do?".

During the interview's participants noted the following as internal CA:

- Culture, motivation, engagement
- Culture, competitive ways of working
- Staff, technological systems
- People, customer service, team
- Reputation, goodwill
- Treatment of people, strategy, culture

Two main areas dominated the responses, people and culture with others providing descriptions that described either the people of the business or the culture. This research supports the literature that says that SC and culture can be a source of CA.

13. The HR Strategy supports the overall Business Strategy

In all responses, participants advised not only that the HR Strategy does support the business strategy but going further with some participants noting that it is vital or

that you could not do one without the other. Some of the key terms that were noted from the interview are:

- Missed targets, failures and mismanagement without HR Strategy
- Culture, ability to pivot, agility
- Goes hand in hand, fundamental part of the business
- Must mirror, both rely on each other to be successful
- Would not work without HR Strategy
- HR needs to be at the top table

One participant noted the following, but actually during discussion on question 4 rather than 13.

"They were saying were trying to be the best product in the market but what we're trying to do is on a low budget, which doesn't essentially work and if you want the best members who are giving you the best performance for the best abilities, you have to pay what you expect for premium service so that caused a lot of problems historically when they weren't working properly with HR and didn't really have a HR Strategy in place".

This point links in with Schuler and Jacksons approach in literature that HRPs should match the business strategy. In this case, the Company was seeking to follow a Focus/Quality Enhancement Strategy for the business but using a cost leadership/ cost reduction strategy for their HRPs which led to misalignment.

"We went from an average 2019 was the last full year we operate before Corona. So, you're talking 2018 and 2017 year on average we were losing a third of our workforce, a third of our drivers in peak seasons and that was down to the HR strategies didn't match. The wages didn't match the role. The training didn't match the role, the job description didn't match the calibre of candidates they were getting in, what they were offering didn't match role and once they let us align HR strategy to what this business actually needed and wanted, we went to 100% retention in 2019".

In the case of this Company is seems clear that the alignment of HR Strategy to business strategy really changed the team and the competitiveness of the Company.

Reviewing the responses, it seems conclusive that not only does HR support the Business Strategy but that it actually requires it in order to be successful. Again, the results support the literature on the topic that HR strategy needs to be linked to business strategy in order to support and maximise any potential impact.

Conclusion

It is conclusive that HR Strategy can be a source of CA with the key areas being training, culture, retention, recruitment, selection and development as the most widely cited areas in the literature. There seemed to be a lack of responses citing reward and remuneration as an important HR area however there was an example of a Company the suffered badly with reward and remuneration being a key factor.

There were mixed responses in terms of whether CA should be internal or external with the vast majority citing either internal of both with no participants citing external. This supports the literature that while Michael Porters Five Forces Model still remains important, it has taken a backseat in recent years with the focus shifting towards internal factors. Some of the keywords and phrases that came about on this topic include people and culture being the CA. The importance of HR Strategy not only being understood but owned at top level was highlighted as an area of importance throughout.

The research supports the literature that the HR Strategy supports the business strategy with many participants citing it going hand in hand or being vital to the success of the business strategy.

Research Objective 2 - Imitating Competitive Advantage

The questions, 6 and 14 were designed to identify whether firstly CA can be accurately described even by those working in the business. Following on from this the aim was to discover whether it could be imitated which links in with finding out whether it can even be accurately described in the first place.

6. **If I asked you to describe what the Competitive Advantage of the business was in its entirety, what would you say?**

Some of the responses to this question listed the following as the CA of the Company:

- People function but the ability to select, train, develop, retain and reward appropriately
- People at its best and not at its best, also people
- People, teamwork
- Staff, longevity, cross training
- Structures and resources
- Culture

In 5 out of 9 conversations people was mentioned as the CA:

"So really, what distinguishes us from our competitors? It's our people".

After that, customer relationships were mentioned three times followed by culture, training, development and retention all being mentioned twice. Other areas that were brought up once include selection, management, recruitment and structures. It appears that while there is some overlap, there also seems to be some differences which may be down to the individual's position, knowledge, awareness or even perception.

When one participant was asked whether they felt they had accurately described in full the CA of the Company the response was,

"So, it's like when you see a balance sheet and goodwill on the balance sheet, there's a value on that, but you can't touch it, you can't explain it properly".

14. Other Companies, could study what the Company does, replicate it and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts on this.

Culture of the business was mentioned in six of the conversations however it is important to note that the following responses emerged on trying to explain it further,

- Certain elements of culture
- Difficult to replicate
- They [competitors] would not know
- Intangibles
- Certain ingredients

While this was the response given, it should be noted the participants themselves did not try or perhaps were unable to fully explain it and instead used the above phrases to portray the CA in addition to the culture aspect.

SC was also mentioned with one participant citing,

"There's a lot of experience there that is made up not just by one individual it's made up by many different hats".

One participant discussed the potential for competitors to look at what the Company is doing in another question:

"I mean being the one looking outside and going. These guys are actually doing really well, you know, and they don't know what's going on inside the walls. But something must be going inside of walls for it to be so successful externally".

Both participants 5 and 9 discussed the culture and CA being linked to the founder. This will be discussed in further detail later in the research.

Conclusion

It appears that it was possible for candidates to describe the CA of the business to a certain point but not entirely. Most respondents said that the CA is the people with other responses citing customer relationships, training, development, retention, selection, management, recruitment, structures or SC. After people, the responses seemed to be much more varied with a lot of respondents struggling to fully explain.

The relationships held by the MD came up as a part of the CA in more than one response within respondents from the same Company. It could be said that perhaps this could be one of the more obvious elements to those working within that particular Company.

On further probing, it emerged that the CA would not be easy to replicate and that culture plays a large role in the CA for all Companies that took part.

This supports the research by Barney which stated that resources can be inimitable when they are based upon historical conditions, are socially complex or when the link between CA and the firm is causally ambiguous.

The questions designed to investigate this research objective is number 7 and 8.

7. **Do you think that the Company Culture of this business acts as a source of Competitive Advantage, please explain the reason for your answer?**

In all responses, participants advised that they felt that Company Culture was a source of CA. Some of key insights from the discussions were:

- Culture is when you've got an engaged, group of people working together in unison towards a common goal and motivated on a personal level to achieve that goal. It's a very powerful force. And it literally propels growth and momentum in an organisation.

- The competitive advantage we had was our people and our culture and that culture literally got us from you know, a negligible sort of size operator to this force to be reckoned with.

- The company culture is something that you know you can't touch. It's nothing tangible, so the way that the culture is from higher up to all the way down or vice versa. It is such a vital importance because it sets probably business results in a different way.

- When the culture is right, it feeds down to the people that are on the ground, day to day, who represent us as being ambassadors not only for us, but for our customers

- When culture is strong and people go the extra mile and give more without expecting anything in return - all for the good of the team and to help the team

One Company that would have went through the process of culture change through the years explained the changes they experienced when moving from a first to second generation company and the changes that this brought about in terms of culture.

"the culture was very much almost this entrepreneurial type of culture that was fed right through from (founder) through the organisation, so people used to come in and talk about their wins and those wins created this, it was like this high energy. It was like competition with each other, so drivers will be coming in to talk about their sales and their customer feedback and their beaming with pride because of sharing it with (founder)".

"As you get bigger, the challenge there is how to keep that very personalised contact between the leader and the team. After, it just never had the same piece. So, suppose that thought that always fascinated me. That, how to keep that, how to evolve a culture with the size, growth and development of an organisation and keep it at that kind of high performance engaged piece".

In another organisation which is currently a first-generation Company, it appears as though the culture is very much described as what the initial culture would have been in the above organisation:

"And I'm not necessarily sure that you can, you can get that, I think the culture here, it has come from, you know, a number of years' experience as opposed to just something somebody thought of on a Monday morning and said, right, that's going to be our culture from now on you know, I mean, I've worked here since, you know, I've been here 12 years. And I, it's not any different today than it was when I started 12 years ago, it was still about knowing people's names, knowing how many kids they had, you know, asking those questions like, how's the small fella? How's he getting on with the football? Like I've seen [Managing Director], say that to people, you know, like, the culture is no different, we might have a much bigger team. But it's the exact same as the day I started".

It seems that certainly cultures which have a tie to the founder have benefits. This supports research that states that Company cultures that are linked to the founder can have CA as a result. It would be interesting to review the responses regarding culture in the second Company once it becomes second generation to see if this is something that they were able to hold onto and if so, how.

8. The Company culture is affected by the HR strategy

In all cases, the participants responded that yes, the Company culture is affected by the HR Strategy. Some the responses included:

- Cultural improvements followed from implementing a good HR Strategy, prior to that, the culture suffered
- Top down, owned by leaders at the top, should not fall solely to the HR Manager
- HR Strategy translates down to others what the culture is, they go hand in hand
- The culture didn't start really kind of start growing to strength until we got a proper handle HR strategy

One participant described the culture as;

"The business organizational plan is the skeleton and the culture is the blood that feeds the body and the movement of the organization. So, it's so important that is that the HR strategy isn't seen as something else that like a piece of clothing you put on".

Conclusion

The responses support the literature and the research objective in both points in that culture can be source of CA but also that it can be affected by the HR Strategy. The follow on from this is that culture is one of the key areas of HR Strategy that contributes to CA.

This links back to the results from question 5 and the results from the overall research objective where, when the participants were asked what the key areas of HR that specifically contribute to CA, that culture came out on top. Research completed by Barney and Wright suggest that HR are responsible for maintaining a culture of trust and teamwork so that employees are committed to delivering service excellence or superior products (Barney & Wright, 1998). The results of this research also support the need for an Employee Champion in Ulrich's model. Surely a culture of trust and teamwork cannot be delivered with HR disconnected from the frontline.

In the cases of two companies, it seems that the initial culture was generated and is strongly tied to the founders. The HR strategy, it appears contributes to and carries this throughout the company ensuring those values continue on. It may be question whether in the case of the second-generation Company, somewhere along the lines the HR strategy failed to carry those values on into the next generation of the Company or whether it was other factors that changed the culture.

Research Objective 4 – Trust Between Managers and Employees Impacts upon HR Strategy

Question 11 was designed to investigate this research objective.

11. The level of trust between Managers and Employees impacts upon the success or failure of new practices, policies or procedures

In all cases participants discussed the importance of the employee having trust in their Manager.

Some key insights include;

- People leave people, not jobs
- No trust, it's not going to work
- Trust is vital, transport and logistics businesses are built on trust

In certain cases, participants discussed that hand in hand with trust is that managers are able to explain their reasons for change and ensuring that employees understand the reasons behind it, is a key feature of successful change or implementation.

One participant who has seen changes in these areas described the following,

"I've seen good times and bad times and times when the level of trust between the management and employees was very low, it was very difficult to implement any sort of change, no matter how small or any procedure you trying to bring in, was always met with distrust and guys thinking there was something underhanded been done. When the guys trusted management and they were working with us, they didn't care what we implemented, what we changed, they had full trust that what we were doing was in their best interest, in the best interest of business".

The results of this research objective support the literature that trust between managers and employees will increase the potential success levels for any policies or procedures and when this is not in place it can lead to more than the failed implementation of policies and procedures such as turnover or low productivity.

Research Objective 5 – Lack of HR Strategy Can Cause Competitive Disadvantage

Question 15 was designed to investigate this research objective

15. The business would face a Competitive Disadvantage if there was not a HR Strategy in place.

In all cases, it was agreed by participants that the business would face disadvantage without a HR Strategy.

Throughout the research and not just within this question, the consequences of not having a HR Strategy have been highlighted:

- the business suffered in terms of turnover, management, wrong people being recruited in to the business.
- it's a massive, massive disadvantage for accidents, issues on sites for customers and staff retention, because they're not trained correctly.
- I think we always use the term of firefighting. And I think that just basically sums it up.

One participant mentions the possibility of missing out on the attraction and retention of talent in his generation and the generations following him:

"if it's ignored and if it's looked at as a way of HR is just applying to the policies and the regulations that the government has employed in terms of bank holidays, annual leave, redundancy and so on, you're going to miss a beat because my generation and the ones above me, want a little bit more than that".

One business owner discussed that the culture of the transport and logistics industry is shifting:

"There's a lot of companies I know that wouldn't have HR managers or HR departments in place. And they're at a disadvantage. By not having that, as the culture of the industry is starting to change, and employees, I think, embrace the HR side of things. Now more than ever".

Conclusion

It is clear from looking at the responses that there is considerable damage that may be caused to an organisation should there not be a HR Strategy in place including actual damage to resources, damage to relationships with customers, impact on the ability of the organisation to retain and attract talent. There seems to be varied and ongoing potential for disadvantage.

This research supports the literature by Barney and Wright which state that it may be a disadvantage not to have HR policies and procedures and that having these may provide a Company with CP. In the research, it shows that within the industry at the moment, not all transport and logistics companies have invested in HR and so right now it may be considered a CA for these Companies that have invested in it.

Objective 6 – HR represents all levels within an organisation and has an impact upon trust

Questions 9, 10 and 16 were designed to investigate this topic.

9. **HR Represents the interests of both Management and Employees in equal measure**

In all responses, participants said yes, and that it should be. Reasons for this being important in an organisation were described as,

- To allow the employee feel connected to the organisation
- Balance making all groups happy
- Portrayed as fair
- Confidence in HR that they can talk openly, are listened to and that HR will fight their corner

These results align with and support the research by Ulrich on the Business Partner Model specifically on the need for an Employee Champion within HR.

10. **The role of HR is to support Line Managers and Supervisors in the Management of their teams**

In all cases, it was agreed that HR is a support role and is there to support Managers and Supervisors in the management of their teams.

One participant described it as,

"It is a support function and we do a lot of work but in what we are doing our work is difficult to measure. You can't look at the at the bottom line at the end of the month and say HR contributed x, y or z and it can't be measured a lot of the time".

A Director noted the following concerns in relation to HR a support function,
"I think that's true. But I think it's an area that maybe in here that some line managers and supervisors don't understand what HR actually is. I think they think that HR is there to manage the problems for them, and not to advise them how to manage the problems themselves".

This was also a point that was raised and backed up by a second director in a different organisation:
"No, I think the managers, the supervisors should be capable to manage their own teams with the support of HR. Because otherwise, I've had my own experiences, I find that it's going to be pushed to HR or there would nearly be a norm set in business or in a department to say, Well, okay, that's your [HR] problem".

Potentially this shows that there is scope in Management training for Managers to be trained on how to use HR effectively and that there is a common misconception amongst managers and supervisors that HR are there to deal with "issues" for them.

16. **HR Practices should be different or the same for all groups within an organisation**

One interesting finding that came from this question is that the vast majority of respondents noted that HRPs should be the same for everyone across the board. However, when you delve into the individuals that disagreed, saying that it should be different, it is important to note that these are the ones who are both HR trained and hold HR experience. The ones who said it should be the same are neither HR trained or HR experienced. In this case, it should perhaps be considered that the majority are not necessarily correct but rather have just given their opinion on what they view to be fair.

One participant that is HR trained and experienced noted,

"in real life some roles do add more value than others and everybody in business adds value and, in some shape, make or form, if the cleaner isn't doing their job the customers aren't getting the product they want, but the reality is your practices and your policies and your processes in place to protect your cleaner wouldn't be half as well developed or as valued as they would be to protect something like a manager or driver".

Another participant in a separate organisation who is also HR trained noted,

"just think about what roles are the most impactful in this organisation and how can we do everything to attract the best into it, to train and develop them, to evolve them in that role and to support them as they as they move through the organisation as they in turn support colleagues within that space"

"if you lose a leader or let's say you know high performer, the loss to the bottom line is significant at three or three and a half times the salary of a high performer or a senior leader"

"a differentiated approach in HR, to my mind is the way to go, and I think again, if we were to look at the body, talked a little bit about the body as a sort of an analogy. You know when you're training, you don't do a training piece that just works for the whole body. You know if you're looking to develop, strengthen certain parts of the body need to a different type of exercise in the upper arms, the arms or the torso versus the leg".

Conclusion

The results in relation to research objective 6 in HR representing the interests of both employees and management supports the work completed by Ulrich in his Business Partner Model and the need for there to be an employee champion in HR.

It does also show that there is potential for misunderstanding to occur on what HR does as a support function for Managers rather than being the function that manages issues for them.

In the case of HRPs being applied across the board, the research does not support the literature however as mentioned above there are certain important factors to keep in mind here when reviewing this particular piece.

Overall Conclusion

The research completed for the most part supports the literature except on the topic of HRPs being the same for all groups across the board in an organisation. As in other industries, the research demonstrates that HR Strategy does lend itself to the CA of an organisation operating within the Transport and Logistics industry in Ireland.

The topics of culture and people focus seemed to dominate throughout the research across all three companies with no exceptions. Another area which reoccurred throughout the research was the need for HR to be understood, supported and owned at top level. Given the responses in the research, it is fair to say that HR is involved at top level across all three organisations.

One surprising element that emerged from the research is the lack of focus on reward and remuneration. With transport and logistics being such a fiercely competitive industry for talent where wage wars and wage competition is a frequent focus, it did not come across as a dominant feature in the research.

While there were nine interviews carried out, there was potential to include more participants from each Company however following completion and review of nine interviews, it was found that there was sufficient relevant content within the nine. In addition, there is a finite amount of time to complete the research which does not lend itself to a researcher being able to carry out an extensive number of interviews.

The researcher carried out interviews with both Directors and HR Managers from the Company where the researcher was first employed in the role of HR. The researcher was aware that some of their own baseline views and thoughts in the field of HR may have been formed in this role and as such ensured that she remained aware of the potential for bias when carrying out the research.

Chapter 6 - Discussion

Introduction

The aim of the research was to investigate whether the HR Strategy can lend itself to the CA of a Company operating within the Transport and Logistics industry in Ireland. The research supported the research objective confirming that it does in fact.

Discussion

Testimony from one Company in particular detailed the extreme and considerably damaging effect that a mismatched HR Strategy had on the business which was brought about by the business operating one type of business strategy but using an opposing strategy for HR. This caused a lot of problems within the Company including high turnover, incorrect hires, insufficient training and remuneration.

Within the industry, it is quite competitive for Companies in terms of reward and remuneration to attract and retain employees. It was a surprise that only two participants listed this as a key HR area. Within the business, HR is responsible for carrying out exit interviews uncovering reasons for turnover and monitoring market rates and trends. It could be suggested that as other members are not confronted with this competition on a regular basis that perhaps the impact or the considerable affect that it has on the industry is somewhat restricted to HR. Literature outlines the importance of a business matching their remuneration levels to that of business strategy an example being a Company that wished to join an elite group of firms, offering high compensation. As in literature it is thought that the pay levels can be a strategic choice of a firm (Purcell & Ahlstrand, 1989). It is also identified as important in both BP and BF theories.

The literature heralds Porters Five Forces as one of the most important theoretical frameworks which is still used in literature but less relevant as it only looks at external forces. The research supports this with no participant stating that the CA is external to the Company. Most participants outlined either internal or a combination approach in line with the more recent popular theoretical models such as RBV, Ulrich's Business Partner Framework, Best Practice and Best Fit Approach which

incorporates models such as Miles and Snow, Michael Porters Generic Strategies or Schuler and Jackson.

