

**An exploration of the effect of devolution on
Human Resource Management**

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for
BA Hons in Human Resource Management**

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Declaration:

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of BA Hons in Human Resource Management, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed:.....*Brian Daly*.....

Date:.....*26 - July - 2007*.....

Acknowledgements:

I wish to express my thanks to my family Laura, Graham and Eimear for being so supportive over the last year. You are the best.

This is dedicated to my son Ian who inspired me while he was with us and continues to inspire me every day. Your memory lives on forever.

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Chapter One...Introduction

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This dissertation seeks to explore how the techniques used in Human Resource Management [HRM] have changed in recent years. It will review the changes that have happened in HRM over the last 10 years. It will review the theory as put forward by the acknowledged experts in the field and will review how the theory has been implemented over time and compare it with the organisation I am studying with particular emphasis on resolving the objectives I have set out in this chapter.

It will look at the development of HRM within a large manufacturing organisation, the role devolution has played in that development and what benefits it can bring to the organisation.

1.1 My objectives

1. To determine what has been the driving force behind HRM change.
2. To investigate the effect HRM change has had on the organisation [HR department, management of employees and on the employees].

Chapter 2 will explore the theories put forward by the acknowledged experts in the field. There is an abundance of theory on this subject and I propose to show how this theory has developed over time. I will talk about the strength of competition in the organisation's industry. This will allow a sense of the unique competitive pressures that are present in the environment it operates in.

Chapter 3 will outline the methodology I followed in completing my research. I will give an outline and explanation of the research methods I used including Qualitative and Quantitative sampling and explain why I chose them. I will provide a profile of the respondents to my surveys and the reasons why I chose them.

Chapter 4 analyses the results of my research. Here I will be looking for trends and patterns to emerge so I can gauge what stage the organisation is at in the HRM change

process. This data will form an important part of developing my hypotheses and will help link the different strands of the dissertation together.

Chapter 5 consists of my conclusions based on the information I have gathered and how it ties in with the theory. I will put forward some recommendations that may benefit the organisation. I would hope to be able to make recommendations to any organisation that is contemplating streamlining it's HR function. I will also outline what areas I would concentrate more on if completing a similar dissertation in the future.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

Chapter 2 – Literature review

2.1 Literature

In this section I want to explore the literature about how HR brings value to an organisation and how that focus has changed from People Management to Human Resource Management. I will briefly explain the difference between People Management and HRM and will outline some of the key terms involved.

People management is concerned with the regulation of the employment contract in pursuit of organisational goals. However employers and employees will debate about those goals and how they are obtained. Torrington and Hall (1987) describe people management as a process that allows employers and employees to agree on objectives and how they will reach those objectives. So it is primarily concerned with '*the regulation of the employment relationship*' Legge (1995).

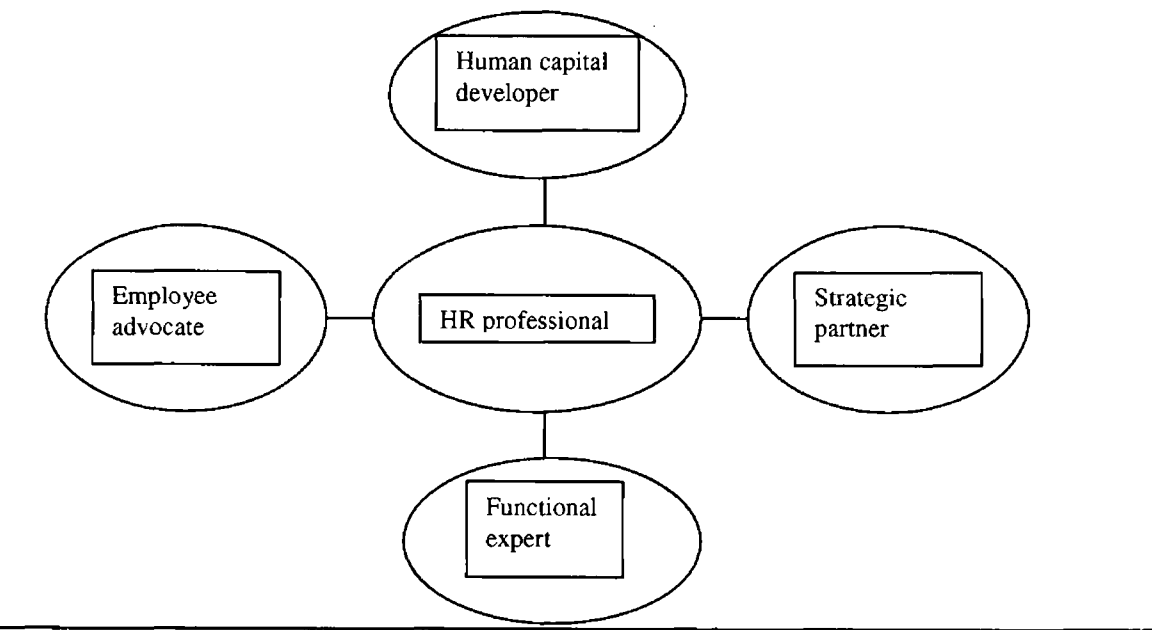
Human Resource Management is the successor of people management and is concerned with ensuring HR issues are considered when an organisation is completing its strategic plans. It looks at the management of a company's most valued assets, its human resources, so that there is a mutual benefit to the employees and the organisation. It assumes that employees want to improve their knowledge to complete tasks and that the organisation can provide training to fill that gap. Therefore HRM is focused on '*the interplay between people, tasks and the organisation*' so that maximum value is gained for all parties. (Brewster and Holt-Larsen, 2000 p2). In doing this HRM will enhance its status by contributing significantly to the objectives and goals of an organisation (Tyson, 1987). '*The ultimate test of an HR organisation is the extent to which it serves customers, investors, Line managers, and employees.*' (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005. p198)

So HR departments that are People Management focused are concerned primarily with the management of the organisation's human resources and deal with issues as they arise. An HR department that has a Human Resource Management focus will be looking at opportunities to become involved in strategic decision making and ensuring that there is mutual benefit for the organisation and its human resource assets.

Devolution is the entrustment of some Human Resource Management [HRM] activities to people managers. Brewster and Larsen define it as '*...the allocation to line managers of responsibilities or tasks formerly undertaken by the personnel specialists*' (Brewster and Larsen, 2000, p.196). So in effect it is the allocation of authority to line managers to deal with these tasks. The tasks are operational or transactional in nature and involve, but are not limited to, such responsibilities as appraisals, disciplinary procedures, absence tracking, reward and recognition schemes, training and development, communications and team building. It is important to note that while tasks like these have been allocated to line managers the strategic decision making and HR planning remains with the HR specialists (Ulrich, 1998). It is suggested that the role of HR personnel is now more professional and less administrative (Hall and Torrington (1998). They go on to say that the HR role is now more of a consultant and advisor due to the devolution of the administrative tasks. This in turn allows HR the opportunity to add value to the organisation by it's interventions.

Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) talk about HRM having five major roles. They are shown in figure 2.1.

Fig 2.1



Employee advocate

This role requires the HR professional to act on the employees behalf when dealing with issues. It involves listening to the employee's issues and having compassion with them while at the same time guiding the employee to a successful resolution that will satisfy both them and their manager. This role is very important in ensuring that employees remain motivated as they are a very important asset in any organisation. The HR professional will also represent the employee interest during negotiations on realignment of resources whether that is a reduction in workforce or an increase due to expansion. Similarly they will monitor the internal environment in which the business is conducted to ensure fairness and equity to all employees and ensure no group is excluded. This is particularly important in the early part of the 21st century when there are many diverse groups and nationalities in every organisation. This particular role plays a very important part in showing how HR adds significant value to the organisation by helping to create a motivated workforce that is not only productive but quality focused which in turn directly affects its customers.

Human Capital Developer

Ulrich and Brockbank p.206 refer to human capital development as focusing on the '*wealth created through and by people in the organisation.*' This involves aligning the human resource skills of the organisation with future opportunities. Where those skills do not exist then HR will offer opportunities for employees to develop them. It also involves ensuring team dynamics are best utilised to achieve desired results. In this role the HR professional will act as a mentor to employees and managers to ensure continuous development. This adds value to the organisation thereby making it attractive to investors.

Functional Expert

This aspect of being an HR professional involves being competent in the skills required of the HR profession. It involves using the knowledge the profession has gained over time and using it to resolve HR related issues. These can be as simple as

using the organisations intranet to upload HR solutions that all employees can access. It could also involve guiding senior management on the best decisions to take when reviewing HR issues such as succession planning. The depth of knowledge required to be an expert in all areas of HR is too great for one individual. Ulrich and Brockbank recommend that the HR professional specialise in one area so they can properly deal with any concerns that arise or at least know where to go to research answers.

