HR Analytics and Frontline Leadership Decision-Making: An Investigation into the Role HR Analytics May Have in Enhancing the Human Capability of a Social Care NGO

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A Dissertation submitted in fulfilment for the award of MA in Human Resource Management

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Abstract

Given the recent growth in HR analytics a lot of scholars are of the stance that HR analytics can not only enhance HR departments effectiveness in their roles but can also equip organisations to develop and meet strategic objectives through more efficient, innovative use of employee data. Little research exists to demonstrate how this can be achieved within specific contexts. While the researcher acknowledges the importance of standard workforce metrics to meet regulatory obligations within Social Care NGOs, given that social care organisations rely on frontline employees to function whilst those employees rely on guidance from their supervisors, simultaneously the organisation relies on supervisors to translate strategy into action whilst meeting regulatory obligations therefore places frontline leaders in a pivotal role. As such, this study applies an exploratory qualitative approach to better gain insights from frontline leaders into how HR analytics could impact on a social care NGO. Data gathered from semi-structured interviews demonstrates that the vast majority of decisions made within the NGO are focused on service provision and meeting the needs of all stakeholders primarily through supporting its client group who are heavily reliant on frontline staff. Within this, evidence-based decision-making is of high importance at a frontline level, despite this employee data is compliance based thus impacting on effective decision-making in relation to employees. New insights were gained into how value of HR analytics can be achieved within the NGO through practical applications of projects that while designed to meet frontline leadership needs in the first instance, can enhance decision-making regarding employees needs thus supporting client group whilst also, by extension, meeting needs of all stakeholders including regulatory metric requirements of data.

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HR Analytics and Frontline Leadership Decision-Making: An Investigation into the Role HR Analytics May Have in Enhancing the Human Capability of a Social Care NGO

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Acknowledgements

Dedicated to the memory of my Nana and Grandad,
Esther and James P. A. Kenny

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Steve Sands for his continued support and guidance at every step of the way. Steve's steadfast encouragement and belief in me took so much weight off my shoulders, even at the most difficult times. Steve took a genuine interest in my research, his enthusiasm and unique anecdotes made the research experience more enjoyable. All considered, I truly don't think anyone else could have got me to the finish line with my passion for HR intact.

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel Development
CORU	Health and Social Care Professionals Council
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
HR	Human Resources
HRA	HR Analytics
LT&D	Learning, Training and Development
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NQSF	National Quality Standards Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ROI	Return on Investments
SCW	Social Care Worker
STA	Supported Temporary Accommodation Service
TA	Thematic Analysis
TUSLA	The Government Child and Family Agency

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Background to the Research Study

HR Analytics (HRA) is an emerging specialism within the Human Resource (HR) profession, the goal of which is to leverage the vast quantities of employee related data in a way that improves organisational decision-making, both at a strategic level and local management level thus enhancing value of the data. However, in order to achieve this value, data must be reliable in how it is collected and presented, but also valid in relation to the organisational goals in order to best inform decision-making processes in regard to people resourcing and organisational capacity. While Rasmussen, Ulrich and Ulrich (2024) and Greasley and Thomas (2020) suggest HRA is best used when meeting management needs, there is a research gap in how HRA value can best be achieved within specific contexts whist maintaining reliability and validity of data (Fu, Keegan and McCartney, 2022; McCartney and Fu, 2022).

The focus of this study will be on the context of a Social Care Non-Government Organisation (NGO), this is because while NGOs must meet obligations from a wide variety of stakeholders (Mikołajczak 2023; Mikołajczak; 2022), as Minion and Banerjee (2024) highlight the main point of interaction between a social care NGO and its client group comes through its frontline Social Care Workers (SCWs), suggests that employees are the key source of stakeholder value which the organisation should be focused on, thus utilising HRA within organisational decision-making can improve organisational effectiveness in respect of employees. However, as the Human Capability Framework suggests, leadership are key in to driving this value (Ulrich, 2023). Therefore, to gain insights a qualitative exploratory research approach of analysing 7 semi-structured interviews with frontline NGO leaders we seek to identify how HRA can be used both effectively at an organisational level but to enhance value of employee data.