Culture was the focal point of internal factors aligned to the literature suggesting that under certain circumstances can form CA. These circumstances are described in the literature as sometimes unidentifiable so they cannot be imitated, or being entwined in a founder. Throughout the research both of these were suggested. In terms of the Company that was part of an international brand, being intertwined with the founder was not suggested however there was a large focus on the culture and the suggestions that competitors would not be sure what was involved in the culture and therefore could not copy it. In both of the family run Companies, there was a large focus on culture but also suggestions that the culture is entwined with the founder in the case of the first-generation Company or that it had been entwined with the founder at a certain point in history.

Culture has been confirmed as being a possible source of CA within the industry and that the role of HR is to carry that culture throughout the organisation. The founder seemed to be a focal point in discussions within the two companies that were family run. This supports the literature that culture entwined with the founder may be CA. In the one Company where the founder still heads up the organisation, the link between the founder and the culture was not mentioned by the founder himself. It would be interesting to find out whether he is aware that this link exists between his personality and the culture of the business or whether he feels it is down to something else, perhaps more collective. In the internationally owned Company, the culture is very much deliberate but as described by HR appears to be rare within the industry with new joiners being surprised at the culture and the turnover levels themselves being rare not only for any Company but especially in the industry. This type of advantage in itself is not only rare but difficult to imitate or substitute. This is a similar story to the one of Southwest Airlines where the culture is the selling point but is also inimitable and rare as proven through failed attempts by other Companies to copy it.

In literature there is examples of how other companies could not copy the culture of Southwest Airlines and it was suggested that this may be down to their own culture

not being able to support it. This example is mirrored in the response of one of the Directors of the Company when they said that,

"And that came from sort of that the agile culture and that scrappiness as well that I mentioned where when we look at our competitor there were linked into that sort of more structured big company piece and their culture had more bureaucracy behind it so their decision making, their ability to pivot quickly and to operate in an agile way, was compromised by there, but I suppose by the confines of the structures that they operated with".

Within the two family run companies, culture was described as being the CA however there also seemed to be differences and similarities in the culture. One culture was described as changing at a certain point in time. There could be various explanations for that, years in operation, acquisition of new business, changes in leadership as the founder stepped away from the day to day, new lines of business starting or lack of HR Strategy. The Company which is second generation is also an older Company. As noted in the discussion and analysis section, it would be interesting to come back and review the first-generation Company in 30 years to see whether there have been any changes to its culture. This is not to say that one culture is better than another, it was just an interesting finding that emerged in the research.

Being able to describe the CA in literature, suggests that it may be copied. Where it is not possible to accurately describe it, it suggests difficulty in imitating. The participants were able to describe the CA to a certain point, after which it became very varied. This is true even of participants who work in the same organisation. This could be down to uncertainty, perception of what CA is or perhaps linked to the what the individuals actually value themselves as employees or owners. If the members of an organisation cannot accurately describe the CA, it is unlikely that the competitors would be able to accurately describe it. If they cannot accurately describe it, they cannot accurately copy it. This suggests that there is scope for this to be SCA however this would be difficult to prove and there is potential for this to be substituted. The research does however support the literature by (Barney, 1991), that CA or SCA sources may be vague and literature by (Boxall, 1996) that it may not be obvious what the source of CA to those looking to imitate such as rivals or competitors.

Literature in the areas of trust between Managers and employees suggested that in order for polices, practices or new implementations to be successful, that there needed to be a level of trust. The research supports this, both from opinions of employees, managers or owners and from people who have witnessed both successful and unsuccessful implementations of policies or practices. What emerged during the research that not only is trust important but the communication around that and being able to effectively explain the reasons why it is being implemented. It is thought by a large number of the participants that the effective explanation behind it, may also increase the chances of success. Perhaps the impact of communication may be a direction for future research.

Research objective five which aimed to investigate whether a lack of HR Strategy would be CD, was also supported. This particular objective seemed to be supported through much of the research not only during the topic outlined. The trend that this was discussed throughout, seems to draw a greater importance on the need for a HR Strategy. The participants again were able to draw on history, pinpointing periods in time where a lack of HR Strategy has caused damage or issues to the Companies in question. It was also described how, within the industry not all companies have embraced the need for HR but one Director noting a shift in the industry where HR is becoming more important. (Barney, 1991) has drawn attention to the importance of HR policies and procedures as a method of competitive parity. Perhaps within the industry, it may currently be a CA. This however can only be short lived as other Companies in the industry can and inevitably will choose to bring HR on board especially if they were to become aware that it was providing rivals with a CA but for now, those with HR could be argued to be at a CA in the industry. This was an unexpected finding in the research as it was assumed incorrectly by the researcher that all Companies for the most part of a certain size have a HR function. However, it seems that this may not be the case.

The impact on customers, resources, and employees was also discussed by many participants. The organisations ability to attract and retain talent is also in question without a HR Strategy and following on from this is questions surrounding the ability

of organisations to be able to fulfil their contractual and customer agreements essentially affecting their ability to function.

The Ulrich Business Partner model is also largely supported by this research. In this model HR collaborate with line managers coaching them through the people aspect and it was supported at all levels across all three organisations that this is as it should be. There was however concern highlighted by two Directors in two different Companies as to Managers themselves being aware that this is how HR is to be or should be used. In the international organisation the person interviewed is both the Operational and HR Manager and so probably this issue does not affect them in the same way but should it be structured differently, this may have been a point raised. Reviewing the research, there seems to be scope for there to be misunderstanding but perhaps an opportunity for training at management level on the effective use of HR. The literature reviewed did not seem to advise of this issue so again, this could be classified as an unexpected finding in the research.

The literature suggests that within the Ulrich model, there is so much focus on the strategic element that perhaps there is scope for the employee champion role to be a little neglected. The research demonstrates the importance and the real need for there to always be an employee champion. Perhaps by the nature of the industry, there tends to be large headcount in Companies, there is even more of a need as there are many different factors, variables, opinions and cultures to be balanced.

HRPs were found in the research to be applied across the board. There were however certain considerations to be taken into account on this. The participants that said they should not be, are HR trained and experienced. Perhaps the other participants did not look at it, or did not have the ability to look at it through the eyes of HR. The other factor is that HR have most likely been trained in the benefits of applying HRPs, in different ways to different groups and therefore, this is the obvious answer when interviewing HR. Perhaps it is better that only HR are aware of this. Other participants were satisfied that HRPs are applied evenly across the board and believe that this is as it should be. There may not be a benefit to be had from opening this information up.

Conclusion

The overall objective was largely supported when looking at literature and the research that has been completed. There were six research objectives and five out of those six were supported although it could be argued that the sixth may have been supported had there been a larger ratio of HR to non-HR interviewees.

The surprising findings in the research are around areas such as reward and the potential for HR to be deemed a CA within the Transport and Logistics industry.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has aimed to contribute to the research in the area of the effect of HR Strategy on the CA of a firm. The transport and logistics industry in Ireland is not one that has specifically been researched in this topic and as such this study provides specific information to this industry where there was not before.

The study shows that within the Transport and Logistics Industry in Ireland that the HR Strategy does lend itself to the CA of an organisation. It has also demonstrated how the CA of a firm can be ambiguous and not easily described adding to research previously completed by authors such as Barney and Wright. The research showed how across the three Companies, the owners, Managers and employees were able to describe the CA to a certain point, largely focusing on people and culture, which in its own right could be considered to be vague and not exact. Moving past these points the elements of CA became very wide and varied with no real overlapping pattern or direction. This supports the literature that often CA can be bundles rather than individual practices.

HR Strategy is a popular topic in the HR literature with an endless list of authors having written and given their views, mostly on the need for it in organisations, the benefits that it can bring and the potential consequences of not having it. Authors such as Becker, Huselid, Schuler, Jackson, Boxall, Ulrich etc have all made significant contributions to the literature. This study contributes to this literature in supporting the need for a HR Strategy and potential impact that it can have for companies in the industry who have either mismatched or went without. In particular, it supports the research on the need for the newest wave, that of Strategy. The study also supports the information that a full partnership role is where HR has the greatest impact. Based on the research gathered in all three companies, it seems that this is where HR does sit within the organisation, however, it may prove as a useful recommendation to other Companies within the industry.

The literature states that most firms will choose to adopt different practices for different groups within an organisation. This study unfortunately does not support this area. However, it is thought that if the study was replicated with interviewees

that are solely HR, the results may have been different. This perhaps is an area for future study. The recommendation on this point is that the Companies should consider reviewing their thoughts on this and perhaps adopt a differentiated strategy for different groups with the organisations. This will inevitably incur costs in areas such as training, development and reward however, it should be viewed as a worthwhile investment feeding into the long-term strategy and areas such as succession planning, workforce capability, attraction and retention of key talent.

On review, one of the main areas that was surprising in the research was how little participants discussed the role of reward and remuneration. As mentioned only two participants discussed it as a key HR area. However, one which did discuss it demonstrated the damaging affect that it had on the team, although this was not brought about solely by a mismatch of reward, it was a contributing factor. On reflection, perhaps there should have been a question which focuses solely on the role of reward and remuneration in HR Strategy. Perhaps there should have been scope to initiate a conversation around it. I would recommend that reward and renumeration is a focus going forward regardless of what strategy the Company is following. There has been considerable focus on the areas of culture but this alone cannot be responsible for the attraction and retention of talent in line with the BS. Depending on where each Company sits in terms of being in line with market rates, there is scope for there to potential be some considerable costs incurred. However, this investment will ensure continuity of service, supporting the business in its ability to attract and retain the right calibre of talent going forward.

A lot of the participants emphasised the role of culture in their responses. Is it possible that too much emphasis is placed on culture and not enough on the tangible areas such as the ones mentioned above like reward and remuneration? Perhaps this is one of key questions, not that culture is one of the most important parts of strategy in transport and logistics, but should it be? What is the effect of culture in organisations within the transport and logistics industry where reward is in line with market rates and the effect on those that do not? Is there any effect? This research has shown that HR Strategy lends itself to the CA of a Company operating within the transport and logistics industry in Ireland perhaps future research should begin to

break down the HR Strategy looking specifically at certain elements and the effect of each on the Company such as culture, training and development, talent management, reward and remuneration, engagement and motivation.

Following research, it could be said that it has changed the questions in the mind of the researcher. On beginning the research, the question was does it affect? Following on, having reviewed the responses and key insights, if the research was to be done again, it may be different. The research would probably focus on the area of culture and the affect it can have on a Company operating within the transport and logistics sector in Ireland. Many interesting insights and stories came about under the topic of culture. It was useful to have included a section and research objective on the topic of culture but perhaps it may have been more insightful to focus solely on culture.

The industry that was chosen was interesting and would be used again. Perhaps in future research and again looking at the areas of culture, it may be useful to look at some family run businesses who are in different generations and compare the culture. One of the most surprising findings was how the culture in one business had evolved from one thing to the next with a change of generation. The reasons for the culture change are not known and there are some assumptions made by the researcher in that it changed when the generation changed. Perhaps this assumption is made because the participants had advised the first culture was similar to the other business, which is interlinked with the founder. The other business is still first generation and the culture is very much entwined with the founder. As stated previously, it would interesting to review this culture after it has moved to a second generation and see what differences, if any there was or to review other Companies in light of the generation in operation and see if there are any similarities or differences to the findings in this research.

Other transport and logistics companies based in Ireland both internationally and family owned may be interested in the outcome of this research.

Reflective Log

The topic chosen was quite broad which led to quite a lot of questions being asked totalling 16 which, when in the scenario of prompting discussions does not leave

much time for teasing out information. While the style and the method of information collection was a great match, reducing the number of questions may have given greater scope to delve into certain areas further and tease out information.

Also, on reflection, had I the option of re-doing the research and I probably would have focused in on certain areas of HR Strategy, perhaps culture and reward.

I do feel that I learned a lot from completing this dissertation and what I have learned I will be able to carry with me in my career going forward.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 Email Invitation to Participants

Email Invitation

Dear xx,

I would like to invite you to take part in a 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 attached documents carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

I have attached in this mail for you, a Participant Information Sheet containing further information in relation to the research process and what to expect should you decide to take part.

I have also included a copy of the proposed interview questions to give you the opportunity to review what will be asked as part of the process.

If you decide to take part, could I ask that you respond to me containing proposed dates and times to carry out the interview. The interview should last 20-30 minutes and will be audio recorded throughout. The interview can be carried out on site or virtually.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Amanda Carroll

Student Number X17113989

Participant Information Sheet

Title of the Study

Investigating whether HR Strategy can lend itself to the Competitive Advantage of a Company operating with the Transport and Logistics industry in Ireland

I would like to invite you to take part in a 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 or not to take part.

Who am I and what this study is about?

The research will be conducted by Amanda Carroll for the purposes of pursuing a Master of Arts in the topic of Human Resource Management in the National College of Ireland (NCI).

This research aims to contribute towards the existing research on the effect of Strategic Human Resource Management on the Competitive Advantage of a Company. This research will specifically focus on the transport and logistics industry within Ireland which has not previously been investigated within this topic. The research will aim to investigate and identify whether within this industry, the Human Resource Strategy lends itself to the competitive advantage.

What will taking part involve?

Taking part will involve completing an interview of approximately 20 – 30 minutes in duration and will take place either on site or via Microsoft Teams. The interview will be recorded and later transcribed. Throughout the interview, handwritten notes will also be taken.

There will be a number of topics discussed during the course of the interview namely,

- HR Strategy as a Competitive Advantage
- The effect of HR Strategy on Company Culture
- Competitive advantage of the business
- The role of HR
- The mediating effect of trust between Managers and Employees

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part due to your experience within the logistics and transport industry whether current or past. You have been selected as the researcher believes that you can contribute meaningful findings in the areas of Human Resource Strategy and Competitive Advantage within the industry.

Do you have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary in nature. You may refuse to take part in the research, refuse to answer certain questions or you may withdraw consent at any time during the process and without any consequence.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part in the research?

The benefits of taking part in this research is that following completion, the results can be shared with you allowing you to gain access to primary research completed within your industry in relation to Human Resources Strategy and Competitive Advantage.

There is no potential for any physical or psychological harm to come to you as a result of taking part in this research. No disadvantage will be caused to you as a result of your participation in this research. Should a situation arise where there is potential for the participation in this research to cause you harm or disadvantage, then the research will be stopped immediately.

Will taking part be confidential?

During and after the research, any data that has been collected will remain both anonymous and confidential as far as is legally possible.

Any individuals or person that you discuss throughout the research will also be anonymised and maintained confidentially. There may be certain situations which may necessitate a break in confidentiality, this includes situations where the researcher has a strong belief that the participant or other person or individual may be at serious risk of harm or danger or where a serious crime has occurred. Should you inform the researcher that you or someone else is at risk of harm it is understood that the researcher may have to report it to the relevant authorities. Where possible the researcher will aim to discuss it with you first but they may be required to report it with or without your permission.

Non-anonymised data in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings are collected and retained as part of the research process.

How will information that you provide be recorded, stored and protected?

During the interview, the data that has been collected will be recorded and stored on a digital device. The data will be password protected and will only be accessible by the researcher.

During the research, your identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing your name and disguising the details of your interview which may reveal your identity or the identity of the people you speak about. Disguised extracts may be quoted throughout the research project.

Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on a password protected and encrypted digital device owned by me. The data will only be accessible by me and stored until after my degree has been confirmed. A transcript of the interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legislation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The plan for this research is that it will only be used for the purposes of submitting my dissertation.

Who should you contact for further information?

Should you require further information at any stage, you may contact either myself or my research supervisor.

Researcher: Amanda Carroll

                  National College of Ireland

                  X17113989@student.ncirl.ie

Supervisor: Pauline Kelly Phelan

                  Lecturer Human Resource Management

                  Pauline.KellyPhelan@ncirl.ie

Thank you.

List of Interview Questions

1. Select your occupational category:

    a. Senior Manager/Director

    b. Middle Manager/Supervisor

    c. Team Leader

    d. Non-Managerial

2. How many years' experience do you have in the Transport or Logistics sector?

    a. 0-3

    b. 3-5

    c. 5-10

    d. 10-20

    e. 20+

3. How many years have you been employed in the organisation

    a. 0-3

    b. 3-5

    c. 5-10

    d. 10-20

    e. 20+

4. Do you believe the HR Strategy is a source of Competitive Advantage to this Company, please explain the reason for your answer.

5. What key HR areas specifically contribute to the Competitive Advantage of the business

6. If I asked you to describe what the Competitive Advantage of the business was in its entirety, what would you say?

7. Do you think that the Company Culture of this business acts as a source of Competitive Advantage, please explain the reason for your answer.
    a. Yes, if so discuss
    b. No, if so discuss

8. The Company culture is affected by the HR strategy
    a. Yes, if so discuss
    b. No, if so discuss

9. HR Represents the interests of both Management and Employees in equal measure
    a. Yes, if so discuss
    b. No, if so discuss

10. The role of HR is to support Line Managers and Supervisors in the Management of their teams
    a. Yes, if so discuss
    b. No, if so discuss

11. The level of trust between Managers and Employees impacts upon the success or failure of new practices, policies or procedures
    a. Yes, if so discuss
    b. No, if so discuss

12. The Competitive Advantage of a firm is internal or external to the Company
    a. Internal, discuss
    b. External, discuss

13. The HR Strategy supports the overall Business Strategy
    a. Yes, if so discuss
    b. No, if so discuss

14. Other Companies, could study what the Company does, replicate it and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts on this.

15. The business would face a Competitive Disadvantage if there was not a HR Strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts on this.