Strategic Partner

The strategic partner element of the HR professional allows them generate strategies in conjunction with management that creates value for the organisation. It involves them being business literate and aware of current and future industry trends so resources can be aligned to maximise return to the organisation. The strategic partner role involves being able to coordinate the different elements of the plan and project manage them to a successful conclusion. Their expertise in human resources and organisational development ensures they can guide decisions in the right direction.

2.2 Devolution

As Hall and Torrington pointed out in order for HRM to be able to concentrate on high value duties it needs to divest itself of the transactional duties. It looks at devolution as a way to do this. Devolution of Human Resource Management was first talked about in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Guest suggested '*If HRM is to be taken seriously, personnel managers must give it away.*' (Guest 1987, p. 51). By this Guest was implying that HRM needed to become more involved in making business decisions right from the strategic planning stages. This would ensure that HRM issues were taken into account when initial plans were being formed and help prevent these issues from arising at a later stage when they might be more complex to resolve. To free up their time to do this they needed to allocate responsibility for routine tasks to other departments. This point was also expressed by Cunningham and Hyman, 1999 who suggested that HR professionals needed to free up their time so they could become involved in strategic business decisions. Ulrich, 1997 talks about HRM being in

partnership with line managers as human resource champions that help create value and deliver results. By giving line managers responsibility for routine HR tasks this will again allow the HR professional to free up their time to concentrate on roles that will involve them in more strategic decision making.

Ulrich also suggests that HR needs to develop its role as not only a strategic partner in the organisation but as a business partner. He defines business partner as:-

*'Business Partner = Strategic Partner + Administrative Expert + Employee
Champion + Change Agent.'*

(Ulrich 1997, p. 37).

In parallel with this move to devolve transactional tasks to line managers organisations were also looking for ways to maximise their efficiency and create a competitive advantage in the way they operate (Gunnigle et al., 2002). Over recent years the focus has turned on internal operations to see how value added they are. Companies reviewed their approaches to managing their Human Resources [HR] as a way to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Jackson and Schuler, 2000).

The key here is that the organisation reviews its HR management as a way to gain a competitive advantage. This should be the principal reason for the review and the aim to achieve superior performance through the knowledge and actions of its employees must be foremost in all decisions.

'The quality of the human or intellectual capital possessed by organisations is seen generally as the key factor in differentiating them from their rivals and achieving superior results.' (Armstrong and Brown, 2001)

There has been a lack of clarity about the way the devolution of HR has happened and how both the HR and line manager roles have changed. Storey (1992) notes this and points out that in some cases the reduction in headcount in the HR department was seen

to happen due to a more strategic role being envisaged for HR while in other cases it was taken purely to cut costs with minimum thought given to the effect on the department.

So as part of the review of their department HR needs to show how it adds value to the organisation to justify its costs and show how they contribute to the overall profitability of the organisation. The contribution of the HR department to profitability comes from:

- Improving productivity
- Improving quality of work life
- Increasing the firms legal compliance
- Gaining competitive advantage
- Assuring workforce flexibility

(Schuler and Huber 1993)

‘Nirvana for the HR profession must therefore be evidence of a demonstrable and causal link between people management and organisational performance.’ (Pilbeam & Corbridge, 2002)

2.3 Organisational Change

The changing nature of competitive strategies such as customisation of products and services, reduced product cycle time so organisations get new products to market faster all have implications for the HR department (Gunnigle et al. 1997). This has led to much discussion on the merits or demerits of moving responsibility for dealing with people management issues away from the HR department to line managers (Hall and Torrington 1998; Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; Renwick, 2003). It makes sense to allow the person responsible for day to day management of employees, their line manager, deal with people management issues that arise. Line managers are critical players in implementing new initiatives and generating new behaviours and attitudes [Ulrich 1997]. Many theorists have pointed out that regular contact with employees allows managers to control and reward them and also allows effective implementation of HR policies.

Brewster and Soderstrom (1994), Downie and Coates (1995), Storey (1995), Limerick (1992).

2.3.1 Effect of Devolution

Sisson and Storey (2000,P219) talk about how the devolution of HR responsibilities to line managers allows the following:

- Decisions to be made that suit local situations
- These decisions can be made more quickly
- Shortens the lines of communication
- Problems are solved at a lower level.
- Line managers become more responsible.
- Managers become more aware of HR issues in each area
- Improves the efficiency of the system resulting in cost savings.
- Frees HR professionals to pursue more strategic roles

This shows how devolution has contributed to not only cost savings but also how it has allowed HR professionals the freedom to pursue more strategic, value added roles.

There is a need for line managers to be involved in implementing particular HR practices as put forward by **Guest and King (2001)**. They suggest that good people management is as much about developing a good relationship with your staff as it is about implementation of relevant HR policies. The thinking behind this is that the manager has built up a direct relationship with their employees that facilitate an understanding of the history behind any HRM issues that may arise and makes them best able to resolve them. (Sisson and Storey, 2000).

When considering the devolution of tasks to line managers as a means to free up their time for more value added duties the HR professional needs to be aware of the pitfalls involved. Issues may arise if the line manager's HRM knowledge is insufficient to consistently apply policy fairly across the whole team they are responsible for (Hutchinson & Wood 1995). Moreover line managers may adopt differing approaches to

solving similar HR issues, leading to a split in the application of HR policy. This in turn can cause confusion between different departments of an organisation.

Managers need to be aware of the synergy between human, financial, and physical resources and be aware it is a necessary precondition for the success of the organisation. (Brewster and Holt-Larsen, 2000). This would suggest that for HR professionals to do a good job they are required to have a general knowledge of how the business runs overall so they can align resources and plan to upskill or acquire the necessary skills that will be required in the future.

In their application of HR policies line managers may be seen to favour certain employees who are contributing well to area output. This can create friction in the team. It is also important to note that HR tasks are being given to line managers in addition to their other tasks so they place the HR tasks low on their list of priorities as they concentrate on area output and other metrics which are measured by their manager and therefore get a lot of focus (Brewster and Holt-Larsen, 2000).

There is an important point to note about responsibility for more tasks being given to individuals. They will pick out the tasks that they are more comfortable with and this may differ from person to person depending on the person's strengths. The other tasks will receive a lower priority on the person's to-do list. Gennard and Kelly 1997 talk about line managers tending to avoid the less pleasant aspects of people management i.e. disciplinary procedures; issue resolution; regular appraisals. Given the typical manager workload they will not give HR as much priority as their other tasks unless HR is a metric they are measured on. Also they will not be able to keep up to date with the latest HR thinking resulting in outdated HR methods. One example is their tendency to increase staff at times of high workload and reduce staff at times of low workload rather than thinking of alternative solutions (short time working, alternative working arrangements) or of the long term implications of both tactics (e.g. cost of training). (Brewster et al, 1996).

Hutchinson and Wood, 1995 found that when devolution had occurred some line managers were not competent to carry out HR roles due to a combination of a lack of

time and insufficient training. It was found that in Norway and the UK in excess of 33% of managers were trained in HR tasks, yet these two countries have some of the lowest devolution rates in the study. In contrast it was found that in Denmark, which has a high devolution rate amongst its managers, they were given little training in HR tasks. The most likely explanation for this anomaly is that managers who have a talent for dealing successfully with HR issues in the workplace learn from each issue and go on to make a more successful impact in that area of their job. In effect success breeds success. It follows that, in this situation, managers who are successful in taking on HR tasks will continue to do so as their career progresses. While a manager who is less able to deal with HR tasks and is not given the training required to correct this will gravitate out of the role to a more technical job resulting in the majority of managers being successful.

2.3.2 HR as part of a line managers role

While these are important potential issues for the HR department to monitor it is significant to note that Brewster and Holt-Larsen (2000) go on to outline reasons why HR should be part of the line managers role.

1. Cost centered or profit centered approach.

As the cost of employees is one of the biggest costs to an organisation it makes sense to give the responsibility to the person responsible for managing them, the line manager.

2. Need for a comprehensive approach to HRM.

This is best accomplished by unifying responsibilities under the employees direct manager as they motivate and interact more than HR with the employee.

3. Growing influence of the service sector.

Here the focus is on making the customer feel comfortable with their decisions. So prompt timing of the HR intervention is required. This is best exercised by the employee's manager.

4. Real time decisions

Allocation of tasks, performance appraisals, staffing levels etc are all decisions that need to be made real time to prevent delay in the process.

5. Change in philosophy and organisation structures.

As organisations become flatter in spans of control, cost structures become more transparent. These costs need to be justified and HRM needs to justify its costs. So it devolves some of its work out to Line managers.

(Brewster and Holt-Larsen, 2000).