1.2: Rationale for the Study

While the NGO is an employer within the social care sector and faces all the pressures that go along with being employers of SCWs, however NGOs are uniquely accountable to all of society, not just those it directly impacts. This presents specific competing interests that are seemingly at odds with the other, namely intrinsic motivators and intangible value of SCWs plus the strict bureaucratic requirements. The researcher of this study who is employed by a social care NGO, working within the HR department in a generalist capacity and therefore keen to identify how data in relation to employees can be used in a way that not only equips the organisation to meet stakeholder needs but enables the HR a legitimate influence on strategic choices by using this data in a value enhancing way beyond traditional metrics thus enhancing the employer brand of the NGO whilst remaining within the financial and bureaucratic constraints of an NGO.

1.3: Chapter Summery

Chapter 2 will consist of a review of a comprehensive range of literature within the areas of HR analytics, human capital and organisational decision-making, with specific emphasis on Non-Government Organisations.

Chapter 3 will consist of clearly specified research question with related objectives for this research project.

Chapter 4 will look at the chosen methodology for the research and the justifications for various choices made.

Chapter 5 will analyse the research data then identify and present various recurring themes.

Chapter 6 will aim to position the findings and analysis of the research data into context together with existing literature.

Chapter 7 will conclude the project and propose recommendations for future steps.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Introduction

The role of Human Resource Management (HRM) evolved from Personnel Management, the purpose of which is primarily to serve the needs of the organisation (Handy, 1999). Typically, the needs of organisations are financially motivated which suggests that HRM should strive to enhance Return on Investments (ROI) to increase organisational profits. Uniquely however, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) do not exist to achieve profitability but rather add value to society as a whole, this presents difficulties in organisations effectively measuring ROIs.

The review will therefore focus on three key areas. Firstly, organisational decision-making how it contributes to organisational goals, human capital and how it enables organisations to meet its goals and finally HR analytics (HRA) and how it can contribute to both.

2.2: Organisational Decision-Making

Organisational decisions, otherwise known as strategies, are informed by the mission, vision and aims of the organisation upon this the organisation makes strategic choices designed to enable itself to achieve these aims. These choices are long term along with a series of short-term choices made by organisational leaders (Whittington *et al.*, 2020). Lepak and Snell (2002) suggests organisational leadership is determined by what is considered valuable and unique to the organisation in context of their strategy.

Where organisation’s function based on a reliance on employee’s skills and judgement, this would suggest that their expertise of highest value (Mintzberg, 1983). Share and Lalor (2009) express that SCWs need to approach their work with a reliance on their own judgement in the moment, this is less of a professional norm, but rather a necessity as social care is typically done within homeless residential settings which can be chaotic and unpredictable (Howard and Lyons, 2014). This also supports Hamilton (2011) who explains social care expertise can only be developed whilst doing the work which would suggest that that SCW expertise and frontline experience is of the utmost value within a social care organisation. Additionally, research shows that frontline expertise is of such utmost importance that senior management are often promoted from frontline positions to more strategic roles thus heavily influence organisational decisions (Andreasson, Ljungar and Ahlstrom, 2018; Mintzberg, 1983). Handy (1999) would argue that in organisations where employees approach their work based on their own expertise and abilities, there is a requirement for a person culture where systems are implemented to support employees in their roles. Mahon (2021) supports this in highlighting that a supportive supervisory experience can enable a more productive workforce.

Despite the benefits it is often overlooked by decision makers due to various pressures (CIPD, 2023a). One such pressure as highlighted by Work Foundation (2018) is that organisations contain a multitude of competing, yet interrelated parts all prioritised differently throughout an organisation yet impacting all other areas.

These issues are greater within the context of an NGO, this is because as in addition to being accountable to employees and clients like all employers, organisations such as with multiple sources of funding, such as NGOs, require high levels of regulatory compliance, this results in excessive bureaucracy which in turn contributes to retention issues at all levels (Mikołajczak, 2022), Mikołajczak (2022) shows that not only do NGOs struggle to maintain a sold core base of it's good employees, but additionally this can result in high levels of stress and burnout in its leadership due to pressures associated with navigating its impacts on service provision. Simultaneously, a notable competing external pressure placed on social care organisations is the future regulation of the profession itself (CORU, 2022), this can work to decouple compliance expectations of NGOs as highlighted by Mikołajczak (2022) from the SCW and CORU requirements.