16. HR Practices should be different or the same for all groups within an organisation
    a. Different, discuss
    b. The same, discuss

Appendix 4 Findings Matrix

Participant	Question	1 Occupational Category	2 Years Experience	3 Years Employed
1		Senior Manager/Director	5 - 10	5 - 10
2		Senior Manager/Director	20+	20+
3		Team leader	0 - 3	0 - 3
4		Senior Manager/Director	0 - 3	0 - 3
5		Middle Manager	10 - 20	0 - 3
6		Non- managerial	5 - 10	5 - 10
7		Senior Manager/Director	20+	20+
8		Senior Manager/Director	20+	20+
9		Senior Manager/Director	10 - 20	10 - 20

Appendix 4 Findings Matrix

4 HR Source of CA	5 Key HR Areas	6 Describe CA
Yes - can lead to issues when not aligned, low budget HR, premium product, high staff turnover. HR strategy matched, huge reduction in undesirable leavers and better match of calibre of talent	Same product, same service for all. People are the advantage but tied to training, remuneration, selection, retention, development	People function but the ability to select, train, develop, retain and reward appropriately. Management of team important
Yes - links to Org Strategy can run parelell. Metrics and aligning metrics back to what is done, evidence and informs the next loop. Not a strategic approach can be costs, replacement of leaders, impact on bottom line, culture, engagement, motivation, those remaining in the business. HR needs to be top down	Recruitment, training, development, talent management, engagement, culture, analytics	People at its best and not at its best also people
Yes strategy strong, getting the right people, culture fit and attitude. Led to good overall team dynamic and good culture. Same product same service it's the people that keeps people coming back. Bookings and referrals	Organisational structure and training. Top level organisation is to develop you and keep you there long term. Internal exercise, external trainers. Cross training for org structure. Difference here people know your face and name, doesn't happen with	People, teamwork, tap into each other for different skills for their knowledge. Take opinions of others into account in plans. Bus is a bus, people can always go for the cheaper ticket or for the experience because of the people
Yes fishing in the same pool of people. Having a strategy is vital. Drivers tend to move quickly	Direct and indirect competitiors. Full 360, recruitment, on boarding, buddy system, retention and exit. Thinking long term, strategically, who exactly are we looking for. Better able to retain, less turnover, happier team, better culture.	Not competitive enough in terms of potential candidates, all companies tapping into the same market without looking beyond the one pool. Board did not value competitiveness from that point
Yes same service by other companies, not specialised. Our team - a lot of long term staff knowledge, skill, relationships with suppliers. Everyone knows our aim, what we are working towards. Hiring practices	Hiring process - who we want, more to it than what they can do. The training given to them contributes to retention especially if you understand your role.	Staff, longevity and stability. Small team even when not in that department can pick up with a customer on their query. Strong customer relationships. Issues are not escalated due to trust levels with staff and customers
HR takes care of people and people are the assets. Services are tailored and having the right person, HR plays a big part.	Recruitment - right people, right role. Policies and Procedures	Services tailored to customers, deliver different types of projects makes us unique. Staff are CA for their interactions with customers.
Yes - Management team and staff aligned, communication in company, guide managers in difficult situations, legislation and process	Communication between Managers and staff, fair and true representation of employee and Company	Structures and resources and impact upon customers.
Yes - workforce planning, reward recognition, training, development, retention and culture.	Culture and retention- retain key workers, training and development, rewards, good pay, recognition. All ties to culture.	Culture - cant compete with large size Companies in the market. Improvements to recruitment process, selecting the correct candidate, training, development, retention - specialised drivers and come in competition with larger companies
People attracted due to structure and how they are treated. Stems from good HR strategy, training and reviewing.	People management open door policies, people enjoy working here, loyalty and length of service increases. Value contributions	How we treat people, resources, safe, issues addressed, important clean trucks etc. Reputation and the intangibles

7 Culture as CA	8 Culture affected by HR	9 HR Represents ER EE Equally
Yes - culture is strong and people go the extra mile and give more without expecting anything in return - all for the good of the team and to help the team	Yes - huge cultural improvements followed on from implementing a good HR Strategy aligned to business needs. Prior to that culture suffered	Depends on the Company, often ee has negative view of HR. In this Company it does and HR is well respected, known to be fair
Yes when engaged, group, teamwork, common goals, motivated powerful force. Changed in the beginning entreprenurial with Tony, wins high energy, startup feel contagious, personal ownership. At 70 changed, professionalised, other culture, never got the initial one back, two tiered seperated office vs ground. Training development, job chats, PM, never the same. Culture shifted us from small to equal market share with competitor force to be reckoned with.	Yes HR strategy from top down - owned by leaders at the top. Should not just fall to HR Manager. Business strategy skeleton, HR Strategy is the blood feeds the body. Inherent to the success of the organisation.	Yes it should, doesn't always but it should. Help ee to achieve common goals. Ee should feel connected, rolled down to various different parts of organisation
Yes can be demanding with sales as the focus, pandemic, focus is more on empowerment in roles. Trusted that we are doing things for the betterment of the Company.	Yes if HR Strategy not correct, wont get the right people resulting in high turnover. Benefit the business long term	Yes in my experience equal across the board, ee know they are not overlooked
Yes, intangible, from the top down. Vital to business results, team members describe if you like to work here. HR Strategy plays a part in that.	Yes the HR Strategy translates down to others what the culture is - hand in hand	Yes in an ideal world, board play a role in how equal that really is. Managers can ask for things that may not be equal, other issues such as unions etc. Should be equal. HR must balance making everyone happy
Different cultures within different departments some more corporate than others. Downstairs teamwork, loud, high energy. That team needs to connect with drivers. That realtionship feeds into retention. Keeping long term staff, that's our culture.	HR ensure fit with department. HR intervene in issues or notice somebody is not themselves, or atmosphere being down. HR manage that and in turn the Company culture benefited by HR	Yes - HR guide your goals in your role. Ee need to feel their input in decisions. HR responsible to ensure the interests of the driver is minded as much as management. Without ee no jobs for anyone.
Yes Culture is unique to the Company. Motivating, open door, share opinions, ideas, communicate with managers at all levels. Everyone happy, provides a better service, staff more productive	Yes HR is about recruiting and Company culture, people fit and aligned to that. HR is how people enter and it can either work for or against a culture. Top down, people enhance or make it	In theory yes but needs to have good policies, procedures and culture. Right person in HR. If they don't exist or are not well done then perhaps there is room for it not to be equal but when done correctly yes equal.
Yes feeds down to those on the ground that act as ambassadors	Yes vital, open communication various schemes and incentives play a role	Yes, all represented in a fair manner
Yes - values, ownership in roles, progression. Market changes staff don't tend to stay a long time. Accept finite period of retention.	Yes - recruitment, hiring right people, meet the values, selection. Hiring misfits will cause headaches. Developing that team, continous training	Yes - would want to be portrayed as fair. Element of no captured in disciplinary proceedings, etc. Most part yes. Heavily supports management in terms of talent management, progression, succession. Ee policies procedures training and devopment
Yes culture important all treated like a part of the family. Most people have same qualifications, know them personality wise at interview stage. Helping each other when busy.	Yes structure process and policies built on promoting culture of equality and value across the board	Yes - needs to. Ee need to have confidence in HR team, will fight their corner, can talk openly, listened to.

10 HR Support in Management of Teams	11 Trust Impact	12 CA internal/external
Yes does not make profit, there to support. HR outcomes generally not measurable. HR should support all other areas of the business in training, development, workforce planning.	Yes, previously when trust was low very hard to implement any type of change even really small believe in something underhand happening. Following HRS, ee believes that in their best interest and will back and support you knowing its for a good reason.	Both - CA internal, effect external. Managed and contained internally resulting externally in better cust experience
Senior team represent the shared voice ensure that common goals are achieved and the culture supports that	Yes connection with LM crucial. People leave people not jobs. Quality of manager crucial to onboarding retention, engagement, motivation,	Both culture creates competitiveness. External type of product, unique space. Hospitality and selling same product, people will be the differentiator. Comes back to culture, motivation, engagement, achieve goals. Interlinked internal and external
Yes should support but also for management and supervisors to come to HR with ideas, not just a HR job	No trust, its not going to work, bond agreement between both. Manager will end up carrying most of it or it would be swept aside	Should be internal. If its external then outside of your control. If its stops where does this leave you. Need to have the right people
Yes - HR to advise on training etc but Manager or supervisor responsible for carrying it out.	Yes trust is vital. In transport or logitics business is built on trust	Both - Internal the cultur that has been built, competitive ways of working. Others can view what is happening and know that there must be something going on inside but not really knowing what that is.
Yes - recruitment in conjunction with line manager. Support with mediating issues. Ee needs to know there is support further up the chain if needs be. Legal or dismissal issues advise managers	Often new policies are as a result of backpeddaling, ee view with distrust. Needs to be shown the reasons behind it keeping ee safe etc. If they don't trust, they will think there is something up with it. Guide rather than enforce	Both - internal staff. Technological systems cameras and tracking, know how many deliveries and where drivers are. Externally ability to respond to change fast eg covid, changed model in the first month just adapted.
Yes - takes away personal aspects from Manager, disciplinaries, recruitment, personal issues. Good support for Managers.	Don't trust managers to enforce or follow then less likely to follow yourself. Good relationship, new things introduced you will not be a barrier to it but will try your best to conform. No trust huge barrier and can take longer to work.	Internal comes from the people, customer service from office and driver team. External elements may impact on our CA.
Yes while advising managers what they can or cannot do	Yes - HR pivotal role helps Company implement processes. Change, buy in and know the reasons behind it. HR communicates that out discussing concerns the staff might have	Internally - Culture top down, everyone feels a part of something, know what we are trying to create and feel valued. Culture embedded supports business with customers
Yes mainly identifying the keepers and ensure to work on succession, ifdentifying number 2s for management and retaining them. Managers should manager their own team with support of HR not set basis for HR issues	Yes - change model important, wont succeed in implemting any change with no trust	Internally ee will promote company themselves, reputation, goodwill. Externally from customer or supplier view
Yes maybe not understood by Managers that that is the purpose of HR- HRs problem. Support function	Yes Communication explaining the reasons for it and effect.	Both - Internal advantage treatment of people, good strategy, good culture. External factors against us industry shortage of drivers.

13 HR Strategy supports Business Strategy	14 Other companies ability to study and replicate	15 Comp disadvantage no HR Strategy
Seen HRS not aligned resulting in missed targets, failures, mismanagement. Once it was aligned the results were fantastic and very successful in supporting the business in what it is trying to achieve	Could copy but it would take years. Experienced staff are CA in order to replicate, it could take years. On paper it could be copied and pasted. Would not know our culture and exactly what is involved. All companies mission statements the same claiming	Yes - it has in the past, costly, wrong people brought in for the wrong reasons, no recrutiment, training, management or retention
Yes hr strategy is additional piece, ability to come together and ride out the storm. Culture and people shine in challenging situations, ability to pivot, agile. Emerged from initial culture, quick decision making. Supports and is interlinked with business strategy hand in hand. Can be missing a fundamental part of business if HR is not bedded in.	Competitor tried to copy for a number of years, unsuccessful. Similarly smaller operators have that leader - team connection we once had. On a bigger scale cannot compete with that personalised service. Not possible to reverse engineer. Needs to be embedded in culture from beginning that service levels never change	At a certain size becomes crucial. Seeing HR as the blood, intertwined in the business strategy. Smaller comes from the leader but at a certain size hard to function without
Yes if there is not correct process in terms of recruitment, retention, rewards and does not reflect what the business is trying to achieve. It must mirror, should not be different both really rely on each other to be successful	Only a certain number of hurdles, technically could do the same thing, would not have the people. Drivers tend to move around but other companies will poach from companies that they see doing well. Would not get the same results, a lot of experience not just by	Yes if not followed correctly focus of family run, correct person will slip through the cracks and lose the CA. If just used for policeis and procedures, will miss out, current generations want more than that and to feel part of a bigger team.
Yes - loop from job spec to exit supports the business. Right people on board, time to hire, onboarding, cultural knowledge. Goes hand in hand	In practice to copy and paste in theory yes but not possible to get the same results. Company culture, intangibles - every single person, cannot be replicated	Yes, without it it would be more firefighting rather than strategy
Yes business is solely reliant on workforce hire, retain cannot fulfill contracts.	Yes, simple model but others have tried and not succeeded. Certain ingredients other companies could not have that have made it successful, MD contacts and relationship with customers. Long term staff with the MD and their relationship directly with customers fight the corner of the business. Stand the test of time through contract renewals.	HR plan retention levels, promotions, increases in headcount, hiring. No targets of goals to work towards. Everyone here gets the same level of training, had previously been as issue. Massive disadavntage for accidents, issues with customers or site, staff development, promotions, succession planning
Yes, right people push it forward. Policies, procedures, recruitment, selection, motivation, productivit. Link up and aligned, would not work without a HR Strategy	Yes procedures but culture is hard to replicate, top down and unique, driven by management. May change a business by studying a Company will not get the same result.	Yes recruitment of people that will not stay will be costly in terms of time and money. Cost effectively select the right people for the role. Cant perform services, frustrate office team, lack of resources, hinders growth
Yes HR can sit with Senior Managers to advise and discuss implications, culture changes, market knowledge, availability of resources. Important that HR is at the top table	Yes - companies have and still do try. Some without HR, culture of industry is starting to change and ee wants HR. Competitors would not be sure of what we are doing. Doing it a while and are ahead of certain companies	Yes - important for inductions, contracts, accreditations, new employee reassurance, well organised. HR is a huge advantage.
yes ties in, cant do business strategy without it. Need to have input from HR	Culture is different in each place. Policies and procedures yes could be copied. Certain elements of culture can be imitated. Harder now especially generation that does not stay long.	Incorrect fit for business. Time consuming, problems, WRC, turnover in team.
Yes HR comes in line with business strategy, right resources, supports business strategy. Not on the same page, not at anything.	Culture is top down, would need same managemnt with same attitudes. Culture comes from years experience, has not changed in the past 12 years, still about knowing people. MD effect on that even though much bigger team	Yes important, no structure without it, doing things the right way not the quickest way. Serious disadvantage

16 HR Practices same or different
On paper shold be the same, in reality some roles add more value that others and are easier replaced. Everyone adds value but will not be treated exactly the same
Need to be different, backed by talent management literature. Not treating differently but for different things like training for speed. Differentiated recruitment, training and development, Differntiated approach not one size fits all. Loss of leader or high performer x 3.5 times their salary impact to the bottom line. Training the body, if looking to strenghten certain parts, dont just generally train whole body.
Should be uniform with slight variation for teams. Level of training should be the same but the actual wouldn't be. Bonus schemes difficult if generic does not capture those that excel. Tailored for certain groups
In theory should be the same in practice not going to happen. Should be adapted to individual roles and what you are trying to achieve with that person. Benefits should be across the board but the amount as a % of salary
Everyone treated the same but each department treated differently
Same. Maybe a transparent rewards system. People that work exceptionally hard and get rewarded for it is right but should everyone know about it, not sure. Some rules but should be different.
Same treated equally
Same needs of organisation and employees. Different levels, different motivational levels, some don't want development. Establish framework on how to manage levels within the business.
Same maybe tailor

Interview Transcripts
I = Interviewer P = Participant

Participant Number 1

I: The first question, select your occupational categories
P: I would be a senior manager.

I: How many years' experience do you have in the transport and logistics sector?
P: five to 10

I: And how many years have you been employed in your organisation
P: five to 10

I: Do you believe that the HR strategy is a source of competitive advantage to this company? And please explain the reason for your answer.
P: Ummm I have to say yes and we had a lot of historical problems that were down to HR strategy not being aligned with the business wanted and it just caused problem after problem after problem and historically speaking the business was always trying to say there were a premium product or high-end service, whereas with recruitment or training or wages and staff management was what you would expect for budget company.

So, they were trying to be a premium product in the market. They were saying we're trying to be the best product in the market but what we're trying to do is on a low budget, which doesn't essentially work, and if you want the best members who are giving you the best performance for the best abilities, you have to pay what you expect for premium service so that caused a lot of problems historically when they weren't working properly with HR and didn't really have a HR strategy in place,
they would just say yeah, we want to be. We want to be premium, but there is just a rather miniscule budget and hope for the best. And once things start becoming properly managed and they were left, just aligning the HR strategy with the needs of the business. Everything started improving and we went from having a revolving door system nearly in terms of recruitment. At one stage you were you were losing guys quickish and turnover was crazy high to the last full year before we shut down for Corona we had zero undesirable leader. Whereas compared to the year before that and the year before that, we probably lost about 33% of our staff on average in peak season. So, once they started actually letting us align HR strategies with the needs of the business, we went from losing a third of our team each season when we were in height of it, to 100% retention in busy season.

We went from an average 2019 was the last full year we operate before Corona. So, you're talking 2018 and 2017 year on average we were losing a third of our workforce, a third of our drivers in peak seasons and that was down to the HR strategies didn't match. The wages didn't match the role. The training didn't match the role the job description didn't match the calibre of candidates they were getting in for what they were offering didn't match role and once they let us align HR strategy to what this business actually needed and wanted, we went to 100% retention in 2019.

I: What key areas specifically contribute to competitive advantage of the business?
P: In our business, the staff would be what the competitive advantage would be. Everyone's trying to deliver the same product everyone's trying to deliver the same service and one competitor for arguments sake just does pre-recorded tours where we have all our live guide, fully trained guys.
So that's what the customers want to. Customers want what we have not what competitor has and that definitely gives us a competitive advantage. But that comes down to recruiting the right guys, training the right guys, paying them properly, giving them development opportunities, giving

progression opportunities and giving them a proper salary so that they want to stay with the business long term. So definitely by making sure that we are hiring the right people and we're managing it correctly, they are getting proper remuneration for the role and protecting these guys and keep them within our business and stop them from going to competitors and that's given us a clear competitive advantage over one of our rivals at the moment. With one of our rivals we are on about 82 to 83% market share. And again, they're not going to catch up with this staff, it will keep us ahead of them.

I: If I asked you to describe what the competitive advantage of the business was in its entirety, what would you say?
P: Uhm, everything people related has been redeveloped since, I I've been working here for the last six years. But we finally got proper traction in the last two or three years. But everything staff related has been redeveloped and revamped, and that's what's really given us a competitive advantage.
And we've revamped the way the guys get paid in terms of the frequency the pay rates, the salaries we've introduced the bonuses we've introduced, to the training, even down to how the supervisors manage them historically HR had to deal with a lot of problems that were dragged out directly as a result of front line managers, so we got more involved with what was going on in the front line, and ironed out on these problems and then just the guys were being managed better, treated better, better working conditions, better pay and once we kind of aligned all these things to what the business needed and wanted to build and what the business was trying to achieve we were flying along and having a lot of success.

I: Do you think the company culture of the business acts as a source of competitive advantage? And please explain the reason for your answer.
P: A definite yes. One of the areas I've been working really hard on the last number of years was trying to change the culture and re develop what the culture was here and it's a very, very, very strong culture. They are a very close team. They go the extra mile for each other, every opportunity they get. In 2019 we got crazy amount of overtime off the guys and it was all unpaid. Nobody wants anything for it, they're happy enough just going you know what I'm going to come in 2 hours early in the morning. Nobody was looking for overtime, nobody was considering it. Over time they were just going, I'm coming in in the morning to help out the team or to help out the guys. So it was by developing a really strong, inclusive and supportive and friendly culture that these guys were coming in every day and every week and going the extra mile but if we had a poor culture, you would have guys standing there and going but I'm not doing that if I'm not getting money for that instead, we had guys volunteer and coming in an hour or two early off their own back which essentially gave us a lot more working hours, a lot of competitive advantage and it was something that if he weren't treating them property, would it cost a fortune to hire guys covering these hours. I know technically they should be getting paid for what they're working, but the way they were looking at it was this is my day start to finish and I get a day rate so they were happy enough if their day was made longer anytime and it sits with our needs.

I: The company culture is affected by the HR strategy yes or no and discuss the reason for your answer.
P: Yes, definitely, since we started aligning HR strategy to the needs of the business and trying to make sure everything is fitting exactly where, the business wants to see itself going. So, culture is going from strength, when the HR strategy wasn't really being worked on properly, maybe my first two to three years with the business and there was a lot of areas that could have improved a lot of areas that were being mismanaged and the culture was suffering as a result of that. And once we got a proper handle on HR strategy and we started managing these areas correctly and managing these guys correctly, the culture just went from strength to strength, so the culture didn't start really kind of start growing to strength until we got a proper handle HR strategy.

I: HR represents the interests of both management and employees in equal measure, yes or no and discuss your reasons.