When discussing the impact employees have on customers Ulrich and Brockbank say '*Loyalty comes from relationships, and relationships come from personal care*' (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005 p. 202). So in order to gain the loyalty of our employees we need to manage them and nurture the manager: employee relationship as it has a direct effect on our customers. By their manager being the first point of contact for HR questions and being able to resolve some of these issues it can only help the relationship. Employees who feel appreciated and are motivated by their manager become more engaged in quality output. The outcome of this is that it becomes vital that managers are competent when dealing with their devolved HR tasks.

Ulrich and Brockbank go on to talk about the effect Organisational Development [OD] can have. They explain OD as referring to '*...change interventions at the organisation and team levels*'. These interventions allow the organisation to change their training and development interventions so they focus on the metrics required then and in the future which in turn will maximise productivity. They feel that the training of managers in HR is crucial to this.

2.4 Issues for a devolved HR department

There would seem to be a need for the HR department to remain in control of certain tasks so that there is consistent application of centralised solutions across all areas of an organisation.

Without a central HR department, control on metrics like recruitment, training, employee reviews, pay there are likely to be many different solutions that are '*more appropriate to local situations*'. (Brewster and Holt-Larsen, 2000).

Brewster and Holt-Larsen also talk about the need for HRM to maintain control of devolution. When devolving HR tasks care needs to be taken that the process is managed correctly by the HR department to ensure fair application of policies with all groups in the organisation. Policies need to be developed to prevent a '*policy vacuum*' where managers have nothing to refer to and so end up going back to the HR department to get the required information. (Brewster and Holt-Larsen, 2000 p208).

Support must be available to line managers so their concerns are resolved and any learnings that result must be made available to all managers.

'A decentralised managing of personnel issues will lead to different kinds of solutions.' (Brewster and Holt-Larsen, 2000, p.205).

Pilbeam & Corbridge talk about HR being a business partner 1st and HR 2nd. This emphasises the need to be seen to add value to the org by supporting business objectives through effective human resource planning.

'The HR business partner must ensure that HR policies and processes are characterised by effective administration, fairness and equity, compliance with the law and effective practice..... but in order to add real value, it is argued, the HR business partner is expected to appreciate and understand corporate strategy, identify with the objectives of their managerial colleagues and contribute to the optimisation of people performance, and thereby organisational performance.' (Pilbeam & Corbridge, 2002)

Hiltrop, Despres, and Sparrow (1995) point out that devolution could be a threat to HR and may result in line managers taking over more and more responsibility for the role. However it is also noted that the HR role has become more complex and the knowledge required to administer HR policy effectively is beyond that of line managers. Also if HR professionals become involved as business partners and are seen to add value then their role is assured.

Guest and Barron (2000) published findings from their research that show organisations can gain a competitive advantage by remaining up to date with people management practices. Yet their study found that only 10% of the chief executives they interviewed prioritised people management ahead of finance or marketing. This suggests that organisations are not fully aware of the positive impact that approved HRM practices can have on an organisations bottom line.

Areas where it was felt it was key to interact with were:-

- Use of psychometric tests for selection
- Well developed induction training
- Provision of ongoing training for experienced employees
- Profit related bonuses
- Provision of information on the organisation's business plan and targets
- Harmonised holiday entitlement

To coordinate these policies and ensure they remain upto date will need central planning through the HR department.

2.5 Tools that facilitate devolution

E-HR is one of the components that aid the devolution of HR. The components that go to make up e-HR according to Pilbeam and Corbridge (2002) are the use of the company intranet, e-mail, the internet and the use of business level HR specialists to facilitate HR activity across the organisation. An HR intranet is a series of computers linked to a central database similar to the internet. The data on this central database is only accessible from within the organisation. It allows employees to access basic level information on some or all of the following topics:-

- HR policies and procedures
- Employee HR self service
- Health and Safety information
- Grievance procedures
- Compensation and benefits,
- Payroll and pensions

- Promotion opportunities,
- Training

This can then be updated centrally to ensure it remains up to date. It also reduces the requirement for frontline HR personnel interaction, thus freeing them up for use on the more value added advisory and strategic matters /concerns / roles.

More comprehensive access for managers is allowed to a people management section which may contain links to various management training courses, requests for relevant reports, checklists for dealing with various situations including appraisals, pay reviews and disciplinary procedures. This is termed 'disintermediation', Pilbeam and Corbridge (2002, p.43) whereby there is no personal intermediary occurs between the information and it's recipient.

When an issue cannot be resolved by reference to the on line facilities it can be escalated to an HR specialist through the intranet. These specialists can advise on more complex PM issues like disciplinary procedures, employment law and compensation and benefits disputes.

This system has proved to be a success in reducing the number of low level queries that HR departments get while also standardising the process across all departments for dealing with these concerns.

When reducing HR headcount it is more important to note the number of HR specialists in the HR team compared to administrative staff. Specialists are afforded higher credibility in the organisation as they tend to be more highly educated (Tyson and Wikander, 1994).The more specialists in the team the more influence they can bring to bear on line manager practice and the need or otherwise for devolution so they can be freed up to work on more strategic HR initiatives.

Reilly (2000) mentions the downside of E-HR and says that HR may lose the opportunity to take the pulse of the organisation through lack of communication with employees.

After reviewing the theorists two hypotheses emerge.

1. That HRM policies increase the level of devolution in an organisation.
2. Those employees left in a devolved HR department will need to have specialist skills and knowledge to ensure the organisation remains compliant.

I think Pilbeam and Corbridge summed up the changes in HR very well,

'Line managers have always undertaken the management of Human Resources, but they now may be doing more of it; the personnel practitioner has always had to have a business orientation, but perhaps it is sharper now; the personnel professional has always had to be aware of strategy, perhaps there is now a greater emphasis on this.'

'Pilbeam and Corbridge [2002]

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 – Research methodology

The chapter provides a detailed discussion of the research carried out for this thesis.

Section 3.1 reintroduces the objectives of the thesis.

Section 3.2 discusses appropriate research methods for a study of this kind.

Section 3.3 discusses the choice of particular research method that I used and why.

Section 3.4 describes in detail the research method employed in this study.

Section 3.5 describes the limitations in the methods chosen

3.1 Research Objectives

This research attempts to answer the following questions.

1. To determine what has been the driving force behind any HRM change.
2. To investigate the effect HRM change has had on the organisation [HR department, management of employees and on the employees].

My research takes place in a large manufacturing organisation and as such will reflect the vision, culture and aspirations of that org. It will be interesting to see how the results compare with theory and what impact this has had on the HR department and those involved in devolution.

To maintain the confidentiality of all parties involved in my research I am calling the organisation involved in my research LINET Corp. It is a multinational company that is operating in Ireland since 1989. Figures for 2007 show that the company employs over 4000 people in Ireland and over 90,000 people worldwide. The company manufactures advanced technological solutions for business and home digital appliances. It is seen as a market leader in the industry and produces approximately 80% of the industry output. Ireland is one of two European manufacturing sites that between them contribute 20% of this output (www.i.cmpnet.com). However the organisation's operating margins have been put under pressure since the turn of the decade as one of its main

competitors developed a more advanced product that allowed it's customers a technological lead. Over the last number of years the claim for technological leadership has see-sawed between the two companies. This focus has led to a twin approach of needing to create a lean organisation that can develop ideas and bring them to market with minimum delay but also do this with minimum cost so the end user benefits from not only leading edge technological advances but also at a reduced cost to them.

Since 2006 LINET has been restructuring its operations in an effort to gain efficiencies in all areas. This included cutting its worldwide workforce numbers by 10%. This reduction had a significant impact on LINET's Human Resources department in Ireland. The company had a HR: Employee ratio of 1:30 two years ago. It is now 1:53 which compares favourably with industry benchmarks. However these industry ratios depend considerably on the types of systems that are in place to automate the transactional tasks mentioned earlier. So benchmarks are not a true reflection of the health of the dept.

'The HR department provides a greater level of support than similar companies who might only provide support for high risk issues.'

HR Generalist manager

As the Ireland site HR director said *'We were lagging behind other companies in the industry until we took these measures to bring the site back in line.'*

3.2 Appropriate Research methods

In order to answer the research objectives mentioned in Section 3.1 I have used both primary and secondary data. Primary data is data that I generated myself through quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Quantitative data is any data gathering technique that creates or uses numerical data while Qualitative data is any data gathering technique that creates non-numerical data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). Secondary data is data that has already been collected by organisations and is available for reuse.