Ullah, Hameed and Kayani (2022) find the strongest mediating factor in balancing all these inter-connected and competing stakeholders is through strong value based, ethical leadership. These values are of greater importance within an NGO as branding itself will have a degree of goodwill associated with it which, according to Lievens (2007) is amplified for an NGO due to the mission and vision. This in effect informs employees what to expect when working for an organisation, this means that NGOs must pay close attention to the overall branding and ensuring internal processes align to it. As Mokina (2014) additionally suggests that by aligning policies with the employer brand, which has employee expectations engrained, can improve retention. This in turn means NGOs would not need to offer beyond what is fair and reasonable within that context. this is what Mokina (2014) regards as being the employee value proposition of the employer brand.

As research finds leaders often make judgements based on a self-assessment of their own past performance levels and needs, which as Feichter (2023) suggests are often inaccurate and biased, while Weisbord (1976) argues that often strategies often fail due to a gap in decision making, this presents issues in NGOs capitalising on the value of employer brand given that an NGOs brand is so intricately linked to values and trust. This suggests the need for senior management themselves to continuously seek to improve decision-making process which is what Garratt (2021) considers a learning board, where checks and balances are in place to enhance decisions. However, as Weisbord (1976) explains decision-makers cannot be all knowing and rely on information provided to them, CIPD (2023a) supports this showing the importance of how information is collected and reported in which senior leaders place trust in.

CIPD (2023b) explains that evidence-based decisions are informed by multiple sources consisting of not only professional expertise but also stakeholder concerns, research and organisational data. As such, basing decisions relying heavily on one source may result in this information source not being regarded as evidence based. It is for these reasons that Briner and Walshe (2015) highlight the importance that decision not to be made based on passively gained information but to be actively involved in gathering the information. This suggest that this can also enhance the reliability of quick decisions that are made with Barends, Rousseau and Briner (2014) nothing that being actively involved gathering information can often mean leaders have the reliable information before they need it. Rousseau (2020) supports this in explaining that the importance of evidence-based decision-making is equally relevant in clinical settings as managers do not operate in isolation and their choices impact their whole team and have a duty of care to close gaps in their cognitive abilities or intuition. Research supports this with Hedayatipour *et al.* (2024) finding that managers who utilise evidence-based processes in their decision-making enhances trust within the organisation even during times of uncertainty as employees can trust their managers would have made every effort to navigate uncertainties.

2.2.1: Role of HR

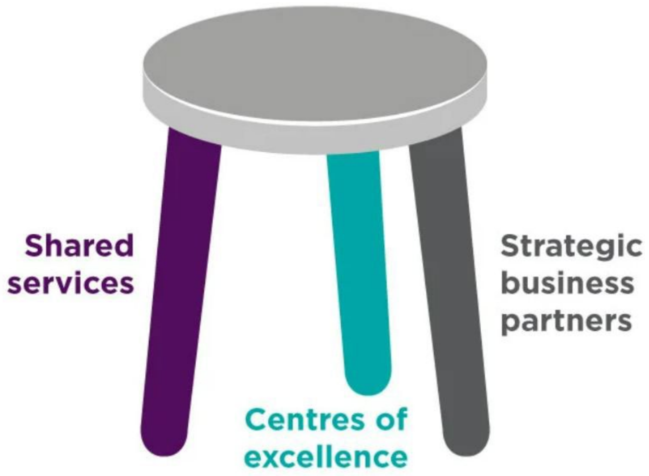
While attrition is common in the health and social care sectors, it is of utmost concern, given that employee engagement and the development of a leadership pipeline which as highlighted by Bersin (2015) fall within the remit of HR, in situations where employee retention is of a strategic importance, HR should therefore have an input at all stages. This is because strategic objectives are typically long-term oriented and fixed, whereas organisational needs must evolve and adapt to internal factors and external society, the agility of which Johnson *et al.* (2013) explains is enabled by HR. This is considered strategic HR. The challenge is not only to meet stakeholder expectations and facilitate organisation capacity to meet challenges, but also to manage the risks associated (McGahan, 2021).