P: An interesting one. The answer should be yes, but depending where you go, it will depend on the answers you get from staff and my talking to a lot of people in a lot of different companies often have a very negative image of HR. They say that HR is just there to suit the interests of the Company or that HR are just there as a as a weapon for the Company to use against them. But if you go to other companies and I said no, HR is fair and if you're right there on your side, if you're wrong, they're against you, and when managed properly HR should be pulling up everyone in the business, from the management teams down to the entry level positions but some companies don't do it the way it should be and HR doesn't get maybe the respect it should within the business and because of that. In our business the guys have a strong opinion of HR. That's because they know that if they're in the right, HR will stand in front of the manager and defend them and if there wrong, they accept the fact that HR is going to come down on them in the appropriate manner.

I: The rule of HR is to support line managers and supervisors in the management of their teams. Yes or no and discuss

P: yes, definitely. HR isn't a profit-making line of business. It is a support function and we do a lot of work but in what we are doing our work is difficult to measure. You can't look at the at the bottom line at the end of the month and say HR contributed x, y or z and it can't be measured a lot of the time and were there to make sure that all the relevant departments have the adequate resources they need, team members they need, the adequate training adequate development, headcount, everything so that they can do their jobs properly, and if they are not being managed properly, that they come to us for help and support if they have problems with employees that they come to us for help and support and if they're lacking skills or headcount in their department they come to us for support so that the main function of HR is to support all other areas of the business to make sure that they're running efficiently.

I: The level of trust between managers and employees' impact upon the success or failure of new practices, policies, and procedures.

P: Yes, definitely, so I would be in this business about six years, so I've seen good times and bad times and times when the level of trust between the management and employees was very low, it was very difficult to implement any sort of change, no matter how small or any procedure you trying to bring in, was always met with distrust and guys thinking there was something underhanded been done. Many times, when things were going fantastic when the guys trusted management and they were working with us, they didn't care what we implemented, what we changed, they had full trust that what we were doing was in their best interest, in the best interest of business. So, if your employees support you and work with you, they will back what you're trying to implement, because they'll know it's

it's for a good reason. And if there's a poor relationship between management and staff, there would be a lot of distrust every time something is trying to be implemented. They will say their trying to take something from us, they are trying to get more from us, trying something that's going to affect us in some way, and so anything we've ever introduced the level of trust between managers and employees will kind of let you know if it's going to be successful or unsuccessful and how easy it will be to implement it.

I: The competitive advantage of a firm is internal or external to the company. Discuss your thoughts

P: Both really, bit of a tough one to think about. Sorry, our competitive advantage is internal to the business, but its effects are external. Its effects are affecting our competitors. It's giving a better experience for our customers, but it can be seen externally. It's managed internally and contained internally, but all of our customers are the ones seeing it externally and our competitors are the ones

seeing it externally. So, I may be on the fence. I wouldn't really be sure whether its internal or external, so it's kind of a bit of both if you get me.

I: The HR strategy supports the overall business strategy. Yes or no and discuss.
P: So, as I mentioned earlier we have gone through a change process as well, the last number of years where the line of business I was operating in was sold to an international Company.
and again, once we had the HR strategy aligned a certain direction being managed a certain direction, it supported what the business was trying to achieve and the business was very successful in what it was trying to achieve. And in previous years it wasn't matched properly towards what the business trying to do and they were having a lot of a lot of missed targets, a lot of failures and seasons and that was down to mismanagement from both sides, from what the business was trying to do and what they expected of HR and once they were aligned properly and HR strategy was following suit and supporting what the business was trying to achieve, it worked out fantastic results for both sides.

I: Other companies can study what the company does replicate it and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts on this.
P: From our perspective and from our business, which would be XXXXXX, they could copy and replicate what we're doing, but it will take a number of years to get where we are, and what we're doing with it, and one of our strong advantages is our experienced tour guides who have been working in their jobs for years and in some cases decades. So, if they want to kind of set something up like that, they can bring tour guides in, they can train them tomorrow, but they're not going to have the years' experience that our guys would have in terms of what they know about the city, what information they can give to customers, what they know about touring what they know about driving. So yes, a lot of skills that our guys have could be copied by another business, but it's the experience and the knowledge that they have from years of these skills that will take a number of years for the competitors to catch up with. On paper, they could easily copy and paste what we're doing tomorrow, but it would still take them a number of years to get their team to the level that our team is at.

I: Just an add on to that question. Do you think that a company could look at your company and actually pinpoint what it is that you have done in terms of your culture, your training, your reward? Do you think that another company could see exactly what you've done? Or would there be some ambiguity around what it is you have actually done there?
P: Our culture, they wouldn't get a proper look at our culture unless they're actually in the business, and so we've had guys join and they think they know what company is about, and they think they know what our culture is about, but it's only until they actually come in and get involved hands on in the first couple of weeks that they actually go Jesus, I didn't realise this was actually what it was or this is what is actually involved and we've had guys leave major places like Dublin bus where it's a pension for life, it's a job for life. Guys typically don't want to leave places like that and have come in and worked with us for two or three weeks and they say it themselves if they had of known working for us was the way it was or culture was the way it was, they would have joined a business like this 20 years ago. And but again they have been driving alongside of our busses for 20 or 30 years and they have no idea what the culture is actually like within the business. It's only when they actually joined and got their boots on the ground and got involved in what we were doing that they realised what our culture was like. So, everyone puts the same things on their mission statements under websites we do XY and Z and we do a B&C for staff and we're all friendly and great place to work. Everyone says the exact same generic stuff on their company web pages under mission statements and their handbooks. So like it doesn't really matter what company you're looking at their all saying pretty much the same, saying we do the similar things, but only until they actually came in and got their feet on the ground and experience it for themselves that they were going off recommending it to colleagues and friends like Jesus this is something you should get involved in and it's actually a great place to work..

I: The business would face a competitive disadvantage if there was not a HR strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts on this

P: Yes, definitely. So, as I mentioned earlier, we had a couple years where it wasn't being aligned properly and a couple years with both being aligned properly. So, we've seen for years where it wasn't being aligned properly that it was costly disadvantage to us. We were suffering in terms of turnover of staff, we were suffering in terms of management. Staff were suffering in terms of the wrong people being brought in, sometimes for the wrong reasons, the wrong applicants coming in, giving you a poor pool to recruit from. So, like all these problems were down to everything from recruitment not being done properly, training not being done properly, management not being done properly, retention not being done properly, bonuses not been done properly, so a lot of historical problems we had were down to a lot of areas of HR not being properly managed. And once we got a handle on these and once we got control of these and it took a lot of time to iron out, and sort historical problems in the past and even some of the problem. Once they were being aligned properly, we seen the benefits very early and seen the benefits in the end.

I: HR practices should be different or the same for all groups within an organisation.

P: That's an interesting one because on paper everybody should be treated the same and everybody should be treated equally but in real life some roles do add more value than others and everybody in business adds value and in some shape, make or form from if the cleaner isn't doing their job the customers are not getting the product they want, but the reality is your practice and your policies and your processes in place to protect your cleaner wouldn't be half as well developed or as valued as they would be to protect something like a manager or driver, right? Because they are advantage, so yes, everyone should be treated the same way, but in reality, they're not going to be because some roles are just more valuable to the business and some roles are a lot harder to fill and we know if our cleaner decided to quit tomorrow, we would have a new cleaner within a week or two if we tried.

We know if we lost a live guide with 10 or 20 years' experience tomorrow we're not going to fill that void. We want to get somebody in, but they're not going to deliver the same product that that person was delivering.

Participant Number 2

I: The first question that we're going to go through is select your occupational category. A) senior manager/director, B) middle manager/supervisor C) team leader or D) non-managerial.

P: I say I know you know my role looks at the blended option A, but it's more a than the latter than the last one, so yeah.

I: How many years' experience do you have in the transport or logistics sector?

P: Hard to know but definitely 25 plus.

I: And how many years have you been employed in the current organisation?

P: 22

I: Do you believe that the HR strategy is a source of competitive advantage to this company? And please explain the reason for your answer.

P: absolutely I do. And I think the reason being that it's if done right or when done it's linked into the overall organisational strategy it sort of runs in parallel. I suppose, by getting under the bonnet and understanding what the HR strategy is and you remember this from a couple years back, even understanding what the negative impact of not necessarily having a high strategic approach on page or the way you would for your business and then reviewing your metrics and aligning those metrics back to what you have done, you know, but that the loss implications or something like that give an

example of how let's say, HR strategy isn't implemented and then reviewed the way business strategy would be looked at. How evidence can be crucial, evidence could be missed, and that crucial evidence helps then inform the next loop of the strategy. You know. Where do we go right? What, really worked and what areas did we not do as well as? What is happening here? So for example, in our and I suppose I'm answering the question kind of looking at when it's not their cohesively, when it's there, but when it's there as a sort of, let's call that elements of strategy but not an overall HR strategic approach that the downside can be these unforeseen and unrecognized costs, not just financial, and we know the cost of replacing leaders and team members in general through attrition and the impact it has on the bottom line, but also on the sense of the motivation on the culture, the engagement, based on the fact that people see other people leaving and think oh what's going on here? And then that other effect where people thinking to join the company think oh I hear there's a lot of leavers in that company what's going on there, so the brand is affected in that respect as well. So when I when I think about strategy in this Company, for example, I think that we had some parts really well and we had some parts of it at times where and again I think this can happen in busy operational situations where if strategy in HR isn't from the top down, isn't understood and owned from the top down, it can be a thing to do, the fold out of the business strategy, but if it's not given its own let's call it its own strategic plan where this sort of as I mentioned that kind of implementation and then review of the results and feedback so a constant kind of evolutionary flow then it becomes a lost opportunity in an organisation. So yeah, so I suppose I can say that having seen it work well in other organisations you know, I've gone out and assessed in different organisations around here Ireland and European companies all operating to certain level, and I've seen where HR strategy is so effective. And I've seen the impact on that kind of people profit and sort of plan type performance measures and then equally I've had the chance to see how ours has evolved over the years. And to be fair, we probably reset and start looking at a very baseline strategy in 2007 and as a company had grown, and I think again like companies that are in the early stages of HR Strategic knowledge it evolved with time, so you know I can see what companies that are very mature in that space look like. And you know what I mean? So, it's kind of easy to you know. I suppose you only really get to know if you've seen it really. If you see in strategy, operating a really high level where I can definitely comment and say absolutely so a bit of long answer, but I hope that's helpful.

I: What key HR areas specifically contribute to the competitive advantage of a business
P: So, we talked about things like recruitment, the training and development, talent management and that whole engagement piece that the sort of cultivation of culture. I probably put them up at there at the kind of higher levels and then the use of HR insights so the data piece, go back to looking at the results, but also the analytics that sit behind, the analytics that indicate how well or how functional the HR strategy is in alignment with the organisational goals and requirements.

I: If I asked you to describe what the competitive advantage of the business was in its entirety, what would you say?
P: I know what it was when things were at its best. It was definitely it's people and I know what it was when it was at its let's say it's less optimal and again, you know the answer, I'd have to say it was its people because it shows there's so much competition in the transport sector. So really, what distinguishes us from our competitors? It's our people so you could see what it was really working on. You could see when there were dips in that time. So yeah again people.

I: Do you think that the company culture of the Business Act as a source of competitive advantage? And please explain the reason for your answer.
P: Yeah. That's just linking back to what I mentioned there now. So, do I see company culture as a source of competitive advantage? Absolutely. I think culture is when you've got an engaged, group of people working together in unison towards a common goal and motivated on a personal level to achieve that goal. It's a very powerful force. And it literally propels growth and momentum in an

organisation and we saw that from, you know, we've had so many growth spurts in the organisation, but certainly when we were in that kind of start-up mode and we had that scrappy Celtic warrior spirit of, kind of, get in there and compete against Dublin Bus. Uh, the culture was very much, almost this entrepreneurial type of culture that was fed right through from (founder) through the organisation, so people used to come in and talk about their wins and those wins created this, it was like this high energy. It was like competition with each other, so drivers will be coming in to talk about their sales and their customer feedback and their beaming with pride because of sharing it with (founder). And they're all shooting the breeze. So, they got new ideas, they're saying, right tomorrow, we're going to do this instead, and here's another way of getting more sales. And here is what the competitor didn't do, so let's try and do some of that. So, the culture was, it almost felt start-up for quite a while? That energy was contagious, really, really contagious and there was a sense of personal ownership for every employee in the organisation at that time because everybody knew what they were contributing to the overall pot it was but, but not in the kind of formal way that we became as we got bigger. And obviously as you get bigger, the challenge there is how to keep that very personalised contact between the leader and the team. As we started to grow in size, and passed that magic number of 70 that's when things started to, the culture changed and we acquired two companies and the culture became blended with other cultures and it took a while. I don't think we ever got that level of entrepreneurial culture back, what we got was something different. And then as we professionalized, I suppose then there was this this other culture that happened, but it felt at times two tiered compared to what we had, so that two tiered was almost and I suppose I can say this in an interesting way, like as somebody who's in leadership role, but dealing with people on the ground. You used to hear it sort of said, they work in the office so those guys don't know what's going on the ground, you know? And what are they doing up there? You know that kind of commentary and it felt like there was a disconnect. Even when we rolled out the training and development and the one to one job chats, you know, the performance management. It just never had the same piece. So, suppose that thought that always fascinated me. That how to keep that, how to evolve a culture with the size, growth and development of an organisation and keep it at that kind of high performance engaged piece. So, our competitive advantage coming from that scrappy small company and going up against Dublin bus brought us to equal market share and that was the end result of that. So, the competitive advantage we had was our people and our culture and that culture literally got us from you know, a negligible sort of size operator to this force to be reckoned with. I suppose the end result is that is that our business was acquired, so you know if you're looking at results, the results are stacking up to show that we got to that and then other parts of the organisation again, you could see that with (other service) that sort of start-up culture, that connection with (founder and initial team) and then as that sort of morphed and moved and evolved then shifted in that, in the energy, on the sort of the culture you know it impacted the business in other ways. We had leavers, we had accidents, where you know and you start to see the results there as well. So yeah, absolutely the culture and the competitiveness are to my mind. After looking at this over to the tune of half a decade, absolutely inextricably linked, there is no. You can't pull them apart in a way, you know.

I: The company culture is affected by the HR strategy. Yes or no and discussed the reason for your answer.
P: Yes, and again go back to the first question. The first to answer I gave where I mentioned the importance of the ownership of the HR strategy by the leader at the top of the organisation, and so culture is led by leadership, it's led by seeing people around you walk the walk, not just talking to talk and if the strategy isn't fully owned and bought into and participated in and buy the senior leadership team then culture, is just it's lip service is just this is the way we should be, but it's not necessary, it's you know some paints are equal more and some are more equal than others. Kind of you know, so equally I suppose that HR strategy is, it shouldn't just fall to the HR manager. It's a living breathing it's how I put it, it's almost, the business organisational plan is the skeleton and the culture is the blood that feeds the body and the movement of the organisation. So, it's so important that is that the HR

strategy isn't seen as something else that like a piece of clothing you put on. It's actually inherent in the in the organisation, and you know in the success of the organisation, but in the way, it moves in the way it breaths, in the way it feels and the way it didn't, in the way it achieves and what I've experienced over the years is again from observation of both our company on our growth stages and also going and getting under the bonnet of top performing companies is that culture has to be owned across the board and not seen as this appendix you know that's, OK, so now that's the HR strategy lets bolt it in. You know what I mean? And it's not necessarily aligned and really owned from the top down, so yes.

I: HR represents the interests of both management and employees in equal measure.
P: It should, it doesn't always, but it should, yeah. Do you want me to expand on that a little?

I: Yeah, if you could.
P: Obviously the interest of the organisation in terms of its performance are key. So, HR strategy is there to help people from the ground up understand how to achieve collective goals. That's right, and then for the individual its about feeling connected into the organisation, feeling part of something, feeling that there is a culture, and so the HR strategy is different depending on. But the let's call it, there's a collective piece of HR strategy and then there's that nuance piece, where it's rolled down to the different parts of the organisation, so it should be as much for one as for the other, but it certainly it's not always the case. Sometimes it can be, you can see that it can be. Yes, so yes, I do believe that that it's important for both the people and for the leaders, yeah.

I: The role of HR is to support line managers and supervisors in the management of the teams.
P: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, obviously it's in terms of we talked about culture coaching earlier, you know if there's a certain style of communication that HR helps to look and identify that in line with the organisational, the overall organisational goals, the desire for the type of a style of culture that fits that organisational strategy and then how leaders then represent that through the organisations, so I suppose a well thought through HR strategy will include, will absolutely feature that you know. You've got the CEO and then you've got the senior leadership team and it's about how the senior leadership team represent the shared voice to ensure that the common goals are achieved and that the culture helps to support that. So yeah, absolutely, there's a cascading effect.

I: The level of trust between managers and employees impacts upon the success or failure of new practices, policies, or procedures.
P: Absolutely I think there's recent research and evidence out there to suggest that that even more so than employees having that true connection with the CEO there actually their Direct Line managers. The relationship that they have, with their Direct Line managers is crucial. And obviously we know that people tend to leave people rather than jobs, so the quality of the manager is crucial to the, let's say, let's call it the successful onboarding and retention of employees and obviously then from that the engagement and motivation piece so a really tuned in manager to their role isn't to tell other people how to do things, but rather to support them in their ability to do that and to help overcome the hurdles and the obstacles that might get in their way. Both from an organisational and a bureaucratic way and also you know within that individual employees' case in terms of their, you know their own personal roadblocks or their own developmental roadblocks so helping to build their competency, through kind of one to one engagement or through slow, or the fast development of that employee depending on whether they're high potential or where they're at in their career trajectory. So yeah, 100%, that trust relationship between the employee and the manager is crucial to the success of the organisation.

I: The competitive advantage of a firm is internal or external to the company.

P: I think both. Obviously, it depends, so we already talked about the people piece that I think that covers off, you know we talked about the culture and how that creates competitiveness. So, without a shadow of a doubt, there's an internal piece to it. But then there's also the external piece. It could be the type of product you carry in a unique space, so and competitively right there in your own doing something that no one else is doing or you're doing it in a way that your competitors can't touch you. It tends to be, but not always, the case that your people and the way you run your business can actually give you that additional edge. So, when you're in something like hospitality and you're doing an identical product, your people will be, you know, in a service industry space your people will be your key differentiation. The competitive edge depends on, I suppose that the sector that you're working with but look again, I think whatever way you look at it comes back to culture and then the motivation and engagement and the ability to hit those goals and objectives, so it's kind of hard to see to see how, even when you're looking at the external piece, how the internal peace doesn't affect it there, it's so interlinked, so hope that answers your question.

I: The HR strategy supports the overall business strategy. Yes or no and discuss the reason for your answer.