The primary research is guided by the typical Organisation Development (OD) data-collection feedback cycle which involves planning to collect data, collecting data, analysis of data, feeding back data and follow up as depicted in figure below Fig 3.1

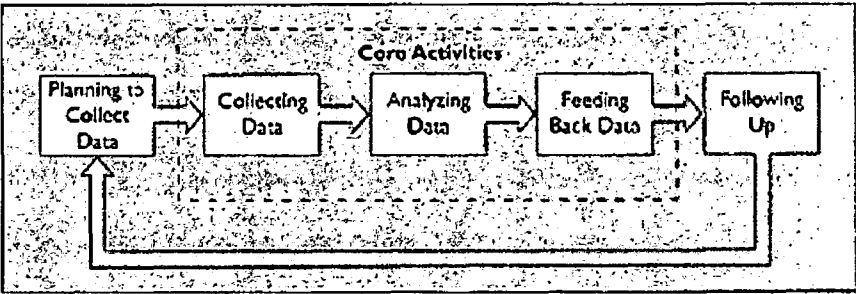


Figure 3.1: Data-Collection Feedback Cycle

(Ref:Cummings & Worley,2004)

There are a number of direct techniques available to collect data i.e. questionnaires, Interviews, Observations and Unobtrusive observations. Each has their own distinct advantages and disadvantages. See Figure 3.2 below.

METHOD	MAJOR ADVANTAGES	MAJOR POTENTIAL PROBLEMS
Questionnaires	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Responses can be quantified and easily summarized 2. Easy to use with large samples 3. Relatively inexpensive 4. Can obtain large volume of data 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nonempathy 2. Predetermined questions/missing issues 3. Overinterpretation of data 4. Response bias
Interviews	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adaptive—allows data collection on a range of possible subjects 2. Source of "rich" data 3. Empathic 4. Process of interviewing can build rapport 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expense 2. Bias in interviewer responses 3. Coding and interpretation difficulties 4. Self-report bias
Observations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collects data on behavior, rather than reports of behavior 2. Real time, not retrospective 3. Adaptive 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coding and interpretation difficulties 2. Sampling inconsistencies 3. Observer bias and questionable reliability 4. Expense
Unobtrusive measures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Nonreactive—no response bias 2. High face validity 3. Easily quantified 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access and retrieval difficulties 2. Validity concerns 3. Coding and interpretation difficulties

Figure 3.2: Data Collection Techniques

(Ref:Cummings & Worley,2004)

3.2.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are an efficient way of collecting quantitative data. They contain fixed-response questions that enquire into the aspect of the research topic. Using IT systems they can be easily administered to samples of the organisation and as the responses are fixed i.e. limited degrees of freedom, the data can be easily quantified and evaluated using appropriate software i.e. spreadsheet programs or statistical packages. For the questionnaires used in this thesis I used the website www.surveymonkey.com. This allowed easy editing and reediting of the questions and efficient distribution of the questionnaire and collection of responses.

However, questionnaires have a number of disadvantages. The responses are fixed-responses which means that additional information is left unrecorded. For example in the questionnaire I used, I asked the respondents who was responsible for training in the company and gave the options of the HR department, Managers or Both. I also provided a comments section for this question. A number of respondents used the comments section to reply that the training department was responsible. This would seem to suggest that they feel the Training department is not part of HR. In an interview situation I would be able to clarify this point with them and explore what areas they felt made up the HR department. Yet in the two line manager interviews I conducted they both seemed clear that HR was made up of more than just the people they interacted with when dealing with grievance and disciplinary issues.

Another disadvantage is people may answer in a way that is acceptable to the culture of the organisation rather than risk bringing focus on themselves. So where a company places great emphasis on quality, a question on the importance of quality in the organisation may receive a more positive response than is reflective of the attitudes in the work area. Questionnaires also tend to be impersonal and thus do not provide an opportunity for the researcher to read between the lines, where in a lot of cases there can be a lot of useful information. Finally, the effectiveness of the questionnaire depends highly on its construction. When creating the questionnaire the researcher needs to develop it in such a way that the respondent completely understands what is being asked, so choice of words and structure of sentences is very important.

3.2.2 Interviews

Interviews, both individual and group, are probably the most widely used data gathering technique (Cummings & Worley, 2004; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). The interviewer asks the interviewee direct questions that are designed to provide information about the aspect of the organisation being studied.

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured. According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2004, semi structured interviews are those where structured questions are in place but if an interesting theme emerges then it is followed to conclusion. Interviews provide qualitative information which is both an advantage and disadvantage, on the plus side qualitative data is easy to interpret and analyse and does not require the use of complicated numeric methods, on the minus side the interpretation and questioning can be subject to the interviewer's perceptual bias. So care needs to be taken that the results are a true reflection of what was said at the interview. Other disadvantages are that it is expensive as it consumes a lot of time for both the interviewer and interviewee. The skills of the interviewer are important in order to overcome the limitations of the interview technique. They need to remain neutral when conducting the interview and later when analysing the results.

3.2.3 Observations

Observations can be a very direct way of gathering information that reflects a persons real feeling on the subject. For instance if you are cognitive of opinions expressed during casual conversations with members of the group you are sampling, an accurate picture can be built up over time of feelings in the group on a particular subject. This is due to people feeling relaxed talking about the subject and their true feelings being expressed. When doing this care must be taken to engage people who express differing opinions so a balanced result is achieved. The sampling regime needs to be constructed in such a way that it collects enough data on all aspects and levels of the organisational attributes or behaviours under investigation.

3.2.3 Unobtrusive observations

Unobtrusive observations are a secondary data collection technique where company records are collected and analysed. They provide a relative objective view of the organisation and can be useful for analysis of all levels of the organisation i.e. organisational, group and individual level.

Unobtrusive observations are a useful method that can readily augment other methods e.g. absenteeism and labour turnover can be very quickly assessed from company record and both give a strong indication of organisation climate.

3.3 Choosing a Relevant Method of Research

For this dissertation I chose to use both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys. I felt that by conducting the interviews before the surveys it would allow me to focus on particular areas of interest that came out in the discussions. Also it would be interesting to see if the information gained from both methods correlated. On the 7th June I contacted the HR Director and suggested that I conduct two interviews with HR and two interviews with line managers and then conduct a survey of 35 employees. These 35 employees would be made up from a mix of HR personnel, line managers and shift employees. After discussion it was agreed that I would conduct two simultaneous HR interviews with the Human Resource Director and the Human Resource Generalist manager. I would also conduct two line manager interviews. I would also send out a survey to five HR personnel, eleven line managers and twenty two employees. The surveys for HR, line managers and employees were different.

3.4 Detailed Description of research methods

3.4.1 Interview

I conducted four semi-structured interviews. Two with HR. One was with the Human Resource Director and one with the Human Resource Generalist manager. Due to

time constraints in the HR department these interviews took place simultaneously. The interview time was 35 minutes and the interviewees preferred not to be recorded.

The other two interviews were conducted with line managers. Again these managers preferred not to be recorded. Due to time pressures on other managers I could not conduct any more line manager interviews. These interviews represented 20% of the HR sample population and 7% of the line manager population. The interviews were carried out before the questionnaires were created. This allowed me to design the questions based on the themes that came out in the interviews.

On the 10th June I held my two line manager interviews. One line manager is with the company seven years and the second line manager is with the company fourteen years. Both worked as maintenance technicians with the company prior to becoming managers. For the interviews I used the list of questions listed in Appendix 1. However as all interviews I conducted were semi-structured, not all the questions were asked. I found that I was able to gain more information by following the themes that emerged during the interviews.

I conducted the two HR interviews with the HR Director and the Human Resource Generalist [HRG] manager on 20th June. The HR Director is working in HR with the company for 11 years and she has a vast experience of Human Resource practices. The HRG manager is working in HR for 17 years and has held HR positions in both unionised and non unionised companies in both the public and private sectors. The questions I proposed to use are listed in appendix 2. As these were also semi-structured interviews not all the questions were asked.

3.4.2 Questionnaires

I analysed results from my line manager interviews and then constructed a survey on the 12th June using Survey Monkey.com to be sent out to the 11 line managers. I reviewed the questions with two line managers. Both agreed that the questions were clear and unambiguous. Based on their feedback I changed the answer section of question eight which had a matrix answer. So if you chose one option for part of your answer you could not use that option again later in your answer. I was able to change this so respondents could answer as required. I also added in a thank you note at the end when

people had completed the survey. The survey was sent out on 16th June. The survey questions are listed in appendix 3.

I constructed the employee survey on 12th June using Survey Monkey.com. I read through the survey with an employee and asked for feedback on clarity and purpose of the survey. The employee felt the survey was clear and that the objectives were understandable. I then sent the survey out to twenty two employees on the 16th June. A copy of the employee survey is in appendix 4.

The HR survey was constructed using Survey Monkey.com on 20th June after my interviews with the HR Director and the HRG manager. I used the information gained in the interview to construct the questions. The survey was sent out to five HR employees on 20th June. A copy of the HR survey is in appendix 5.

All the questionnaires were developed with the recipients in mind. They were designed to see if the respondents felt there was a change in their role or the HR support they received. I was also attempting to find out what their reaction to any change was as outlined in my objectives.

The first few questions on each survey were designed to relax the respondent prior to sourcing information. The line manager questionnaire was composed of nineteen questions, the Human Resource survey was composed of fourteen questions and the employee survey had sixteen questions.