However, a general misunderstanding and perceived lack of trust of the HR function has accumulated over time contributing to reduced level of influence HR has in comparison to other departments, thus positions the role of HR as a transactional one (Bersin, 2015; Ulrich, 2015). Kryscynski *et al.* (2018) argues that this trust can be developed by better utilising HR information. The way in which organisations manage this is related to the maturity of an organisation, as Khan and Millner (2023) show, as organisations develop, the HR function must evolve from personnel management, otherwise regarded as transactional HR, towards more a business impact-driven mindset, which requires HR to be involved in decision making (Ulrich *et al.,* 2012).

However, this is not to say that HR should not have some level of responsibility for transactional responsibilities, but rather that HR should take a strategic approach to transactional responsibilities with Ulrich (1997) noting that when transactional tasks are not completed effectively it prevents HR professionals from being strategic partners. One approach to this could be the Three-Legged Stool Model as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 –

Three-Legged Stool Model of HR



(Source: CIPD, 2023e)

The model divides HR responsibilities into three key areas, firstly the centres of excellence according to CIPD (2023e) is compiled of a small team of HR specialists who focus on adding organisational value by leveraging their specialisms to deliver tailored solutions to ensure organisational objectives are met. These specialist projects can include a wide variety of areas such as recruitment, LT&D, talent management and well-being programmes. The strategic business partner function typically involves more experienced HR professionals who work closely with frontline leaders and management to advise on people related issues and ensure the HR policies, procedures and shared services reflect the needs of the business.

CIPD (2023e) explain, shared services are typically a centralised group who are responsible for low level transactional HR duties such as absence monitoring, recruitment administration, payroll and providing management with advice and guidance templates on how to respond to employee relations issues. Typically, shared services are facilitated through on online self-service support hub which allows for non-HR professionals and managers to progress with an appropriate level of HR activities which do not require direct intervention from HR (Kew and Stredwick, 2016). This allows managers to be more effective in addressing employee needs while also enabling employees to gain advice directly on areas such a complaints procedure or manage their own affairs when requesting documents such as statements of employment or payroll related items such as salary certifications. In turn, it not only frees up HR professionals to focus on value added initiatives, but it also allows for leaders and staff to act with more autonomy and decision-making capacity, which as are linked to motivation (Lundberg, Gudmundson and Andersson, 2009).

2.3: Human Capital

Social care suffers from sector wide retention issues which are linked to the challenging nature of the work itself (Mahon, 2021; Keogh and Byrne, 2016; Share and Lalor, 2009), with Laily *et al.* (2022) suggesting stems from the high levels of self-awareness within the caring professions in comparison to other professions. Additionally, Slatten *et al.* (2021) notes that individuals who seek employment within an NGO are often motivated by non-financial elements.

This highlights an urgency for organisations to focus on human capital, which Khan and Milner (2023) would argue, given that HR have access to the largest resources of information on employees, or human capital, which is of importance in understanding organisational abilities, then HR need to be given a greater degree of input into decision making. In respect to NGOs, research supports this need with Domiter and Marciszewska (2018) along with Slatten *et al.* (2021) finding that the role of HR has become vital for the future sustainability of NGOs by enabling its human capital.

Human Capital is defined by the OECD (2022) as the "stock of knowledge, skills and other personal characteristics embodied in people that help them to be more productive". There has been a socio-economic shift, meaning the source of organisational has shifted towards the intangible assets of human capital of employees, which according to Ulrich *et al* (2012) must be factored in when making informed strategic decisions. Despite this shift, many organisations still base decisions on traditional aspects emphasising on financially tangible elements rather than human capital (Pease, Walker and Beresford, 2014), thus impacting the validity of choices in respect of organisational priorities. Research however highlights that consideration for human capital has become essential for sustained productivity (Pasban and Nojedeh, 2016). Much like is asset management where assets such as buildings need investment to remain functional, in the context of organisations, human capital management considers employees as assets and must to be invested in