P: Yeah, absolutely, and again I think I've touched into this on some of the other answers I've given so. Yeah, without a shadow of a doubt that you're starting to influence the success of business strategy. I guess again, the evidence of that is, I suppose, is that you can have everything else going well, you know and it could be because the economy is buoyant and your sales performance is just excellent because maybe your business processes are going well. You know you have everything streamlined. And so, you're performing and your profitable. I mean, maybe its profitable compared to, your peer organisations, but that extra piece that extra elements that shows up as well, when there is a dip, where there's an issue, when there's a challenge, when the market takes a hit, that extra piece, that ability to come together and to ride out the storm and I think that's you know that's where the real metal is. The culture and the people really get to shine in the challenging situation so yeah, I've had the opportunity to see where again, where the two are so heavily and intertwined, and I've seen our business pivot in situations where there were different stories that had the tourism industry, you know whether it was an ash cloud. On this on how we've been able to come up with new ways of doing business very, very quickly. And that came from sort of that the agile culture and that scrappiness as well that I mentioned where when we look at our competitor, there were linked into that sort of more structured big company piece and their culture had more bureaucracy behind it so their decision making, their ability to pivot quickly and to operate in an agile way, was compromised by there, I suppose by the confines of the structures that they operated with. So, Culture definitely supports and is interlinked with the organisational strategy and I think yeah, that HR strategy rather than bringing culture into that. I think they go hand in hand, so again, it's the evidence as well can be when it's not there. So, as I mentioned, you can have a lot of other things working well but you can have people leaving and that starts to drain on your resources and on your ability to think ahead and to compete, thinking outside the box. When you're losing talent and when you're on that wheel of recruitment and training and development, but not looking at the what's going on here. This is telling us something so you can be, you can be busy doing everything else and missing a fundamental part of your business if you're not looking at that HR piece is not as bedded into what you're doing strategically as your business strategy.

I: Other companies could study what the company does, replicate it and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts on this.

P: I just gave actually one example there. You know what we did, when we came into the market and in the exciting industry is we did, this scrappy agile kind of a lean type of approach in our, in what we did, how we got better and how quickly we turn things around and evolved our sales marketing, you know had had a fresh and contemporary look and our online sales were and I suppose this is isn't about HR or but it's just kind of a quick little insight. Everything was just, was new, was contemporary,

was fast, was agile, like the team where operating at that level and I guess what happened, for example, is (competitor) tried to copy us for quite a number of years unsuccessfully because it took them time to be able to catch up. So, there's an example. One example that comes to mind where copy catting doesn't necessarily work. Equally, some of our smaller competitors, you know when you think about it, they come to the competitive landscape that, you know, the one or two men operated (product), you know we are bigger. Again, had we been at that smaller space where the leader and the team are connected. We did have a personalized piece about the way we operated. But when we got bigger, we were never able to compete with that smaller, more personalized service, and so our reviews were never quite, never as good as the ones of small personalized operators. And again, I got an example I guess of there was elements of trying to copy that. What were they doing that with? Getting the great reviews but you know trying to go back and reverse engineer at the size we were at wasn't going to happen either. It has to be embedded in the culture from the get go and continued and maintained and managed. I suppose in a way that that service quality never diminishes irrespective of change of the employee on a day. So, there's two examples just looking, I suppose that our direct business. I mean, I could talk more in terms of other companies, but I think that sort of maybe answers the question.

I: The business would face a competitive disadvantage if there was not a HR strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts on this.
P: Yeah so. Again, I suppose everything depends on organisational size. We didn't have HR like we're not really thinking HR in the sense until 2007 when we brought in a first HR part time role and it was more administration recruiting, and you know, recruitment selection, the training and development done on the HR policies and procedures. Stuff like that. Before that there was as I mentioned there, the culture had a certain drive too, as we all individually, myself, (founder) and (director) at the time would have had, you know we were doing it individually. Recruitment, training, development, you know and all of that. So, I think it's down to size, but I certainly think when you get to a certain size, it's crucial because it's very hard to keep that contact with your team. I look ideally and again. I think this is going back to what I said at the start. That relationship between seeing HR as the blood in the body. Not just as a piece of clothing you know that gets thrown on, but as it's intertwined with the business strategy so. Having it is crucial, but I could see smaller organisations could because it all comes from the leader and they know what they want and as long as they have that one to one contact with their team, that they can communicate that effectively and people learn by observation. I think there's a certain number of employees after which it becomes difficult and certainly at that point I don't think a company can function without or without that HR strategy. And again, I suppose I've answered that question in some of the different other questions as well so.

I: HR practices should be different or the same for all groups within an organisation.
P: Oh, look I think they need to be different and it's this sort of talent management, the literature in talent management suggests that as well. One of the big areas would be around how to manage high performers. So, let's say your leadership team are, it's not to say that you're treating, you know one group in a more hierarchical way. But rather looking at talent across the organisation and allowing training that for example facilitates speed if you like. For individuals want to learn at a higher pace and equally allowing for a slower paced training for those who take time to maybe absorb and digest the information and allowing for kind of those nuances. But again, that's difficult. It's very easy to talk about this in the academic. In reality it can be different when you're on the ground and you're trying to do this, but certainly differentiated type of recruitment for example, and selection piece for your leaders. You could be gone through 3, 4, 5 interviews It may be different for your on the ground team at times, but certainly something cohesive overall, you know the piece of, you know everybody's recruited because they have shared the same kind of values, but certainly that said the recruitment selection piece, the training and development, they may be different and would need to be different for all sorts of reasons based on the levels which you are developing people. And then equally I

suppose looking at the rewards and benefits piece that you know, how you parcel that out, how you look at that in a way, and it could be as simple as training supports, you know, for high performers people want to go on and study at third level or supported third level. You know, but equally allowing everybody to see what that looks like, so you come in at whatever level in the organisation. But you're aware that as you move through the organisation, these are the approaches that are taken depending on the kind of roles you're in, so yes, there's a differentiated approach as opposed to a one size fits all, recognises the difference, I suppose the different contributions within the organisation, the different contributing roles within the organisation. Even if you park people and just think about what roles are the most impactful in this organisation and how can we do everything to attract the best into it, to train and develop them to evolve them in that role and to support them as they as they move through the organisation, as they in turn support colleagues within that space, so certainly my experience over the last 20 odd years on and on. I spoke more recently, the acquisition of information through the Masters has highlighted the need for a differentiated HR approach. You know, the you're talking about and I can't, remember specifically, but if you lose a leader or let's say high performer, the loss to the bottom line is significant at three or three and a half times the salary of a high performer or a senior leader. But at the same time and so I'm just mentioning the cost involved in getting someone into that role and the cost of it failing is significant, because then you've got that gap between the where they're leaving and, you having to go back out to market and sort of look to recruit. To select and then to recruit a mentor training, develop that person. That gap creates a downtime in your business which affects your bottom line because again, you're missing a key leader in a position, or that, or you may have someone in there who hasn't fully functioned and the knock-on impact on that is immeasurable, and again, it's immeasurable, and at times not measured, which makes it, I guess, all the more challenging. So yeah, a differentiated approach in HR. To my mind is the way to go, and I think again, if we were to look at the body, I talked a little bit about the body as a sort of an analogy. You know when you're training, you don't do a training piece that just works for the whole body. You know if you're looking to develop, strengthen certain parts of the body need to do a different type of exercise in the upper arms, the arms or the torso versus the leg. So, I guess it just depends on how rounded you want your organisation to be and how optimally performing you want it to be? But certainly again, the differentiated approaches is. The evidence again suggests that that is the way to go in terms of HR strategy.

Participant Number 3

I: The first question. Select your occupational category. A) senior manager/director B) middle manager/supervisor C) team leader or D) non-managerial.
P: Team leader

I: How many years' experience do you have in the transport or logistics sector?
P: Three

I: And how many years have you been employed in the organisation?
P: Three

I: Do you believe that the HR strategy is a source of competitive advantage to this company? And please explain the reason for your answer.
P: Yeah. With Covid it's a little bit different, so if you take it outside of what has happened in the last year I do, I it was thinking about this when you sent over the notes and I think the HR strategy we had was very strong, it looked at trying to get the right type of people and looked at the culture fit more so than the skills of the person, so attitude was very important so I think the whole strategy that we had pre covid was very strong and it's kind of led to us having a very good overall team dynamic and a good culture as well, so that's kind of what is very important and I think yeah, I do believe it is a competitive advantage because we will touch on this in other questions that you have got there, but

what we effectively do across all our operations is send a bus, it's just a bus, the bus goes, the bus comes back. But it's the people in between that that make it so that people keep coming back, keep booking, keep using our services and having the right type of people in terms of whether it be them being punctual, their attitude, their friendliness, whatever it is, it's very important to have that in between, because otherwise we won't have any bookings and the referrals coming in in terms of sales. So yeah.

I: What key areas HR area specifically contribute to the competitive advantage of the business?
P: So, the two that I felt, now you can correct me if I'm wrong. The two that I felt were actually giving us a competitive advantage over competitors was, organisational structure and training. The training side of things is kind of, like a two way. At top level their focus is courses to kind of upskill your education. We have obviously the maintenance program where we bring in apprenticeships and get them their qualifications. We make sure they stay with us through the whole process, but then what happens then is they stay within the company. The aim is to keep them their long term and that same in marketing like I did the same myself. A lot is put into kind of profit enhancement teams is what we called it so there are like internal exercise focus groups to look at how we can improve the business. Then you have working with an external coach she looks at your leadership styles, how to improve your management skills and then you have the other level 6 courses as well we put people on in terms of how to be an effective leader. And then there's other bits in between, like the small training courses we cover in terms of Excel and all of that. That would be pretty good in terms of our side of things. We always try to make sure that enough members of the team are trained up on certain aspects and if they need more training the guys are more than happy to do it. In terms of the organisational structure. I think it's a very good competitive advantage and it was something I was actually chatting about a couple of weeks ago to one of the drivers, we had a bit of a get together to celebrate the end of the season, the little bit of season we did that have, and you know around there you had finance team, you had the drivers, you had the marketing team and the maintenance team, yet everyone from the very bottom of the ladder to the very top of the ladder, and everyone was obviously with two meters and social distance and another mingling. They know your face. You know their face. You know their name, you know a little bit about them and you can kind of pick up a conversation and what the driver said to me was like this is a like a company where you don't get that in normal places in the likes of (competitor) and the bigger operators like (competitor). You turn up, you take your stuff for today, your gone your dusted. What he said was a number on the sheet but in this Company you're a bit more than a number on a sheet because you end up meeting everybody along the way and no matter what level of work you do, you're always valued to a certain extent so that would be something I would say gives us a competitive advantage over.

I: If I asked you to describe what the competitive advantage of the business was in its entirety, what would you say?
P: This people. it's strange because. Like we do a bit at everything and nothing at the same time, but everyone is willing to kind of give you a hand along the way. You know, like I work with (colleague) on a few things and you know she doesn't have certain knowledge, shall we say uncertain marketing techniques or what we need to kind of achieve. But she does have the operational side of things and she also has a lot of experience in say hotel marketing. And I tap into her for that. She taps into me for that side of things. I also tap into the drivers for things that they might know in terms of the tours and so on, so the people and the knowledge they bring, it's very, very important to us and also that kind of approachability that they have like. You wouldn't have any issue walking up to a driver and saying look, I'm thinking about doing this, what is your opinion, and that they are also their opinion is also valid. Because coming back again like a bus is a bus but no matter what and people will always tend to go for the cheaper ticket but if you were to say that they would rather go for the experience and that they know that the people are friendly, the drivers are polite, the team are helpful and then yeah.

I: Do you think that the company culture of the Business Act as a source of competitive advantage? Please explain the reason.

P: Yep. Well, I have to say, yeah. Yeah, I think more recently yes and a lot more recently like in terms of the people and the culture. This is, like the culture would have been difference at times, especially in a family run business like ours like it's very demanding, sales driven as the main focus but with the pandemic, it's actually lead towards kind of sitting back and re-evaluate what we're doing in certain areas and shall I say a lot more. And a lot more empowerment to the same people like so for example at the CEO said recently that you know she's willing to leave us off and do our thing. Previously she used to keep a close eye on how, what we were doing, what it contains. We're trying to achieve. Now there's a lot more trust being placed because she understands that the people she has now know what they're doing and do things that are better and for the better of the company, rather than just being there and doing their nine to five and going home. And so, I think with Covid, our company culture has shifted a little bit and has actually brought a lot of people closer as well because there's less of a team. And I think at the moment, but you know how many people we had employed. But there were only down to about four now at this stage. So, it's quite at like everyone is kind of doing a bit of everything, but also helping everyone at the same time.

I: The company culture is affected by the HR strategy yes or no, and just discuss the reason for your thought.

P: Yeah, I think so. I think any company culture is affected by the HR strategies, like if. if the HR strategy isn't correct, you're not going to get the people you want, and then your turnover is going to be constantly high so like when you sit down and you want to do or recruitment for each department that you say this is the type of person I want with this set of skills or this type of attitude, whatever it may be an if you go off and you get your own thing, based on what you like, it's not going to really benefit the business long term.

I: HR represents the interests of both management and employees in equal measure, yes or no and discuss the reason for your answer.

P: It does 100%, I mean. I think it's awkward because like I've only about 10 years' experience working so I don't have a good overview of how different companies may act in terms of how they deal with management and employees and which one they may favour over others but the companies I've been with it's equal across the board, which is good because it puts both management and employees and mainly the employees that you know they're not being overlooked, so to speak or belittled.

I: The role of HR is to support line managers and supervisors in the management of their teams.

P: Now when you mean the management of your teams, do you mean that day-to-day management of your teams or?

I: Generally, so even in areas like recruitment, reward, retention. I suppose what I'm asking is do HR support supervisors and line managers in those areas. Or is it more that HR should be doing it for line managers and supervisors?

P: No, I think they should support. I don't think it should be left up to HR alone, because then you'd have again, two separate ideas or two separate directions, so I think yes, they should support supervisors and management of their teams, but it's also up for the management and supervisors to come to HR with ideas, but with maybe idea generation in terms of what they can do it, you shouldn't just leave it up to HR and say that's a HR job. I think it has to be combined.

I: The level of trust between managers and employees impacts upon the success or failure of new practices, policies, or procedures.

P: 100% and I think that comes back to working in the shop like I did recently. On the ground if your employees, if they don't have trust with their managers in terms of the practices, policies and

procedures, it's not going to work, and they're going to say oh what the they know, they're not out here all the time. Do you know what I mean? So, it has to has to be that kind of bond that agreement between the two of them. That, as you said, that level of trust. Because otherwise if you try to implement something as a manager and you don't have that trust within your employee base or within your team. It's not going to work. They're not going to do it. You're going to probably end up carrying most of it, and then it's going to get swept aside after a while, because you're going to get fed up and move on to something else. So yeah, there has to be trust.

I: The competitive advantage of a firm is internal or external to the company.
P: I don't know like I think it should be internal based on my understanding like your competitive advantage. It shouldn't be external, it shouldn't be on factors that are outside of your control. For example, if you rely on something outside of your business for some something else to work fair enough. But if you need that to be successful and then all of a sudden that stops, what are you going to do? you're stuck so your internal processes in your internal side of things must be very important and must people forward, and with that from a HR perspective like the people. You know you need to have the right people in order to be successful. So, if you don't have that. You have nothing so, yeah.

I: The HR strategy supports the overall business strategy. Yes or no and just discussed the reason for it.
P: Yeah, yeah, no. It should 100% and again, it comes back to the question previously where like. If you don't have the correct process is in place in terms of recruitment, retention, rewards, whatever it is. And it reflects what your business is trying to achieve, you know? It has to mirror the two, you can't have separate HR strategy and a separate business strategy because the two of them they both rely on people to be successful, so yeah.

I: Other companies could study what the company does replicated and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts on this.
P: To be honest, yeah. And I was thinking of that, like if you look at this Company just for example like our transport like what's stopping me tomorrow, same with you like what's stopping you tomorrow, going out, buying a couple of vans. OK we might not have the money but saying money is not a problem, buying a couple of vans, open up a delivery services or bus service and just running the same thing. There's only a certain number of hurdles that you need to get over in terms of licensing restrictions. Nowadays Covid, our capacity management, all this kind of stuff, but if you can get over the hurdles, you could technically do the same thing that we're doing, but the only difference is you won't have the same people. and you can see that in terms of the transport industry. And it's something I was thinking about when you when you sent these on, a lot of drivers and a lot of yeah, a lot of drivers and a lot of people tend to hop around different companies within the same sector. A lot of people would say, oh that's because It's something they are familiar with, they can get a job, that's why. But if you look at it the other way around, it's because for example, a company called (competitor), go around and poach drivers from another company because they see that companies actually doing that quite well. They don't go looking after drivers from companies that aren't doing things quite well and so. That's why they try to get the best people for the job, so you could technically replicate what a transport company does, you could do it quite easily, but would you necessarily get the same results? I don't think so because it's the people in between that make that possible, and like the headaches that you would have in terms of running such a service, especially if you're a small operator and in terms of the online side of things, the admin side of things the legislation and the in between gaps. There's a lot of experience there that is made up not just by one individual, is made up by many different hats and it's getting these hats to actually work the best of their ability. That would give you good results. Could you replicate it? Yeah, but could you get the same results, possibly not no. Now you could put thousands into ad spend on marketing and public do better. But how long would you? The thing is, how long would you be able to sustain that level of success? Because as soon

as I see you make and market share in transport. I'm going to say right you were taken from my share so I'm going to start taking go back after you again, but that's it. That's not really a HR issue, that's more another thing.

I: The business would face a competitive disadvantage if there was not a HR strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts.

P: Yeah, I think again. I think yes, I think. We did have a good HR strategy. But nowadays I think could this strategy that the business, I work with are trying to implement it's a very high level, less doing strategy and just getting people in as quick as possible. Get them to drive the bus and off they go again, but one would have to argue with that strategy is incorrect because it's the family, the business, that the family run focus, the people first focus that we previously had in 2018, 2017, 2019 that is slowly, in my opinion will slip through the cracks if this isn't really looked at and then when the company loses that they will lose their competitive advantage. So, a HR strategy has to be in place over a longer period of time. In order for a company to continue to be successful, like even outside, well maybe we looked at (competitor) which had great HR Strategy like did you saw that they had a campaign to get women drivers and then all of a sudden you see a lot more women drivers so it has to be a longer process and if it's ignored and if it's looked at as a way of HR is just applying to the policies and the regulations that the government has employed in terms of bank holidays, annual leave, redundancy and so on, you're going to miss a beat because my generation above me a want a little bit more than that. They want to be cherished a bit more, so this comes from the strategy and what you were talking about earlier on about the rewards, retentions in the schemes and making people feel part of a bigger team. And it's something that the driver said even that earlier on where he was saying that you know that kind of meeting and catching up you don't get it in other companies and that's why he likes being with us.

I: HR practices should be different or the same for all groups within an organisation.

P: They shouldn't be different no. No way, they need to be uniform across all the boards because then you'll have different teams doing what they want. And no one will take accountability for when things go wrong. Yes, you can have variation, slight variation based on the needs of each team, but the overall pillars should remain the same. And because otherwise, you'll just end up with chaos everywhere. And especially when it comes to HR practices because it is a minefield in terms of the wrongs and the rights and what people are allowed to do and what people aren't allowed to do. And if you do not have that in place people won't know what to do, and it's just going to be chaos and it's going to be crazy.

I: And do you think elements like training, reward, remuneration, dash should be more or less the same across all groups like office driver team? Should there be any differences in those areas?