I approached managers and asked them to nominate employees from their department to take part in the surveys. This prevented any bias on my part as to whom I chose. The participants all agreed to take part in the study. The line manager questionnaire was sent to 11 people. This represents 30% of the line manager population in the company and the response rate was 64% [7 responses]. The employee questionnaire was sent to 22 manufacturing employees. This represents 5% of the manufacturing employee population and the response rate was 77% [17 responses]. The HR questionnaire was sent to 5 HRGs. This represents 60% of the HRG employees. There was a 100% response rate [5 replies].

3.5 Limitations

For this research topic I found access to information difficult to come by due to the sensitive nature of the organisations business and the need to keep operational metrics within the confines of the organisation.

The general limitations to my research were related to the current environment in the organisation. Due to the restructuring in 2006 peoples roles have changed and they have to make better use of the resources available to them. This has meant a change in the mindset of the people involved and is still being worked through at the time of this research. I therefore found that people were time constrained as they adjusted to the new methods of carrying out their job.

There were also other issues getting my research data. Some of the people I surveyed in the manufacturing environment thought the survey was part of the current cost saving initiatives and that the data would be used to initiate headcount reduction in their department. Once the reason for the survey was explained the respondents were happy to partake.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the heavy workload on individuals I found it difficult to get people to agree to interviews. As stated in my objectives I wanted to gauge the effect of any HR change on those most affected and hence that was why I chose these respondents.

I also noticed that there was a need for me to gain the trust of the people I wanted to question. There was a lot of apprehension about some of the questions I was asking as they made the respondents question their management techniques e.g. 'How often do you meet with your employees to review their performance'. This was particularly so as it was a question I was asking of my peers and some perceived it as questioning their ability.

The final limitation I encountered was my skills as an interviewer and survey designer. Some of the questionnaire questions were not as simple as they could have been and required some qualification from the first version. Also my ability to document all the discussion during the interviews was quite weak and would defiantly need to improve for future investigations.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four – Analysis of Results

This chapter reviews the results of my research for this dissertation. The aim of the research was to measure the effect on the organisation of changes in the provision of HR services.

The two line managers I interviewed are working with the organisation for 7 years and 14 years respectively. The Human resource managers I interviewed have worked in HR for between 11 years and 17 years respectively. As a result of this they all felt comfortable expressing their opinion about the topics we spoke on as they could speak from past experience.

I explained about the changing focus of the HR department over the last number of years from People Management to Human Resource Management and the role devolution has played in that. The interviewees all felt that devolution of HR tasks had already happened in their departments. The conversations quickly moved on to the effect that devolution had on line managers and on the Human Resource department.

The HR interviewees agreed that the HR role had become more complex over the last ten years and is now seen as a business. While it is a big part of the role still, the HR department has moved on from sourcing, training and retaining people to ensuring that the company remains compliant with legislation.

‘The department is still focused on employee wellbeing, but a huge part of the job is keeping the company compliant with current legislation’

HR director

‘Managers have authority to deal with HR issues in their areas upto a certain level. For high risk decisions HR will get involved.’

HR Director

‘ Our company is a showcase with respect to Human Resource practices in Ireland and worldwide’

HR Director

I found that the HR changes in LINET mirrors theory and the industry in that all the department members are upskilled and not only aware of the need to add value to the organisation but also aware of how they are going to achieve that. It came out in the research that the remodelling of HR in the organisation came about as a result of assessing where savings could be made without compromising the service HR offered for high risk issues. This would support both hypotheses outlined in Chapter 2 that,

1. HRM policies increase the level of devolution in an organisation
2. A devolved HR department will need skilled personnel to ensure the organisation remains legally compliant.

The result of the recent restructuring was the streamlining of the department in an endeavour to gain efficiencies. This mirrors the Europe wide effort to improve HR productivity and devolve some of their authority to line managers and give them more responsibility for resolving HR issues in their teams and therefore reduce their dependence on the HR department (Brewster and Holt-Larsen, 2000). However they also point out that HRM is the catalyst that ensures line managers are successful in the managing of their teams.

One section that was closed in the restructuring of the HR department was the employee support centre where employees could ask for advice on HR issues. This was replaced by a web site where employees can ask their questions. The questions are then directed to an expert in that area. This has proved to be a great saving and mirrors the direction taken by other organisations. However there was a feeling among employees and managers that it was more difficult to get answers because they were not meeting face to face with HR. Over 82% of respondents to the employee survey were happy about how HR information was made available. However there were two notable

comments about HR interaction from employees with over 10 years experience in the organisation,

'It has become less personal'

Employee

'Simplify the process'

Employee

In essence any HR department needs to be run as a business that must justify its reason for existence. It needs to ensure that HR matters are part of all organisational strategies and objectives.(Brewster & Holt-Larsen, 200).

Part of the reason for devolution is cost pressures as outlined previously. With tasks being assigned to line managers it leaves less work for the HR department to complete. So a corresponding reduction in headcount occurs. However this cost saving needs to be weighed up against the potential cost if a line manager makes an incorrect decision resulting in increased costs, lost productivity or even legal action. This point was emphasised greatly during my HR interviews and also in the HR surveys. The HR director was very adamant that not only HR, but senior management were very conscious of the need to keep the organisation legally compliant. This again emphasises hypothesis two that the realigned HR department contains highly skilled employees. This requirement permeates all conversations and decisions made on the site. So no matter what cost savings are talked about as part of any changes in HR there is an absolute need to ensure that due diligence is not compromised in the process.

The line managers felt that they had become more involved in tasks over the last ten to twelve years such as hiring, training, regular performance appraisals, recognition, absence tracking and disciplinary procedures.

‘ I am always pushing to have members of my team trained to the next level of competence. I own that and am judged on my success in that by my manager. The training department coordinates the logistics for me.’

Line manager.

This backs up hypothesis one that HR policies have helped increase the level of devolution. So for them devolution had already happened and they were now looking at ways to improve their HR skills. They would like to have an approved method of dealing with infrequent issues on a management intranet. This would aid resolution of these issues without the need to consult HR. However there were a number of responses from managers that suggested they were unsure of how far they could go with making HR related decisions. One manager said,

‘ Resolution of HR issues takes longer now as initial drafts are supplied to HR and come back, promptly, but with inevitable changes to be made. Previously this was sorted out in one face to face meeting.’

Line manager

HR responses also tend to err on the cautious side. However he felt that if line managers are taking more of the HR role then there is a possibility that these decisions will be taken more quickly by managers. When asked about updates on new HR legislation both line managers said they had a mail from HR about legislation change which they had not read yet. This potentially could lead to the possibility that some HR updates may be missed.

When asked how much of his time was spent on HR matters one manager responded that it was approximately 60% HR and 40% operations. He went on to say that he was happy with HR matters taking up 60% of his time as he viewed himself primarily as a people manager. So some managers embrace the opportunity to manage their employees closely. This can be seen by the survey response to question 14 of the line

manager survey where 57% of respondents regularly meet with their employees every 5-8 weeks for a formal performance review. See figure 4.1

This is because it fits in with their managerial ability to strategically align their resources to achieve improved output.

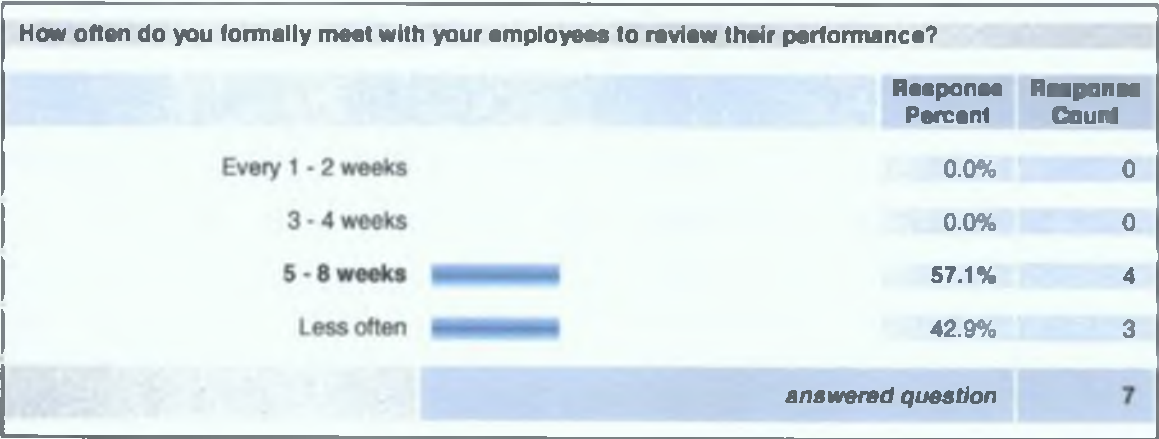


Fig 4.1

However other managers are less human resource focused and do not see the utilisation of human resources as a means to achieve improved output. This is seen by the 43% who review their performance with their employees less often. They view human resources as something to be exploited in the achievement of improved performance. While this may work in the short term it has negative long term impacts i.e. Demotivation and Labour turnover etc. This type of manager will typically not allocate time to motivate staff or deal with HR issues that may be a potential roadblock to improved performance.

When asked in the survey to prioritise six tasks [two HR and four operational] all the line managers had HR related tasks as priority one, two or three. However 57% said they were unable to complete these tasks in this order due to operational pressures. See figure 4.2.

' There is more focus on operations from managers' Line manager

Are there any barriers to you completing these tasks in the order you specified?		
answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	57.14%	4
No	42.86%	3
If you answered Yes please comment.		4
answered question		7
skipped question		0

Fig 4.2

This supports the thinking that managers will concentrate on the things that their manager deems important and this could be a potential barrier to devolution of HR tasks.

One of the themes that came out in the interviews and surveys was that it was very important that the HRGs were knowledgeable in the application of the organisation’s HR policies. This was very important so that there was consistency in approach on resolving issues and ensuring the organisation remains legally compliant. This again backs up hypothesis two. One line manager commented that if he was dealing with an experienced HRG his issues were resolved a lot quicker than if he was dealing with a relatively new HRG member. The line mangers generally felt reassured in making HR decisions once they had discussed them with an HRG. The feeling was that the learning fora conducted by HR are very valuable and that more of these would benefit managers.

The line managers felt that E-HR involving use of the company intranet and on-line policies supported the objectives of devolution well and this also backs up hypothesis one. They could get any information they needed to resolve a lot of minor HR issues and it was available 24 hours a day. The feeling was that the mangers felt more in control of their teams because they had been given more authority to deal with any matters that arose.

E-HR also received positive support from the HRG’s survey. They all agreed that it had freed up their time and that it allowed them work on more value added initiatives such as helping managers and employees. This is also backed up by 60% feeling that managers deal with more HR issues currently than they did 18 months ago.

'...keeping the business legal through providing coaching , advice and supporting employees in HR related investigations'.

HRG

Responses from the HRG survey also confirmed this with 80% of requests for support coming from E-HR sources. See figure 4.3.



Fig. 4.3

Employees also embraced E-HR initiatives. They use an E-HR process or their manager to get information on HR topics except Learning and Development and they are happy that they receive the information they need. See figure 4.4. Over 70% find this method easy to use with the exception of one respondent who commented that they found it difficult to find the exact answer to specific questions. It is also worth noting that 59% of the employees who responded had not needed to contact HR in the previous year as all the information they needed was available on the intranet. One employee who is with the organisation over 10 years commented.

'I have not needed to contact HR since starting with the company'

When looking for information on the following topics what one method do you use most often?							
	My manager	Intranet	Email HR	Ask ES	Phone HR	Other	Response Count
Policies	29.4% (5)	52.9% (9)	0.0% (0)	17.6% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	17
Forms	5.9% (1)	58.8% (10)	0.0% (0)	29.4% (5)	0.0% (0)	5.9% (1)	17
Internal job transfer	23.5% (4)	58.8% (10)	0.0% (0)	17.6% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	17
Learning and Development	58.8% (10)	23.5% (4)	0.0% (0)	17.6% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	17

Fig. 4.4

In contrast 59% of employee respondents contact their manager when they are looking for information on Learning and Development. The employee survey shows that there is little E-HR engagement when seeking information on Learning and Development initiatives. Line managers point out development opportunities at performance reviews with their employees and guidance is given on where on the organisations intranet the classes can be found. However employees tend to come back for their next review 5-8 weeks later unable to source the class and their request for classes have not been actioned by the time of their next review meeting. This is borne out by 29% of employees sometimes having issues enrolling on classes. See figure 4.5.

Please rate this statement. 'I know how to access and enroll on classes I need'			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		52.9%	9
Sometimes		29.4%	5
No		17.7%	3

Fig 4.5

Feedback from 10% of the line managers surveyed was that the lack of physical presence of HR could be daunting as they were not available sometimes when decisions needed to be made. However feedback from one of the HRGs was that line managers were reluctant to make decisions without consulting them and as a result HRGs were still performing a lot of administrative tasks.

'HR should no longer be doing administrative tasks for managers. This is slowly taking affect. However some managers still come to HR for help on these tasks.'

HRG

The HRG also felt that line managers tended to default to asking HR before making a minor HR decision and that a mindset change was required on the managers part. This would suggest there is a disconnect between managers and HR on what the expectations of each other are.

HRG s all agreed that they add value, their workload has improved and they are more in control of their job. They feel better able to provide a quality service and their role is now more varied as they support both managers and employees. Also 80% responded that they have more opportunity to use their HR skills and all respondents felt they had the opportunity to upskill so they could maintain pace with new HR concepts.

The devolved HR dept seems better able to provide a quality streamlined service to it's customers as can be seen by the line manager feedback where nearly 86% were happy that they could access the HR information necessary to manage their employees. See figure 4.6.

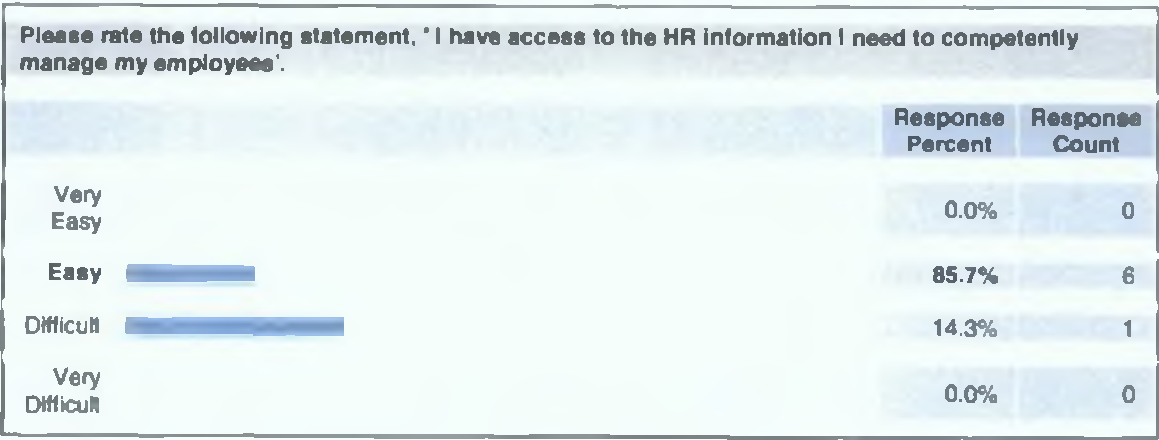


Fig 4.6

As a result of the interviews and questionnaires with the HR department it is apparent that the role the HR department plays in the success of the organisation has become more complex over the last 10 years. It has moved from a department that was primarily responsible for the recruitment and development of employees to one which now plays a central role in ensuring the company remains legally compliant for all HR issues. The HR Director pointed out that the department is now ranked alongside the Finance department in terms of importance and influence and is seen as a showcase in terms of HR practices not only in Ireland but worldwide. The HR director sits on the board and plays a key part in the decisions that are made there and ensures people issues are kept to the fore in all decisions. This is very important in allowing HR to look at the future needs of the organisation, people, skills, legal compliance, costs etc.

‘HR drives the agenda at board level and acts as a catalyst in creating tension to force decisions to be made’

HR director

There was a strong feeling that HR is strategic in LINET and that they add value to the organisation. They are present at every major decision and ensure people concerns are taken into account. In fact the HR director said that in many cases they drive senior management to take actions so the organisation remains both compliant with current employment legislation and is preparing for future employee skills needs.

It is very obvious that the HR department in LINET achieves all the above while maintaining the wellbeing and development of employees. It is seen as a department that also adds value to the organisation in the process. It has worked over the last 18 to 24 months to make people management as self sufficient as possible and free up HR professionals for more value added tasks. However it still provides support through the use of E-HR or disintermediation, as mentioned previously to reduce the basic needs on the department.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five – Conclusions and Recommendations

My research took place in a large manufacturing organisation and as such reflects the vision, culture and aspirations of that org. So it may not be representative of the devolution of HR in general. Despite this limitation I feel the methods of research have the capability to extract the information relevant to this dissertation. As mentioned previously work pressure of my proposed interviewees and the sensitivity of my research topic limited my ability to conduct interviews and send out surveys. This affected my sample size which is quite small for a research topic of this nature.