P: Yeah, that was something my chat about it. With Damian, actually Jesus at the start, the 2019. I don't, I don't think so an. I think certain aspects like that, that the training yes should the training will differ, but the level of training should be the same. So, if it's a month of training, a week of training, whatever it is, it should be the same. But there's certain aspects of certain roles that you know. For example, Damian said that the bonus scheme at the time was very individualists focused. It was focused on the individual and their individual forms, but it actually should be focused on the collective. But then when you fill that out there are certain people who do a little bit more in terms of the sales channels and the functions where there's others that do a lot more in terms of the operational side of things. So how do you filter that out, to create one unified bonus scheme. I don't think it's possible. I think it's quite difficult and unless it becomes very generic and then you have individuals like myself who will achieve their scheme probably quite easily, but other individuals in, say the transport side of things may not. It may be that its harder for them, so I think it could be tailored for groups and bought some of it has to be the same just to kind of keep it that the strategy in place.

I: First question, select your occupational category. A senior manager, director B middle manager. Supervisor C team leader or D non-managerial.
P: So currently I am on a senior manager.

I: How many years' experience do you have in the transporter logistics sector?
P: Roughly around 3

I: How many years have you been employed in the organisation?
P: 2 1/2 years

I: Do you believe the HR strategy is a source of competitive advantage to the company? And please explain the reason for your answer.
P: Absolutely I think it's you know HR strategy is for sure, a competitive advantage, especially in the transport and logistics area of business, due to the fact that it's not only about the transport logistics, you also have the other competitors such as you know if you're going to compare it you know the (type) drivers. Everything maybe isn't classified as transport and logistics is actually classified as hospitality or tourism, and so you're really fishing in the same pool of people. Uh, so having a strategy and as well as having a retention strategy is vital. Because I do think that they jump ship very quickly.

I: What key HR areas specifically contribute to the competitive advantage of the business.
P: So I think from a HR strategy point of view, for a competitive advantage towards other companies within the transport and logistics sector, but also outside of it that there are direct competitors or indirect competitors, I do believe that the aspects or areas, it's everything from you know the full sort of 360 of the recruitment of them, but also the hiring process to the you know onboarding process and to the buddy system to, you know the retention as well as unfortunately the farewell as well. So, you know, having that entire loop around of, you know from we need to hire someone. OK? Well, how do I hire someone? Well we post an ad on indeed or whatever it could be. But what is the purpose of that? Who are we looking for? And having that strategic or thinking long term and not just putting out fires all the time? And because the more people you retain, the less turnover of staff there is, which obviously makes the staff happier as well as company value and culture. And it is a process that probably takes time, but so definitely I think it's absolutely especially in the sector we're talking normal drivers, but of course there's other parts of logistics and transports that maybe are not sharing the same pool of people with a lot of other sectors. But sure, only talking drivers absolutely talking other areas of business. Yes, I do think is also important. And because it's so competitive.

I: If I asked you to describe what the competitive advantage of the business was in its entirety, what would you say?
P: It was competitive enough but still not, like it was competitive enough for if we're going to talk directly into, you know these are the two you know driving people and you know the two from place A to place B more of a maybe like bus feeling. But I don't think that they ever went out and thought about the other areas that they can tap into a pool of potential candidates. So, it was basically, race between a couple of companies or handful of companies for the same pool of people. So from a competitive that point of view, it was just the same circle going around there's other aspects of his well that maybe wasn't great, you know their retention part or the on boarding part and I think that maybe then the directors or the bigger picture people in terms of the board didn't see the need for the competitiveness in an HR point of view.

I: Do you think that the company culture of the business acts as a source of competitive advantage? And please explain the reason for your answer.

P: Uh, yes, absolutely. The company culture is something that you know you can't touch or you can't, you know, it's nothing tangible, so the way that the culture is from higher up to all the way down or vice versa. It is such a vital importance because a sets probably business results in a different way as well. But also, it's you know the whole you know do you like working there and that sort of? If you ask someone, do you like working there? Oh no, they're not great or no. You could do better with this and so on supports. You know, it all comes down to the HR strategy as well, and the company culture.

I: The company culture is affected by the HR strategy yes or no and discuss.

P: Absolutely. Again, if the company culture is of, you know that the warm, nice fluffy words and it translates down to HR strategy, of course, and if the company culture is stick in the mud in a you know, then that translates down as well an or vice versa from bottom up. But you know, definitely go hand in hand.

I: HR represents the interests of both management and employees in equal measure. Yes or no, undiscussed.

P: I think they do an in a, theoretical book you should say yes. Yeah. In an equal world absolutely, but in the end, I do think there's a fine line of. You know the board is the decision makers in the end of everything. OK, let's put it like that and I do feel that sometimes their HR strategy or you know HR represents the yes. OK, short version. Yes, they do represent equally. However, of course there is a manager that might say you know what we need to do this. While it might not represent their employees equally. So, there is scenarios of course if it is unions, if it is you know whatever it could be, of course there is but should there be yes. Does HR have a super important as well as challenging task of being the middle man to making everyone happy. Absolutely. Definitely not a role I want to ever have.

I: The role of HR is to support line managers and supervisors in the management of their teams. Yes or no and discuss.

P: Yes and no, so HR to support line managers. Supervisors in the management of their team, and I think that you know, I don't think it is HR's responsibility to go in on a day to day management of the team. However, they should be there as a support to a line manager or to supervisor in case you know about training and so on so forth and you know, I don't think that it's the responsibility of HR, I think it's the responsibility of the manager to make sure that the team is so on, but again, it's also one of those fine line questions depending on scenario.

I: The level of trust between managers and employees impacts upon the success or failure of new practices, policies, or procedures, yes or no and discuss.

P: And yes, I do believe so. An I mean trust is vital and especially when it comes to. Like transport and logistic you know, you're building the business on trust in details more or less. You need to have the people. It's not that you're selling a pen, you know it's or milk. It's not a product, it's an experience. And not only maybe you know experience for the driver or experience for the customer or the client, or you know the bar or the restaurant or the supermarket. And have that trust that someone will make sure that A gets to B. But and only, A gets to B but also gets it there with, you know a satisfaction as well. Yes. Definitely.

I: The competitive advantage of a firm is internal or external to the company.

And discuss

P: the competitive edge of firms, internal or external and to the company. I say both definitely, an internal competitive advantage. You know again, it comes down to the culture that it has built, it comes down to all of those you know bits and bobs in terms of the culture, the ways of working, you know. Working's smart versus working hard. You know that is definitely competitive advantage, but also external. I mean being the one looking outside and going. These guys are actually doing really well, you know, and they don't know what's going on inside the walls. But something must be going inside of walls for it to be so successful externally.

I: HR strategy supports the overall business strategy, yes or no and discuss.

P: Yes, and the HR strategy. Again, if we're looking back at the loop of, you know from a job spec all the way to saying goodbye to someone that does support the business strategy or the business assuming now the business strategy is to grow as an example, and because it really comes down to that, you know you need to have the right people on board and the right people takes time to hire and you know then they also need to be onboarded to they need to know the company, this is what we do, this is what we don't do this is how we act, how we don't act and so on and so forth. So, for a business strategy to be, we're going to deliver XY set to all of our clients in this manner, if that doesn't translate down all the way from the start, it will be very hard to change it once it is up and running. Or if the structured is to grow well, then it is you know the HR strategies. OK, we need to have XY set new hires and get the turnover down because we need this many people because we have this coming 100% it's goes hand in hand as well.

I: Other companies could study what the company does replicated and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts.

P: I do. I do think that they can. In theory. I mean, in theory you can replicate and do exactly same thing and copy paste. In practice, I don't think it's doable. I don't think I company can replicate and get the same results. Due to the fact that it comes down again to the company culture and a lot of things are not tangible, there not on paper, you know replicated, probably same results, but it all comes down to the people in the end it would not, only drivers are not only cleaners or not, only the warehouse package people. It comes down to everyone and that you can't replicate.

I: The business would face a competitive disadvantage if there was not a HR strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts.

P: And they definitely would. An if there is no strategy in place, the sort of competitive advantage wouldn't be measurable in a way we can compare apples to pears, so I mean, if there is no strategy in place, how we're going to do this and why are we doing it and who is doing it? In any aspect of any role, then there wouldn't be a competitive advantage. It would just be putting out fires, and that's not an advantage.

I: HR practices should be different or the same for all groups within an organisation and discuss your thoughts.

P: Do I do think that again? In theory it should be the same but in practice, probably not going to happen, and it doesn't have to do with, you know, rewards. As an example, they mentioned there. Like as a marketeer as example, I I'm not going to go and join the best drivers in Ireland rewards because that's not for me. I would. Yes, I would celebrate it with them because that's a nice thing. Or they wouldn't probably rock up to social media reward thing as an example again, but in theory yes it should be in practice, definitely not viable, it is same thing with them training or same thing with. You know anything really. It has to be adapted to their role and to what you want to achieve from the people getting the role or.

I: And just in terms of reward, do you think that it should be adapted based on value brought to the organisation? So, say for example, that somebody on a senior management team would be rewarded differently than, say, a driver, because potentially there's a difference in the value added.

P: As in do you mean monetary salary reward, or.

I: Yeah, the whole package. Everything that goes along like salary and whatever other benefits there is.

P: Yeah, so from a benefits point of view and from the sort of you know pension or insurance or holidays I don't think that there should be a difference that should be equal across the board, but of course when it comes to salary when it comes to KPI, so when it comes to maybe you know flexibility as well. Looking at Covid, you know, flexibility of working from home for someone that is based in office versus someone that is on a truck is a little bit different. You can't really give that benefit as per say, but you know like as an example, many companies do this, it's your birthday you get a day off. Of course, it should be across the board. Anything from drivers to cleaners to senior management. I do think absolutely from that point of view. I do agree there should be equal however, then it's a question of the next question is so should it be the same amount of let's say a pension should be the same amount and that is very easily just done like for a percentage of your salary, you know, but it can't be that only a management gets insurance but not the drivers as an example I don't think that's fair.

Participant Number 5

I: First question, please select your occupational category A senior manager, director, B, middle manager, supervisor, C team leader or D, non-managerial

P: B Middle Manager

I: How many years' experience do you have in the transport or logistics industry?

P: 10 to 20

I: How many years have you been employed in this current organisation?

P: Three

I: Do you believe the HR strategy is a source of competitive advantage to this company? And please explain the reason for your answer.

P: Yes, and I suppose the competitive advantage, there is a lot of companies out here doing the same job as us. So, what we do is not special, it's not specialised. The only thing that's specialised is people, I'd imagine. Well, I think I believe for our company, we have a lot of long-term staff. And with that comes a huge amount of knowledge skill, relationships built with customers, suppliers. And that gives the company overall a better competitive advantage over maybe another company who can't retain staff. That's not to say that's always the way but I just think that when I joined the company, I would I'd say, when everybody does, there's such long termers here, you get a good grasp of what the company wants, what our aim is, what we're working towards. So yeah, I just think it's the people the skills and knowledge of who we're hiring, pretty much is what our competitive advantage is.

I: What key HR areas specifically contribute to the competitive advantage of the business.

P: I would have said the employment process. So, when we're kind of streamlining who we're looking for, what we're looking for, and put in the company, that it's not just somebody just sit in an office and do admin or somebody to drive a truck there's a lot more to it. And they have to have certain specifics that we want from them, that we know will work with this company. And also, the level of training, I suppose that we give, I think that's improved massively, that you would hope that if somebody gets through all this, and that they stay and then they're knowledgeable in the company so that they won't leave because you don't understand your role, you're never going to, I believe, stick around if you don't understand it. And you don't get to grips with your role. And you'll always feel like you're chasing something and you're not getting to what you should be achieving or what your target should be. So, there's a few things I wrote, I probably could have written more. So

I: if I asked you to describe what the competitive advantage of the business was in its entirety, what would you say?

P: I don't know if this is wrong. And I feel like I'm reiterating the same thing again, but its staff, its longevity, stability, the office. Customers speak to the same person all the time, there's nothing worse than you're making a call on a previous query, and you're speaking to somebody else, and they have no clue what's going on. And we all kind of were such a small team that we kind of know, everything going on. So even if they don't get the same person, we all will be knowledgeable to an issue. But yeah, we have the same guys, especially in operations, that the relationship with the customer is pretty strong. That you know, even if we do mess up, if there is an issue, it's a phone call, and it's sorted. It's not it's a major problem. And because there is trust there between the staff, and the customers, and the same with suppliers because you know, we can't get anything done. The company relies on 100 vehicles, or pieces of equipment moving and to make us money. So, if they're not moving suppliers and understand that the pressure we're under and how quickly things turned around. And that's just a relationship that we've built as well with suppliers that we they don't leave us all broken down on the side of the road for too long.

I: Do you think that the company culture acts as a source of competitive advantage, and please explain the reason for your answer.

P: I suppose, I have to think about what the company culture is. I guess, if you think about, there's kind of three different departments in the company here. And there are definitely different cultures in each department, one is more corporate than maybe somebody else. So, the, the company culture for I'm going to say downstairs because it's where I'm based. And it's quite loud, it's brash, it's where it's all teamwork, everyone rows in, and everyone fights with each other. For a greater good, like, it's, there's a lot of energy. And it's loud, and it's busy all the time. And that kind of company culture, we deal with the drivers all the time. And I just think to maintain staff, we need to the drivers in particular need to click with this downstairs staff, because that's what they see on an ongoing basis. So, if you're not, if you're not able to click or something like that kind of the culture here that we're friendly, that's what it's not, we're not sitting behind a desk, we'll be out there and we'll argue with you or we will chat with you where we discuss, like, it's just, I can't I don't know, I'm not explaining myself correct. And I know, I'm not, it just means that if it means if we're not the best pair, that if we have a good relationship with our drivers, they'll stay because we are not the best payers. And it's very hard for the industry at the moment to hire anybody, but we're keeping long term staff because there's something there that's keeping them and that's the relationship between the staff inside the office

and the staff on the road that are delivering everything for us. And that's our company culture, I think is I don't know.

I: The company culture is affected by the HR strategy, yes or no? and discuss your answer.

P: Yes, I suppose anybody that comes into, to join the company, is hired through our HR department. So, it is up to them to, to vet the staff to see would they work with our company, not everybody can work in certain environments, especially, you know, if it's a corporate or the complete opposite which some of our departments are and that it's just really casual. So yeah, unless also, I suppose if there's any issues among staff amongst different departments amongst the drivers themselves, or drivers and our operations team, it is up to HR to intervene to see if there's an issue to notice that maybe somebody's performance is below par, from what normally is and to question that as a whole to see, you know, because obviously, they're bringing the name of the company down or the atmosphere of the office or the issues with drivers and department and depots like, if there is problems, the only people that really that will be sorting it out was the HR. So, it's the HR departments so it is up to them, I suppose, the company culture, how this company is run this is hugely benefited by our HR department.

I: HR represents the interests of both management and employees and equal measure and discuss the reason for your answer.

P: Yeah, I suppose management will guide in meetings, how HR are, what the goal is for the company out for whether it's the month, the year, five-month plan for the company. So, the guide, the plan, how you set your goals for your in your job for the year are based on management, expect a might offer you or need off you from different departments. But without our employees we have no job, none of us. So, without drivers, we're all sitting here doing nothing so employees need to be part of the team involved in decisions, asked for input. So, the input so they feel involved, wanted and respected. This can be done through employee report cards or speaking, as I said, speaking to employees whose work-related performance has changed. This could be because of family issues, or maybe there's issues in the office maybe issues on the road where the customer would have would have affected a driver so It's up to HR or to make sure the interests of the employee is minded just as much as management because yeah, none of us will be here, if we don't ever have the workplace, for drivers to drive, we'll be doing nothing.

I: The role of HR is to support line managers and supervisors in the management of their teams.

P: Yes, I suppose first for hiring staff. So, we're a small company, but for a larger company, and HR is not going to know what every single person does, it will be their line managers to go, I need somebody to do this exact role, and give an overall view of the company but not in depth in each department. And that's where you need your line managers and supervisors to, I suppose to guide you on what we're looking for. When hiring staff that will be the first thing. And then for mediating issues, sometimes employees, my feelings are just not getting the, the answer they want from their line manager from the supervisor, and they feel the need to go further up the chain to get a resolution and that needs to be there. They need to know that's there. And then, also, I suppose, for helping with maybe unruly staff members or things like that, when things become legal, I suppose serious if members of staff need to be reprimanded or, or let go that support, that knowledge of how to do things the correct way will be needed by HR to advise line managers.

I: The level of trust between managers and employees' impact upon the success or failure of new practices, policies and procedures, yes or no and discuss your answer.

P: Yes. And sometimes there's new policies, not just here, I mean, any company and it's done to backpedal, it's done because there's an accident, or there's, we want to change the way we can let somebody go or, or anything like that. And a lot of employees will look at it as a bit of distrust, because they can see through it. And so, if an employee feels the practices, we don't benefit the employer, and there is a level of distrust, so it needs to be shown to the employees that well this new practice is done because somebody hurt themselves. And we don't want this to happen again, not that we don't want another lawsuit, we want you to be safe, you don't have to come to work, and be able to go home and not have to go to hospital or not injure yourself. And same, I suppose a different procedure in and out of an organisation. Most of these are done, because something has happened. But it needs to be reiterated to the employees and it's done for their benefit, not for our benefit, because if they don't trust us or don't trust the way we do things, they will just think there's something up about it. There is a level of distrust, sometimes the drivers are being forced to do something it has to be said to them that it's a guide. It's this is a general guideline of how we think how we would like things to behave and not forced.

I: The competitive advantage of a firm is internal or external to the company.

P: I would say both. Internal will be our unique competencies, which would be I think our staff, that's our selling point like our USP and I mean maybe not for our company but innovation, IT if we had a really cool updated system saying that we do have very good computer systems for cameras and tracking. So, I suppose for our home delivery section of the business, it's pretty good we can tell we don't need to know how many stops the drivers had. We don't need to know where his deliveries are. We can tell by the by the time he has stopped that the limit that his vehicles is turned off for we can tell how many stops has been done. So, like that's, that's a huge selling point. That we're not ringing drivers constantly going saying where are you going next? What's your next drop? So that will be my internal and then externally will be our ability to respond fast to change such as COVID. Or on also the new introduction for (Customer name). I mean, with COVID we literally changed the model of the business within the first month because we had to we lost a lot of drivers, not the full model. But we did, we changed a lot. We closed off sections of the business here to not have to segregate staff. And then also with (Customer name), I mean, it's so changing, it's all evolving. And that's what we're doing on Monday, has more than likely changed on Friday, and we've just adapted.

I: The HR strategy supports the overall business strategy, yes or no and discuss

P: Well, the business is solely reliant on the workforce without an effective HR strategy, to hire to maintain, to keep staff, we cannot fulfil our contractual obligations. So, without a plan in place of how you're meeting these contracts, and who are we putting into these vehicles, we have no job and have lost our contracts.

I: Other companies could study what the company does replicated and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts on this.