Some of the line managers were aware that the level of knowledge of some HRGs was better than others. It is normal to expect this level of proficiency when someone moves in to a new area of a job. However it is a sign that the HRGs should remain in their roles for some time and their movement should be limited so they gain experience in that area. Also if there was more face to face discussion with HRGs it would benefit both the HRGs and the line managers and align them on correct handling of the HR issues concerned. This face to face contact could be achieved by HR being invited to attend some of the manager meetings to speak on a particular topic or doing a relevant learning forum.

5.1 HR department

A large part of reducing the workload on an HR department is about creating policies for employees [including managers] and also policies specifically for managers that allow them take on part of the HR role. HR has an important role in defining and setting these policies so they help resolve many of the repetitive, transactional issues that arise. They also own ensuring that the policies are understood by both employees and managers. To do this requires a lot of specialised knowledge in any area where policy is being formulated e.g. health and safety, employment law, disciplinary procedures, company law etc. Line managers can then seek the advice and

support of HR specialists on high risk issues that could create serious difficulties for the organisation. The specialist role is to help managers achieve their objectives rather than do the task for them. They facilitate decision making. This ensures managers do not need to be specialists in legal matters and will make sure they remain compliant to HR rules and regulations. The HR role is so complex that there are many issues which it would not be feasible to expect line managers to deal with. Many high risk issues need to be dealt with by professional HR specialists. As Ulrich and Brockbank recommend, HR professionals should specialise in one area so they can properly deal with any concerns that arise or at least know where to go to research answers.

Regardless of the level of devolution there will be a need for a centralised resource to coordinate common tasks e.g. training, employee development, pay and benefits, succession planning etc. Without this there is a high risk of varied solutions to similar circumstances across the different sections of an organisation. These may cause confusion and would certainly be a misuse of resources leading to inefficiencies and increased costs. Where a manager has a successful employee they may be reluctant to let them go to another area of the company. This would be to the detriment of the employee and the company. With a central HR department monitoring talent in the organisation this situation would be avoided and the employee would gain experience in other areas of the organisation and so develop their career to their own benefit and that of the organisation.

HRM is an invaluable part of an organisation as its human resources are its differentiator from other organisations and can be its main source of competitive advantage.

Devolution needs to happen but there needs to be clear roles and responsibilities laid out for the line manager. Devolution needs to be planned and policies drawn up to ensure the transition happens smoothly. The policy needs to outline

- What is being devolved?
- What level of support is there for the manager?
- What areas does HR retain control of?

- How is the success or otherwise of the venture to be monitored?

There are reasons to maintain an HR department to deal with 'high impact' issues so specialist advice is available not only to line managers but to senior management also so they conform to all legal requirements. Also with HR on the organisations board it ensures that people issues are kept to the forefront of senior management policies and decisions and allows HR to give high-level advice to the board.

5.2 Line Managers and Employees

I feel line managers may be unable to keep up with the latest HR learnings as they struggle to keep the metrics they are measured on in control as they concentrate on ensuring their areas are productive. The research suggests most managers put managing their people below their output priorities.

As the organisation becomes more dependant on the knowledge of its employees then their management becomes critical for the line managers. However HR depend on line managers to be HR content experts as well and able to help on difficult tasks. So managers needs to balance the need to be a functional expert for their area and be a people manager as well.

The devolution of transactional tasks to line managers plays a very important part in freeing up HR professionals to do more value added tasks. It was noticeable in the line manager surveys that there was a lack of understanding of their role in taking on these tasks. Maybe it could be incorporated into their job specification. Before devolving responsibility to managers the idea needs to be discussed and thought out in a logical way. This would involve HR and managers ensuring there was agreement from both parties to support the new structure by committing time and energy to allowing the elements to work. Managers need to agree to take on new roles and HR needs to develop training for the skills the managers will require in these new roles. Managers will need to be monitored closely in the early stages of devolution and appraised on their performance to ensure success. Without this level of involvement on both sides there is a risk that the quality of service will be severely reduced post devolvment due to managers not engaging fully in the process.

Devolution of HR tasks to line managers has had little effect so far on employees. They have seen the face to face engagement with HR become less frequent as they use more E-HR initiatives to resolve their questions. They seem content that they can resolve any issues using the methods available. There is also a sense that their questions are more frequently being resolved by their manager without recourse to HR. This is a very positive outcome.

5.3 Recommendations

In the interest of time and to ensure that the respondents fully understand the frame of reference for the questions, I would have the respondents complete the questionnaire in a structured interview setting in future. I would meet them as a group and clarify the meaning of the questions. This would ensure that the full meaning of the question was understood.

Class enrolment for employees needs to improve. When a class is unavailable on the organisations intranet and employees request the class to be set up they do not receive a response as to when a class will be available.

For this organisation I think it is very important that devolution of HR continues. All research points towards HR becoming even more devolved in the future. This will involve encouraging more use of the E-HR systems that are already in place. These are essential in saving the time necessary for HR personnel to concentrate on the more value added tasks.

However, as pointed out in the research, there is a feeling that the HR department have become distant from the floor. This could result in HR being unable to take the pulse of the org as they are not seeing employees on a regular basis. HR is aware of this and can put fixes in place to ensure the effect is minimised e.g. Employee lunches, Joint planning days etc

More focus is recommended on manager training of HR topics and new legislation as there seemed to be a lack of clarity on what role had been devolved to them. This will ensure that the quality of a devolved HR service will not reduce as managers will be equipped to deal with more and more complex people management issues.

I feel that the HR: Employee ratio can be further reduced by automating more of the transactional tasks such as payroll, absence management, document archiving etc. This will produce cost savings that will help secure the success of the department.

It is obvious from the results of the research that the fact that the HR director sits on the board and drives change with the organisations human resources in mind is a big factor in the success of the devolution process on site. The dependence of the organisation on HR to keep them legally compliant is crucial to the high standing with which HR is held.

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Appendix 1

Line Manager Interview Questions June 2007

Employee did not want to be taped for personal reasons. He was more comfortable with me taking notes.

1. How long have you been with the organisation?
2. What is your current role and how long have you been doing this role?
3. How has the devolution of HR tasks affected your current role?
4. How much of your time is devoted to HR work?
5. Do you feel more in control of your HR resources because of devolution?
6. How much authority do you have in making HR decisions?
7. Do you feel confident dealing with HR issues?
8. Do you think HR is part of your job?
9. What HR training have you completed?
10. Do you think you receive regular updates on HR legislation changes?
11. Do you have time to do the HR tasks being requested of you?
12. Do you feel comfortable taking on the extra HR tasks?
13. For 2006 a new annual appraisal system was used in the organisation. What comments do you have on it? It was brought in late and without consultation. The old system was used at last pay review so not sure what the new one involves.
14. How often do you do progress review meetings with your employees?
15. How important do you find these meetings?
16. What effect do you think E-HR has had on the organisation? [positive, ease of use etc].
17. Are you measured on your HR interventions?
18. How important are these statistics rated by your manager?
19. How can HR better support you in completing your HR tasks?

Appendix 2

Human Resource HR interview questions June 2007

1. How long have you been with the organisation?
2. What is your current role and how long have you been doing this role?
3. Has the role you are in changed over the last number of years and in what way? [Effect of changes in HR practices]
4. Do you think HR has devolved or would like to devolve some of its roles? [e.g., admin/info tasks, recruitment and selection, induction, job description and design]
5. How should its responsibilities be shared?
6. What has been the effect of E-HR on devolution? [Ask ES; intranet; HR web site for checking benefits, policy, reports etc.]
7. When did the devolution of HR to managers commence and what prompted it? [Result of strategic planning?]
8. Do you feel line managers have the necessary skills to carry out the HR role required of them and why should HRM be part of their role? [Disciplinary, grievance, training etc. / cost control, real time correction]
9. Why should HRM be part of their role? [Disciplinary, grievance, training etc. / cost control, real time correction]
10. Do you think all managers can develop the skills necessary to carry out their HRM duties?
11. Do you think there is a need to develop an area HR expert in different Departments? Mfg; Eng
12. Do you find you still have to intervene in issues you thought were devolved to prevent legal issues? [1:1s; appraisals, disciplinary procedures]
13. Guest and King (2001) suggest that good people management is as much about developing a good relationship with your staff as it is about implementation of relevant HR policies. What are your comments on this statement?
14. Have there been any concerns in the HR department because of devolution? [Lose of influence / authority and control on metrics; areas devolved that may not have worked out?]
15. What do you think is the effect of devolution on the HR role? [different skills now required; emphasis on certain skills now.]