P: You could say yes, because it's not brain science, what we're doing. And it is a simple model that we work off and other people have set it up. But they've not succeeded. So, there's some ingredients definitely that we have in this company that made it so successful, that another company could copy and not get it, I suppose. So, I've like a few different topics. So, the first one is our is the MD, and he's in the business so long he's got great contacts and great relationships with our customers. For any

contracts, he is the first point of call, and yeah, without him I suppose he wouldn't have succeeded. This company wouldn't have succeeded. This second will be our long-term staff that know the business so well. And they've been with the MD for over 10 years. They know the business very well. their relationships with customers stand the test of time even through contract renewals, tenders' issues with deliveries, you know, that they fight our corner, I suppose to their staff, because they have such a good relationship they will fight our corner to when it comes to contract renewal time and I said to relationship with suppliers, I said they understand the importance of keeping the fleet on the road. There are long term costs, our suppliers have also they know, they can't leave us to fail our deliveries. And I just said the relationship with our staff. I said each department whether it's finance Ops, or HR, and the knowledge is supposed within this company, and even for somebody that's new coming in, and there's such a base of long-term staff that everyone is brought up to speed very, very quickly. So yeah, I think they're kind of ingredients that made us successful.

I: Okay. And just touching on that point. What I see is that you started off saying yes, and another company could replicate it. But then there's other factors which your suggesting cannot exactly be replicated

P: their model to do homework to do deliveries. Okay. So, you know, there's other companies, there's other truck companies out there that will set up and do temperature control deliveries. So, the model is, is repeated all over. But whether it's success, or it stays as a small two truck company, to what we are is the difference, I would think.

I: The business would face a competitive disadvantage if there was not a HR strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts on this.

P: Well, if there's no goal or target to work towards a in HR strategy, then there's nothing, I suppose. But yeah, if there's no goal, or if there's no target to work towards, and nobody knows what our plan is for the year or for the quarter. So, the HR strategy will tell us what our aims are for the year of where you want to be. And what our staff retention, we plan on being, whether we plan on promotions or within maybe the industry. Yeah, so also, I suppose if we know what's coming down the line, we can be prepared for. Like if there's an increase in work contracts, and there's an increase in hiring, or we promote internally. So, I suppose you will be working. If something might happen until the third quarter, you're working on that from the first quarter preparing, maybe an internal promotion, or preparing a staff member to take on more responsibilities for when the time comes. So, they're not swamped at work? And so, if we didn't know, we're probably not right.

I: I suppose in terms of recruitment, training, development, if there was, if that wasn't built into the HR strategy, do you think the company would be at a disadvantage? Or do you think that it would be worked out as you as you went?

P: And no, as I said, in one of the previous questions regarding training, like I mean, that was an issue here, that the level of training wasn't up to speed, and also, wasn't it? Not generic, but across the board, everyone has the same and I think that's something we all like here that everyone gets the same level of training. So, nobody is shocked by something or not one person knows more than the other, everyone should know the same. So yeah, definitely, if we didn't have staff trained up and correctly, it's a massive, massive disadvantage for accidents, issues on sites for customers and staff retention, because it's not trained correctly. And also, insurance for any incidents or accidents. Same on staff, I saw staff development as saying that you'll be planning on getting them retrained or moving on through the ranks or, yeah, and in terms of promotion, the driver to a driver supervisor or driver trainer and things like that.

I: HR practices should be different, or the same for all groups within an organisation. So just discuss your thoughts on that.

P: I think the same, okay, I was leaning towards different I don't know. And I believe everyone should be treated the same. But I did say each department needs to be treated differently. So, whether it's finance operations, driver's hr or whatever, that in each department, they're treated the same. But I suppose when you have 100 staff, and somebody sees somebody else be treated differently, the HR practices that they're allowed to do. So just say, for instance, if we allow, because I work from home, but with Covid, we had to, you know, if we allowed one department to work from home and not another, so take call whatever the mix, you know, that will just leave unrest. So, I would think that everyone needs to be treated the same. I think something that we've done that across the board, that nobody gets any special privileges will be the travel policy, that it's not that well, no, you're not going to go home because obviously we have a lot of different nationalities working here. It's across the board. You're not allowed to leave, you must quarantine we're following government guidelines. So, these are practices and policies and procedures have been put in place and they're for everybody. And I think if it was seen to be lax to a certain department, it would leave. Yeah, if it got out to everybody else. It would leave a bad taste in people's mouths and I don't I think with that, then they lose a little bit of respect or they might not be as helpful the next time or Yeah, they just don't feel appreciated as much as they think why can somebody else get this and we can't. So, I've given you two different but the same, I think the HR practices should be the same. Okay, for each department or for each group within the organisation,

I: and would you feel the same about HR practices in terms of training and reward?

P: Yes. You would you think it should be the same, of course.

Participant Number 6

I: Select your occupational category. A) senior manager/director, B) middle manager/supervisor, C) team leader or D) non-managerial

P: D, non-managerial.

I: How many years' experience do you have in the transport or logistics sector?

P: Five to 10

I: How many years have you been employed in this current organisation?

P: Just over five.

I: Do you believe that the HR strategy is a source of competitive advantage to this company? And please explain the reason for your answer.

P: Yes, I do. I do think that HR strategies is a source of competitive advantage for us. Because HR looks after the people in an organisation and the people are one of the biggest assets I think, for this company, considering like, the services we provide, and they're tailored to specific customers, you need the right people in the role and HR plays a big part of that.

I: What key HR areas specifically contribute to the competitive advantage of the business.

P: I'd say there's two big ones, one would be recruitment, you need the right people in the right role. And then I'd say another one would be the policies and procedures that are that are created or that are managed or rejigged over time, they're the biggest things for us.

I: If I asked you to describe what the competitive advantage of the business was, in its entirety, what would you say?

P: I would say the biggest competitive advantage would probably be maybe the services we provide, as in, they're tailored to specific customers, and the fact that we can deliver, like different types of projects, I'd say we're unique in that way. And I would say, then, the I think the staff as well would be a big competitive advantage because of the services we offer. And they're so unique and tailored, that you need to have good people in the role in order to talk to customers and communicate their needs. And I'd say that's kind of part and parcel of the services and the people.

I: Do you think that the company culture of the business act as a source of competitive advantage? Yes, or no, please explain the reason for your answer.

P: I'd say yes, I'd say because the company culture in any company is unique to the company itself. And I'd say that, in this one, it is a big source of competitive advantage, because it's motivating. There're open door policies, there's nobody's afraid to share their ideas, and to communicate with all levels of management. There're no barriers within the company. The staff are more like a family in a sense. And I think that works well. And it is a source of competitive advantage that for me, it's like everyone's ideas are listened too, things can be discussed and there's no fear. And I think the business works better for us, and we can provide better service that ways that keeps everybody happy too. I think a happy staff is a productive staff.

I: The company culture is affected by the HR strategy, yes or no and discuss?

P: I would say yes. Because HR, it is all about recruiting people and a company culture. You have to be I suppose, selective in what people you recruit for what role? Will the people fit in with the culture of the company? And will they adhere to the culture? Will they improve the culture? Will they will they fit in will they work? I know probably sounds a bit I don't know, terrible, but I think so. Yeah, because recruitment and HR is how people come into the company and it can either work against a culture or for a culture, or improve a culture. So, I do, I do think it is effective because culture is unique to a company, that culture comes from the top down, but it's the people that kind of enhance or make culture.

I: HR represents the interests of both management and employees in equal measure, and discuss the reason for your answer.

P: I would say in theory, yes, I'd say you need good policies, good procedures, proper, good company culture of adherence to said, policies and procedures for both to be represented in equal measure. And I think with the right person in a HR role that can work with the right policies, procedures, and I'd say that in theory, yes, that would work. Maybe if a hr structure or policies and procedures and stuff aren't developed or aren't there, then I would say, well, maybe there's room for hr not to represent both in equal measure. But I think when it's done properly, with the right person, yeah, I'd say they do they do represent both in equal measure.

I: The role of HR is to support line managers and supervisors in the management of their teams. Yes, or no and discuss the reasons for your answer.

P: I would say yes. Because HR deals with a lot of stuff let's say disciplinaries, or recruitment with, with maybe some personal issues, I think it takes that away from the manager. So, it takes kind of maybe

the more personal aspects of the job away from the manager. So, when you're dealing with your managers, you're dealing with work, you're dealing with purely business kind of thing. And I think it separates the two roles, you can go to HR, for kind of your maybe some personal stuff or, they can deal with the bad kind of things. And it takes that away from the manager. So, I think that is good and stops things getting too personal with managers. And so, I would say it's a good support for a management of a team in that way. If you can manage more effectively, when that kind of stuff is dealt with by a HR individual.

I: The level of trust between managers and employees impacts upon the success or failure of new practices, policies and procedures, yes or no and discuss,
P: I'd say trust is a big thing, because many policies and procedures can be introduced, but if your managers aren't adhering to them, then you don't trust they're going to enforce the more or follow them themselves, you're kind of less likely to follow the policies to impact you. Because you say, Well, why bother? So, I would say if you trust your manager, and there's a good relationship there and new things are introduced, you're, you're not going to be a barrier to it, you're going to try your best to conform or are trying to follow procedures and practices. But if the trust isn't there, I think it's a huge, a huge barrier to work and or it might take longer to work, if that makes sense.

I: The competitive advantage of a firm is internal or external to the company.
P: I'd say in this case, it's internal because I think it comes from the people. I think we offer a service. They're tailored, they're designed there, we deal with the customers here in the office, the drivers then perform the service. So, I would I would say it's internal in that way because it's to do with people. If that makes sense, or external elements can affect our competitive advantage. What I say it's mostly driven from our internal aspects.

I: The HR strategy supports the overall business strategy, yes or no? and discuss.
P: I would say yes, because if a business wants to go in a certain direction, it needs to have the right people to push it forward, or to make it happen. So, I'd say, again, HR policies, procedures, the way things are done recruitment, it's huge in selecting the right people and maybe motivating individuals and company to adhere to a strategy or to work harder to be more productive. So, I do think they link up, because you can have all the best ideas in the world. But if you're not motivated your staff, you're not recruiting the right people. If you don't have proper processes and procedures in place to business strategy, I don't think work without a HR strategy, I do think they align, or quite nicely. Okay.

I: Other companies could study what this company does replicated and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts on those.
P: I'm sure they could look at how we operate, what procedures we have, how we follow them. But again, I think, a culture is hard to replicate if that's if that's what the question is kind of get no, you can't, a culture is unique to a company, it's from the top down. It's driven by your management by the people in an organisation, I don't think you can represent or replicate a culture. But you can slowly change a business by studying this company, if that makes sense. But you won't get the exact same result. Well, over time, you could achieve something similar. But, again, with the right people with the right practices policies. You will get something similar but the same replicated exactly, I don't think so. If that if that kind of makes sense. The culture you won't replicate.

I: The business would face a competitive disadvantage, if there was not a HR strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts on this?
P: I would say yeah, because we need some, drivers they're a hard thing to get. Recruitment is a

constant thing. If you don't want to be wasting time, going, recruiting people that aren't going to stay that are just going to it's going to cause time and money. And that's, that's a disadvantage. So, you do need a proper HR strategy. How am I going to get drivers in? How am I going to replace people that leave? How am I going to do it that its cost effective, that's fast, they're the right people in the role. Like, it is a disadvantage for without one. Because without the people we can't perform services, and of course, the company under too much pressure, then, and then people in the office then get frustrated if they don't have the resources, the people resources to perform services for their customers, and it's not good. You can't grow that way.

I: HR practices should be different or the same for all groups within an organisation and discuss. I'd say they have to do the same.
P: I don't, from my point of view, I don't see why they should be different, maybe, different parts don't apply to certain people based on your role. But I think in general, they should be like a solid set of practices that everyone adheres to. Yeah, like, I don't see why they would be different than it's kind of more selective than this affects you. But this, this is okay for you. But it's not okay for you. I think that might lead to more problems than then solutions, but maybe things don't apply because of your role. But I do think they should be more geared towards everybody not different, but the same, if that, if that makes sense.

I: And would you feel that areas like training rewards, all of those should be the same across the board? They should be applied in the same manner than across the board?
P: That's a hard one. Because I don't I don't know, rewards. I do think everyone should be rewarded, if that makes sense. But again, that is a hard one I actually, rules to follow, yeah, it should be the same, rewards, I don't I actually know on that. Maybe a transparent reward system. Maybe that's good. Everybody knows everyone's rewarded. But then again, I don't know if somebody works exceptionally hard and is above and beyond. And they get rewarded for it. I do think that's right as well. Should that be everybody's business? I don't know. Probably not. So that is a tricky one. But maybe, maybe there should be some sort of rules, but it should be different, if that makes sense. some clarity at a management level as opposed to, I don't know. That's a tricky one. That's a good question.

Participant Number 7
I: First question, just select your occupational category. A) Senior Manager, director, B) middle manager, supervisor, C) team leader or D, non-managerial?

P: It's the first one Senior Management Director.

I: Okay. How many years' experience do you have in transport or logistics?

P: 30 Plus

I: And have you been employed in the organisation the same length of time

P: Yes.

I: Do you believe the HR strategy is a source of competitive advantage to this company and explain the reason for your answer?

P: I definitely believe having a HR department within the company has already benefited the company to now. Prior to making a decision to bring in HR, I didn't realise at the time the advantage it would have by having a HR structure in place. What I believe that HR has done, it's actually kept the management team and the staff all aligned with each other by good communication, but also guiding the management and in difficult situations. And keep them in check of company legislation regarding the HR process.

I: What key HR areas specifically contribute to the competitive advantage of the business?

P: I think it's a communication that has real win here to keep staff updated on the business strategy of the company. And also, I suppose, good communication between the management and the staff. HR in its own right has bridged that gap. While I feel that HR give a true and fair representation of the employee, but also, they represent the company when dealing with the employee.

I: If I asked you to describe the competitive advantage of the business in its entirety, what would you say?

P: I think there's that what gives us the advantage in in being competitive is I suppose the structures that we have in place. Right down to having the proper resources in the proper departments with the proper accreditations which gives our customers and potentially new customers a level of comfort of how we conduct our business day to day.

I: Do you think the company culture of this business act as a source of competitive advantage? And please explain the reason for your answer

P: Absolutely. I think the culture has to be right. For all staff members. And when the culture is right, it feeds down to the people that are on the ground, day to day, who represent us as being ambassadors not only for us, but for our customers.

I: The company culture is affected by the HR strategy, yes or no and discuss the reason.

P: Absolutely, it's a vital part of this as far as I'm concerned. Again, it's a little bit open communication with the staff members, internally and externally, I think the HR has a huge role to play in that. Since we have HR in the business, we started with weekly newsletters or monthly newsletters, employee of the month. We have incentive schemes there, which was never there before. And all of this would not have come about if we didn't invest and enhance, our HR department

I: HR represents the interests of both management and employees in equal measure, yes or no and discuss the reason for your answer.

P: Yes, absolutely. Going back to my earlier points, since having an HR department, we believe that everybody has been represented in a fair manner. And issues, disputes, discrepancies are all dealt sufficiently timely manner and through investigation.

I: The role of HR is to support line managers and supervisors and the management of their teams 100%.

P: It's, it's basically not only supporting but advising line managers on their teams of what they can and can't do within their parameters.

I: The competitive advantage of a firm is internal or external to the company.

P: The competitive advantage of the firm is internally or externally? Absolutely internally.

I: Why do you think that is?

P: I think it has to stem from senior management right down to all the employees, that there is a culture that is set in stone that everybody feels part of something that we're trying to create, that they feel that their valued and once you have that culture embedded, that helps the business externally with customers and solving support.

I: The level of trust between managers and employees' impact upon the success or failure of new practices, policies or procedures? Yes or no and discuss your thoughts.

P: I think it does. Yeah. I think this is where the HR department plays a pivotal role in us by helping the company and implementing new processes that will only help benefit, both company management and employees as is the best practice.

I: Do you think that employees are less likely to go along with new practices, policies and procedures, if there's an element of distrust they're towards their manager?

P: Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah. Like nobody likes change. And I think it's how that changes are brought about the buy in from everybody and the reasons why that change is coming about. It's important to explain that to employees. And I think that's the role that HR would help. In that change, communicating by talking to having any concerns that staff might have and dealing with them.

I: The HR strategy supports the overall business strategy. Discuss your thoughts,

P: I think absolutely, it does contribute to the overall strategy. I think that having a good HR manager department is pivotal that, when they're sitting down with senior management, they can freely give their advice. Maybe cultural change and maybe expansions or whatever. And what the implications might be from a HR perspective. And knowing I suppose the availability of resources, what the markets doing. So, I think having HR in a management meeting, helping with the strategy of the overall company is vital.

I: Other companies could study what this company does replicated and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts on it.

P: I think that statement is quite true. I think companies have, and continue to, to aspire to have, I suppose, a lot of what we have in place, especially in the industry we're in. There's a lot of companies I know that wouldn't have HR managers or HR departments in place. And they're at a disadvantage. By not having that, as the culture of the industry is starting to change, and employees, I think, embrace the HR side of things. Now more than ever.

I: Do you think that say, for example, another company did want to replicate what you were doing, that they could look at what you do? And consider all the elements, reward, culture training? Do you think it would be easy for them to replicate it? Or do you think that they would be not so sure about what makes it successful?

P: I don't think to be sure. I don't think they'd be sure. Yeah. They would probably sound bite, what we're trying to do here, and try to replicate in some way. But I think, no, they probably wouldn't achieve it as we are doing it a while now. So, I suppose probably slightly ahead of some companies in the industry on that regard.

I: The business would face a competitive disadvantage if there was not a HR strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts

P: as well, that's why I went and made that decision A number of years ago to get the HR side but into the business. I think it certainly does. When we are recruiting when we are filling I suppose areas different areas of the business. I think having HR is a huge advantage, I talk about inductions, I talk about contracts, I talk about all the accreditations that HR are involved in what I think it gives to new employee, some reassurance, that they are coming into a company that is well organized. On maybe puts them a bit more at ease to accept a new role within the company.

I: HR practices should be different or the same for all groups within an organisation.

P: HR practices should be all the same

I: And would you say that is true for areas like training, rewards, retention practices, development etc

P: 100% I think the policies of HR departments should replicate, be carbon copied, represent everybody, no matter what role they have within a company. They should be all treated equally. And I think you can't have a set of policies for different employees in different areas. I think the goal has to be the same ethos, same drive to get the best out of everybody in your organisation.

Participant Number 8
I: Select your occupational category is it A) senior manager, Director B), middle manager, supervisor, C) team leader? Or D) Non-managerial?

P: A, B, C and D

I: How many years' experience? Do you have in the transporter logistics sector?

P: 20 Plus

I: And is that the same amount of time that you've been employed in the organisation?

P: Yes.

I: Do you believe that HR strategy is a source of competitive advantage to this company? And please explain the reason for your answer.

P: Yes. Mainly around workforce planning, reward recognition, training, development, retention, and the culture of the business.

I: And what key HR areas specifically contribute to the competitive advantage of the business?

P: I'd say mainly, culture. And then secondly, retention.

I: How so?

P: We want to retain our key workers. And obviously, there's a lot of things that go around that to retain them being the training and development, rewards, good pay, recognition of their work. And I think once you have all of these in place, it'll also tie into the culture, that's within the business, how to keep personal.

I: If I asked you to describe what the competitive advantage of the business was in its entirety, what would you say?

P: Okay, I told a lot about this. And I would say, I'm looking back obviously, as I said, pre-pandemic, over the years, even working under the stewardship of (founder), (director), and so on. I would say its culture.