16. Do you find you are better able to make business decisions because of devolution? [More involvement in business Strategy?]
17. Are there any areas of HR which you see as being incapable of being devolved? [Org Development, Strategic planning ;succession planning;change agent,HR policy drafting, adherence to labour law and equality]
18. How supportive have senior management [site committee and corporate] been in the implementation of devolution and its subsequent effects?
19. How highly do they rate the importance of our Human Resources in creating a competitive advantage?
20. How would you rate the HR department's impact on Organisational performance?
21. What input does HR have to the organisations' strategic planning process? [With a view to being a strategic partner.]
22. How is Strategic HR planning managed?
23. Do you find you are more involved in strategic business decisions now than 3 years ago?
24. Dave Ulrich talks of a business partner position for HR incorporating strategic partner, Administration expert, employee champion and change agent What is your view?
25. Is there a drive for HR to become a business partner in LINET and be seen to add value?[Optimise people performance, contribute to corporate strategy, and align resources to help achieve the organisations goals.]
26. What effect did LINET's 2006 headcount restructuring plans have on the HR department and on devolution? [Increased the pace of devolution? Number of HR employees who left.]
27. What were the numbers / ratio of HR employees pre and post the restructuring? How does this compare with other orgs?
28. Is there conflict with the conflicting roles HRGs play? [Employee champion and manager champion]
29. What do you see as the function of HR departments in the future?
30. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of devolution?
31. What enhancements do you think could be made to the current devolution process?
32. Do you have any other points you would like to make?

Appendix 3
Line manager survey Rev1

1. How long have you worked with this company?

- < 1 year
- 2 - 3 years
- 4 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- over 10 years

2. How long have you been working in your current role?

- < 1 year
- 2-3 years
- 4-5 years
- 6-10 years
- over 10 years

3. Who is responsible for the following in your company?

	HR department	My manager	Both
Pay and benefits			
Hiring			
Training			
Annual review			

Other (please specify)

4. Please rate the following statement, ' I feel I have the time available to be trained on Human Resource Management [HRM] issues.'

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

5. Please rate the following statement, ' I have easy access to HRM training material needed to complete my job effectively.'

- Very Easy
- Easy
- Difficult
- Very Difficult

6. Please rate the following statement, ' I have access to the HR information I need to competently manage my employees'.

Very Easy
Easy
Difficult
Very Difficult

7. When looking for information on the following topics what method do you use?

My Manager	Peer	Intranet	HR department	Other
1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9
10	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11
12	12	12	12	12
13	13	13	13	13
14	14	14	14	14
15	15	15	15	15
16	16	16	16	16
17	17	17	17	17
18	18	18	18	18
19	19	19	19	19
20	20	20	20	20
21	21	21	21	21
22	22	22	22	22
23	23	23	23	23
24	24	24	24	24
25	25	25	25	25
26	26	26	26	26
27	27	27	27	27
28	28	28	28	28
29	29	29	29	29
30	30	30	30	30
31	31	31	31	31
32	32	32	32	32
33	33	33	33	33
34	34	34	34	34
35	35	35	35	35
36	36	36	36	36
37	37	37	37	37
38	38	38	38	38
39	39	39	39	39
40	40	40	40	40
41	41	41	41	41
42	42	42	42	42
43	43	43	43	43
44	44	44	44	44
45	45	45	45	45
46	46	46	46	46
47	47	47	47	47
48	48	48	48	48
49	49	49	49	49
50	50	50	50	50
51	51	51	51	51
52	52	52	52	52
53	53	53	53	53
54	54	54	54	54
55	55	55	55	55
56	56	56	56	56
57	57	57	57	57
58	58	58	58	58
59	59	59	59	59
60	60	60	60	60
61	61	61	61	61
62	62	62	62	62
63	63	63	63	63
64	64	64	64	64
65	65	65	65	65
66	66	66	66	66
67	67	67	67	67
68	68	68	68	68
69	69	69	69	69
70	70	70	70	70
71	71	71	71	71
72	72	72	72	72
73	73	73	73	73
74	74	74	74	74
75	75	75	75	75
76	76	76	76	76
77	77	77	77	77
78	78	78	78	78
79	79	79	79	79
80	80	80	80	80
81	81	81	81	81
82	82	82	82	82
83	83	83	83	83
84	84	84	84	84
85	85	85	85	85
86	86	86	86	86
87	87	87	87	8

- HR policies
- Training
- Health and Safety
- Disciplinary procedures

Comments

8. How easy do you find the methods used in question 7?

Very Easy Easy Difficult Very Difficult

My manager
Peer
Intranet
HR department
Other

9. How many times have you contacted the HR department in the last year through any means?


0 -
1 - 2
3 - 4
5 - 6
> 6

10. What method did you use most?

Choose one

Intranet
E-mail
Phone

Other (please specify)



11. Was your query answered successfully?


Yes

If you answered No, please explain.

Yes

N/A

If you answered Yes please explain how it has changed.



More

same amount

N/A

Every 1 - 2 weeks

3 - 4 weeks

5 - 8 weeks

Less often

HR specialist

100

Your manager

100

Your peers

of the *Journal of Management Education* and the *Journal of Management Inquiry*.

Intranet

114

Urgent report or presentation for your manager.

11

Weekly / monthly mail
to the department.

114

The need to repair a down to production constraint tool in your area for priority product.

11

Employee has requested a 1:1 to discuss the recent appraisal you gave them.

Request from your manager for you to hold an urgent meeting with interested parties about the recent low tool availability in the area.

Employee has requested a 1:1 to discuss their holiday entitlement.

17. Are there any barriers to you completing these tasks in the order you specified?

Yes

No

If you answered Yes please comment.

18. Please rate [1-7] the importance your manager places on the following tasks:-

Tool availability

Objective setting for each member of your team

HR metrics [absence tracking, holiday balances, grievance reviews]

Area output

Regular performance reviews with your team

Your technical ability within your area

Employee development

19. If you have any further comments please list them here:-

Appendix 4

Employee Survey

1. How long have you been working in this company?

- 0-1 years
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- More than 10 years

2. When looking for information on the following topics what one method do you use most often?

	My manager	Intranet	Email HR	Ask ES	Phone HR	Other
Policies						
Forms						
Internal job transfer						
Learning and Development						

3. How easy do you find this method?

- Very easy
- Easy
- Difficult
- Very difficult

4. What other method do you use to get this information?

- My manager
- Intranet
- Email HR
- Ask ES
- Phone HR
- Other

5. How many times have you contacted the HR department in the last year?

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6-10
- More often
- Please comment

6. Did you receive the information you required?

Never

No

Comments

Comments

Comment

Harder

61

Every week
Every 1-2 weeks
Every 3-4 weeks
Every 5-8 weeks
Less often
Comment

13. Has your manager access to the information you need to aid your development at work?

Yes
Sometimes
No

14. Do you feel your manager applies HR policy [Holiday, Absence, Conduct issues etc] fairly with all the employees on your team?

Yes
Sometimes
No

15. Is there anything you would change about how HR information is made available?

Yes
No
Please comment

16. If you have any further comments please enter them in this comments box.

Appendix 5

Human Resource Generalist Survey

How many years have you been working in HR with this organisation?

- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-10
- over 10

2. Have you worked in the HR departments of other organisations?

- Yes
- No

3. What is your current role?

4. Has your role changed in the last 2 years?

- Yes
- No

If you answered Yes, please comment

5. Have you had more opportunity to use your Human Resource skills over the last two years?

- Yes
- No

6. In HR 'New concepts spread like a crackling fire', (Brewster & Holt-Larsen). Do you feel you have the opportunities to upskill in HR practices so you can maintain pace with these new concepts?

- Yes
- No

If you answered No, please comment below

7. Do you feel there is a need to keep up to date with new HR concepts?

- Yes
- No

Please comment

8. In what way has your job changed in the last two years?

- Become easier
- Not much change
- Become more difficult.
- Optional comments

9. How have HR automation enhancements [Ask ES; HR intranet etc] affected your role?

- Freed up my time
- Not much change
- No change

10. Do you see your role as adding value to the organisation?

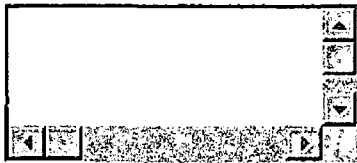
- Yes
- No
- If you answered yes, please comment.

11. In the last 18 months do you feel more HR issues are being dealt with by managers without the need to call on the support of HR specialists?

- Yes
- No

12. What is the primary method managers use to contact you for support?

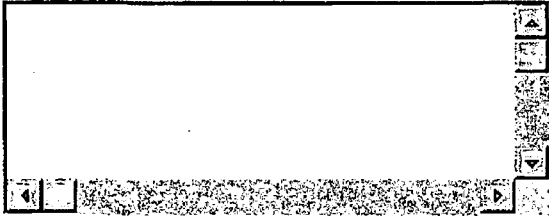
- Ask ES
- Phone
- E-mail
- Other
- Optional comment

An empty rectangular text box with a toolbar on the right side. The toolbar contains several small icons, including arrows and a magnifying glass.

13. Do you think the restructured HR department now provides a better service to its customers?

- Yes
- No

14. Optional further comments

An empty rectangular text box with a toolbar on the right side. The toolbar contains several small icons, including arrows and a magnifying glass.