I: And would you say that completely describes the competitive advantage? Or would you say there is more areas, even areas that you might not necessarily be able to put your finger on?

P: Yeah, I would say there's other areas in there that seemed competitive advantage. And obviously, when I was looking at this as well, I was putting ourselves in, obviously, the medium sized bracket, okay, so does the big guys as you know, like to (competitor), the (competitor), and the (competitor), and a business like ours can't compete with those big guys. Then you've got ourselves along the lines of the (competitor), (competitor), (competitor), and so on. So, I think that, you know, throughout, our decades in operation, we've made serious improvements whether it be on the likes of the recruitment process in the first place, and picking the right people to work for us, the training and development and, obviously, then, you know, leading to retention and trying to keep the churn down. And then I was again, looking at this, I thinking, the airport hopper came in as a new line on the business and that's when we started to seriously see a difference in the workforce, the difference in the churn rate. Because, again, it's nearly a specialised driver that comes in and works on the service on the schedule service. That's when you're in competition with the big guys.

I: Do you think that the company culture of the business act as a source of competitive advantage, and please explain the reason for your answer?

P: Again, I'd say yes to this. I think this goes down to values, and a sense of sort of ownership with staff, and the opportunities for progression within the business. And obviously, again, we've seen things change over the last few decades or generations, you know, you don't tend to retain staff for a long period of time. So, you, you basically accept that and you know that you are going to get people two to three years, you know, and hopefully they've progressed in that period of time, and they've used this company as a portal to move on in their own career.

I: The company culture is affected by the HR strategy. Yes or no and discuss the reason for your answer.

P: Again, I'd say yes to this. And mainly, I suppose, looking at recruitment to start off with because, again, you're looking at improving your recruitment process, you're hiring the right people with the right values that meet the company. And so, it's down to the selection process, because again, if you just go out and recruit anyone, you're going to have a load of misfits in the business, and they are

going to cause you headaches. And then Making sure that you're developing those team members and constant training.

I: HR represents the interests of both management and employees in equal measure, yes or no and discuss the reason for your answer.

P: This one was a little bit of a tough one for me. Because you know, I've been working close, me personally with HR constantly, you'd like to say yes, you definitely would want to say yes, and you'd like to see that your company is being portrayed, as, you know, fair between management and employees. There's an element of a no as well. And a lot of that can be down to obviously, maybe disciplinary issues, or, you know, individual cases that you're working on, but I'm going to say 99%, or towards the high 90s. Yes. Like, HR is there to support both the employees and the management, and supervisors. HR, is obviously how, you know, very heavily supporting management on one side when it comes to, a maybe talent management, progression and succession. But on the other hand, with the employees, you know, around the policies and procedures, and training and development and so on.

I: And just a follow up question, I suppose, do you think it should be equal?

P: It should in an ideal world. Yeah. But you know, again, as I said, there's a heavy that even when you're looking at your business plan, or HR strategy and how they link together, it's very, very top level. So, again, yes, I'd love to be able to say yes. But there will always be cases in the business, or in any organisation, where HR are going to work maybe a little bit more favourably on the management side. If you had a massive big HR team, and they had HR executives versus HR director and manager. Yes, the lower level of the department is going to be working in favour of the employees, and the top level of the department will definitely be more towards board level.

I: The role of HR is to support line managers and supervisors in the management of their teams, yes or no and discuss the reasons.

P: Again, I had yes on this. And a lot of the answers are requested as the above question, okay. But then, the main thing I have in here extra that was this was really identifying the keepers within the business, and then working on succession. Working on number twos for the managers, making sure you're retaining obviously, your key personnel as well.

I: I suppose just following up on that question. Do you believe that HR should support line managers and supervisors in the management of their teams? Or do you believe that it should be more HR managing the teams?

P: No, I think the managers, the supervisors should be capable to manage your own teams with the support of HR. Because otherwise, I've had my own experiences, I find that it's going to be pushed to HR or there would nearly be a norm set in business or in a department to say, Well, okay, that's your problem.

I: The level of trust between managers and employees impacts upon the success or failure of new practices, policies, our procedures, yes or no and discuss the reason for your answer.

P: Yes. The main thing I was looking at here was even when I was looking at my own masters, and I was working on organisational behaviour, and we looked at the I can't remember the model for

change. Where you basically unfreeze, change and refreeze. And that's what I was thinking of when I was reading this question here.

I: And how do you think it impacts

P: To implement any change you need that support and trust. So, I'm just going to read the question again, the level of trust between the managers and the employees impacts upon success or failure to practice policy and procedures, and if there is no trust between your management and your employees, you're not going to be able to successfully implement any type of change, whether it be around new practices or policies or procedures. So, has to be top level down.

I: The competitive advantage of a firm is internal or external to the company.

P: So, I've struggled with this a little bit now, to be honest, which I think it's both to be honest, you know, internally within your own, you know, teams and how they talk about a business that they're working for. And they're going to promote themselves if it's a good business with good values, good culture, and externally, from a customer point of view, or from your supplier point of view are different stakeholders. Again, it's reputation on the business, it's the goodwill that's behind the business based on, on how it treats people.

I: The whole HR strategy supports the overall business strategy, yes, or no and discuss

P: Yes, 100%. The HR Strategy ties into the overall business strategy. Can't put any business plan together without having the input from your HR strategy around your workforce planning type people, they need to be able to grow the company and promote the company.

I: Other companies could study what the company does replicated and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts on this.

P: Yeah, this is a good one, isn't it? Because if that was so easy to do, why would we not all be doing it? You know, and I definitely think it depends on the industry. You know, if you look at maybe some of the higher the companies the PayPal's, the eBay's of this world, it probably easier to copy a model and just, you know, implemented within a business. And, but if you look at an industry like our own, I think there is too much competition, to be able to just say, Okay, I'm going to take, I don't know, we're going to take (competitor) model, and we're going to try and implement it, I think the culture within all these transport business is completely different, you know, yourself, even from working logistics versus passenger transport, it's completely different. And, as I said, if it was that easy to do, when we are just be buying an overall package of a suit that somebody is selling, and then try and implement it, it's very easy, as you know, to be able to copy policies and procedures and stuff like that. But I think maybe that's probably as far as it goes.

I: In terms of culture, if you think another company was looking at your culture, would they be able to identify all the areas? Or would there be some ambiguity around what exactly was in your culture

P: There is certain things that they could try and copy and implement, you know, how you motivate your team or team building days or, you know, outings and that sort of the social aspect of it all. But I don't know if you'd be able to copy you know, that sort of sense where your team members sort of take ownership in their roles, take ownership in our business, they want the company to try and grow.

I think it's I think even now, I'm going into the future, it's going to be a lot harder, because you've got that generation who don't stay that long in businesses as well.

I: The business would face a competitive disadvantage, if there was not a HR strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts

P: So, I think we always use the term of firefighting. And I think that just basically sums it up. You're going to have a load of problem children within your business and misfits that you're going to have to manage. And it's going to consume time and it's going to cost a company because it's concerned and time, you're going to end on the WRC is another thing, and then you're going to have a serious churn within your team.

I: HR practices should be different or the same for all groups within an organisation.

P: I think they should be the same. And I just made a note here to focus on both the needs of the organisation and the ones of the employees.

I: But I suppose would you think that your practices and how you manage people in terms of training and recruitment development would be the same for driver's office staff management team?

P: No, I don't think so. I think there is different levels there. And even different motivational levels with different teams. Some people want to come in like a driver, and they just want to drive their bus and get on. They don't even want to really engage in a serious amount of development. And you'll always find a few that will. And so, I think it's trying to establish the right framework on how to manage people with different areas within the business.

I: So, in your view, it should be different?

P: Yes, yeah, it would be here.

Participant Number 9
I: Select your occupation category. A senior manager, director, B, middle manager, supervisor, C team leader, or D, non-managerial,

P: A

I: How many years' experience do you have in the transport or logistics sector?

P: D 10 to 20

I: And have you been employed in the organisation the same length of time?

P: Yeah.

I: Do you believe the HR strategy is a source of competitive advantage to this company? And please explain the reason for your answer.

P: And I suppose, yes, I would think that we have a competitive advantage, maybe not in the current environment. But prior to COVID, I would think that, you know, people would have been attracted to working here, based on the structure, and the fact that they were treated pretty well. And I think that stems from a good HR strategy, getting them in making sure they're trained properly and reviewing it then on a continuous basis. So yeah, I will, I would think it is an advantage.

I: What key HR areas specifically contribute to the competitive advantage of this business.

P: So, I suppose we have an emphasis on people management and an open-door policy. And I think that lends itself to people enjoying working here. And then it creates loyalty and a good length of service. And we would have a lot of people working here for a long time, like, you know, longer than five years, which isn't that I suppose common in the transport industry. And then I suppose we treat our people well, we were we treat them with respect. And we value everyone's contribution, which is important across the board. Because, you know, without the drivers, we don't have jobs in the office without someone preparing the timesheets on the payroll, they don't get paid properly, you know, so everyone has a role to play. And it's a kind of key link to the next departments. So yeah, I would I think it's important.

I: If I asked you to describe what the competitive advantage of the business was in its entirety, what would you say?

P: And so, I've made a couple of notes. And I'd say, I'd like to think that the way we treat people would set us apart from others, and give us a competitive advantage. Salaries aren't everything. Like while they are important, obviously, I think, you know, we do treat people well, in terms of making sure they have a clean truck, that they're paid on time, that they have a safe working environment, that their hours are managed, that, you know, safety is paramount and key. But if you know there's, when they do their walk around checks if something is logged as faulty, that it's addressed straightaway. And I think all those things mean a lot to drivers, they may not look like something very valuable on paper. But I think a lot of drivers, you know, when they are motivated by what salary they take home, those things are very important to them, like clean trucks, and you know, things like that are key to them. So yeah, I would say that, that has contributed.

I: Just a follow up question on that. Would you say that you could accurately describe all aspects of the competitive advantage of the business? Or would you say that some of it is slightly ambiguous?

P: Yeah, I would, yeah, it's hard to put an it's like, like, I come from a finance background. So, it's like when you see a balance sheet and goodwill on the balance sheet, there's a value on that, but you can't touch it, you can't explain it properly. You know, it's like reputation. And so, it is ambiguous, but you do know what's there.

I: Do you think that the company culture of this business act as a source of competitive advantage, and please explain the reason for your answer?

P: Yeah, I do. I do. Like I said, already. You know, we treat people well. You know, we are a bit like a dysfunctional family. I suppose in here. It's a family run business so people are treated as part of the family. And the culture is very important. You know, it's like, it's very important when we're recruiting for any role that, you know, if you're like, most people have the same qualifications on paper and on their CVS. And it's about bringing people in and sussing them out personality wise as to whether they

will fit culture wise, we're not a team of people who go in for big job titles, or any of that sort of thing. It's more important that you can get stuck in and help if someone is busy. And that's the culture we have here. And it's, you know, it's very, it's very obvious very quickly, if you don't fit.

I: The company culture is affected by the HR strategy, yes or no? And just discuss your thoughts.

P: Yeah, it is. Absolutely it is. You know, we've had a couple of rough years here in terms of HR strategy, it's gone from when I started working here, first, we didn't have a HR department. And then we had a very good operations manager who kind of looked after the HR side of things, and was very good at people management and getting the best out of people. And after she left, we replaced her with a HR person, and she put structure and, you know, processes in place and procedures, and it was, you know, it was very beneficial. And then, you know, recently, more recently, you joined the team. And I think you have built on the foundations of that, and have promoted a culture of equality and value across the board, which I think is really important.

I: HR represents the interests of both management and employees in equal measure, just discuss your thoughts.

P: Yeah, I think that is a very true statement. And I don't think there's any point in having a HR department that only represents the benefit, or the wellbeing of the company, because they are the liaison between management and staff. So, they need to have the best of both worlds, you know, they need to be looking out for, you know, the good of both. Yeah. And I think those employees, especially staff, who are maybe not on the senior management team, need to have confidence in the HR department that, you know, if there's something that they feel aggrieved with, that they'll fight their case, and that they can talk openly about it, and that it's listened to, and that, you know, it's action to then as well, that it's not just a conversation is hard. And that's it. I don't see the value in an HR department that only works for the benefit of the company.

I: The role of how HR is to support line managers and supervisors and the management of their teams. Discuss your thoughts on that.

P: I think that's true. But I think it's an area that maybe in here that some line managers and supervisors don't understand what HR actually is. I think they think that HR is there to manage the problems for them, and not to advise them how to manage the problems themselves. But I think that's an industry thing, though, you know, I think that, you know, some of them will say that's, that's HRs problem. Need to tell HR both, instead of saying, well, maybe I should ask HR, how we deal with this, you know? And it's not that they won't do it, it's just that they're afraid to do it. And then sometimes you'd be you'd prefer if they were more afraid, and then proceeding with what they think is best, you know. But yeah, I think it's, I think that's the way HR is it's a support. And that's what I would see it as being like when I have to manage my team. And I would be steered by what you would say, but I wouldn't expect you to, to address something if there was an issue.

I: The level of trust between managers and employees' impact upon the success or failure of new practices, policies or procedures. Discuss your thoughts.

P: Yeah, it does. Absolutely. But it impacts the success of the business. Not to mind practices, policies or procedures, you know, you expect them to row in with what the SOPs are, or if there's an issue to

draw your attention to it, because, you know, the procedures and policies, aren't there just for fun, you know, they're there to protect everybody.

I: And I suppose, what do you think would be the impact of lower levels of trust between managers and employees on new practices, policies or procedures? And

P: well, I suppose, from employees to management is that, you know, if they if we've introduced new policies and procedures, they would question why. And they maybe don't trust it, if it's not explained properly. Communication is key in that sort of a situation, you know, if you can explain to somebody exactly what the purpose is for this new procedure, or policy, and come at it from their level and explained the knock on effects to their day to day life, they'll take it on board much quicker than if you just implement it, get them to sign a sheet to say they've read about it and say, yeah, Grand, you know. From a management to employee, I think that, you know, if you don't trust that they're going to follow the procedures that you've put in, then you haven't communicated properly. I kind of think that every problem is a management problem, you know. So, if there's an issue, it's that you haven't explained it properly, or taken the time.

I: The competitive advantage of a firm is internal or external to the company. just discuss your thoughts.

P: I think it's both. I think it's both internal and external, like where we are at a moment, like we don't have a competitive advantage in the industry in terms of attracting, new drivers, but it's a nationwide problem. And but that's not to say that our internal, and we wouldn't have an internal competitive advantage in that we treat people well, we have a good strategy, we have a good culture, that that would attract them if we had the monetary side of it as well. I think it would be, you know, so the external factors are going against us in that instance. But, you know, we just need to bridge the gap with the customers to attract the right stuff. But I definitely think it's both internal and external.

I: The HR strategy supports the overall business strategy, yes or no, and just discussed the reason?

P: Yeah, it does, it does. Because I suppose the business strategy is to, to expand and to, to cover the new work that we, you know, we tender for new contracts, the HR side comes in straight afterwards on awarding of a contract to make sure you're fully staffed, that you have the right resources in place. So, you know, the HR strategy has to roll in and support the business strategy. If they're not on the same page, then you're at nothing.

I: Other companies could study what this company does replicate it and get the same results. Discuss your thoughts?

P: I don't know. I mean, potentially, they could. But I think that the culture comes from the top down. And other companies would need the same sort of management with the same sort of attitudes. And I'm not necessarily sure that you can, you can get that, I think the culture here, it has come from, you know, a number of years' experience as opposed to just something somebody thought of on a Monday morning and said, right, that's going to be our culture from now on you know, I mean, I've worked here since, you know, I've been here 12 years. And I, it's not any different today than it was when I started 12 years ago, it was still about knowing people's names, knowing how many kids they had, you know, asking those questions like, how's the small fella? How's he getting on with the football? Like

I've seen [Managing Director], say that to people, you know, like, the culture is no different, we might have a much bigger team. But it's the exact same as the day I started.

I: The business would face a competitive disadvantage, if there was not a HR strategy in place. Discuss your thoughts?

P: Yeah, it would? Absolutely. I think the HR strategy is most important, because without it, there's no structure. And I dread to think what actions could be taken by operations, if there wasn't some sort of structure, or there wasn't a HR department that you'd have to explain yourself to, you know, if you've blown a gasket at somebody for, you know, forgetting something, or whatever, and they're more mindful, I suppose, of doing things the right way, and not just doing things the quickest way, when there is a, you know, a respected HR department in situ. So yeah, I do think that it would be a serious disadvantage, if we didn't have it.

I: HR practices should be different, or the same for all groups within an organisation.

P: Yeah, I think they should be the same. I think everybody should be treated the same. And there are times obviously, when you'd need to tailor a conversation, or plans or whatever to based on who or what the group that you're dealing with, in terms of like, maybe English may not be someone's first language, you may not, you know, deal with them the same way as you would deal with somebody who speaks fluent English. But the, the approach should be the same, or the treatment should be the same for everybody. And, like, there's nobody, just anything here, like everybody's job is as important as the next. Like, we're all cogs in the same wheel. So, the HR policies and procedures shouldn't be any different for one and not the other, you know? Well, I think it is the same for everybody.

I: And do you think it should be the same in terms of training, development, rewards?

P: Yeah, yeah, I mean, training maybe would be slightly different. Because, you know, there's, you know, elements of training on the driving side, and the product knowledge and all that sort of thing that the drivers would need to know would be far different to what the office staff would need to know. And, of course, I mean, you'd still expect someone to get the same level of training, regardless what job they're doing, you know, and reward should be the same to you know, I mean, I don't see, I don't see those people in an office should be rewarded differently to people on the road, you know, and I guess there's there is practicalities involved in that too, in that, sometimes we would do like an night out, but it would be office staff only. And the reason for that is that we've tried it before on a number of occasions, and we've extended the invite to everybody. And they all say they will go and half of them show up. Which is very disappointing, because you've booked something and paid for something on the basis that they're all going to show up, and then it doesn't happen. And so, I think to kind of bridge that gap, because we would do a night out now and its just office staff would go, but it means that the drivers are rewarded in different way. They have a scorecard that they get, you know, a voucher every quarter for the best driver on both sides, and then in cork as well. And, you know, there's an employee of the month available for drivers. The office staff don't have that, but you know, they, they're treated in different ways. You know, [MD] would get lunch for everybody. We have a barbecue. And so yeah, like there are some differences, but largely, I would say they should be treated the same.

Appendix 6 Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Study

Investigating whether HR Strategy can lend itself to the Competitive Advantage of a Company operating with the Transport and Logistics industry in Ireland

Consent to take part in research

- I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without consequences of any kind.

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

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study

- I understand that participation involves completing a 20-30-minute semi-structured interview with the researcher which will be audio recorded and transcribed.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from this research

- I agree to my interview being audio recorded

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted within the dissertation being submitted to NCI by the researcher

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities. They will discuss this with me first but may be required to report it with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on a password protected and encrypted digital device owned by the researcher. The data will only be accessible by the researcher and stored until after their degree has

been confirmed. A transcript of the interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this.

- I understand that under freedom of information legislation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

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Lecturer Human Resource Management

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_____ _____

Signature of Participant   Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher   Date