(CIPD, 2023c). However, unlike fixed assets, the organisation never owns intangible assets of human capital (Delery and Roumpi, 2017). This means the availability is beyond the organisations control and therefore many are often reluctant to invest. Armstrong (2020) acknowledges this but argues that this is in fact what makes it essential for organisations to implement practices with a focus on employees, first to attract talent and then to retain them which relies on HR to achieve. Research by McCarthy *et al.* (2024) links human capital to work ability, thus for employers to gain true value from its employees, then they must be aware of intangibles. Additionally, as Deloitte Insights (2024) suggests, employers must move towards an employee centred approach in how they operate which requires investing in employees.

This is of even higher importance in social care where the provision of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is an essential requirement, which Share and Lalor (2009) explains must be proactive rather than reactive. Thus, requiring a move away from traditional approaches to Learning, Training and Development (LT&D). Lundberg *et al.* (2009) supports this in explaining that employees show higher levels of engagement when organisations design policies that improve on intrinsic motivators, with Montero-Marín and García-Campayo (2010) showing that motivated employees display higher resilience to negative aspects of their employment, thus reducing turnover and burnout. Recent research expands on this with Hassan, Alam and Campbell (2022) highlighting HR practices can reduce turnover in care-based roles. As seminal thinker Senge (1993) suggests, organisations must strive to meet the needs of employees as priority rather than as an operational objective. Research supports this with Batistič, Kenda and Premru (2022) highlighting that failing to meet employee needs is counter productive to organisational goals.

2.3.1: Value of Care

Employees no longer expect to be developed for promotion internally therefore organisations need to understand an individual's expectations of LT&D for their own career progression and personal satisfaction (Tupper and Ellis, 2022). This is of importance as Amah (2023) shows, LT&D practices are linked to engagement and talent retention. Additionally, Hirpa *et al.* (2020) explains for care-based organisations to identify what value is, they must pay attention to what is of importance to clients. Within the context of social care NGOs, Minion and Banerjee (2024) show that SCWs are often the only link between vulnerable people and social inclusion, thus suggesting SCWs are of highest organisational value to service users. Research by Marino and Capone (2023) highlight that while organisations must consider the non-financial value of care when it comes to the efficiency of service provision while also noting there is work to be done in effective measuring of this value.

Gunnigle, Heraty and Morley (2017) believe that LT&D is key in achieving strategic goals within complex operational contexts. However, to achieve competitive advantage, resources invested in must be able meet specific criteria. One way to achieve this is to invest in human capital practically whilst enhancing engagement through LT&D, which Armstrong (2023) suggests is linked to not only compliance, but also motivation and engagement. As Armstrong (2020) explains, the goal of a management is about the management of work to achieve an organisational goal, whereas leadership is about inspiring others to perform well based on their own discretion.

2.3.2: Human Capability and Stakeholder Value

As frontline employees interact with clients daily, Rasmussen *et al.* (2024) suggests they are where true organisational value is and putting them at the centre of decisions capitalises on this value while also ensuring clients get looked after. Minion and Banerjee (2024) support this in highlighting the indispensable value of a SCW to their clients within an NGO. However, leaders drive this value as they are responsible for guiding SCWs in their roles, which in turn enhance organisational competencies thus ensuring leadership pipelines which therefore makes leaders the bridge between Talent and Organisational culture, systems and governance, all which impact engagement (Ulrich, 2023).

The Human Capability Framework groups activities into three categories of Talent, Leadership and Organisation providing HR an opportunity to enhance organisational leadership through an outside in approach to thus adding value to all stakeholders in the process (Ulrich, 2023). This however requires more wholistic view and looking beyond finance and compliance (Ulrich, *et al.,* 2012), moreover, the contingency theory of leadership suggests that as a mangers priority is to achieve a goal, they therefore ought to adapt to fit the individual context (Waters, 2013). Therefore, the leadership cohort are pivotal in enhancing human capital and driving human capability.

Figure 2 –

The Human Capability Framework

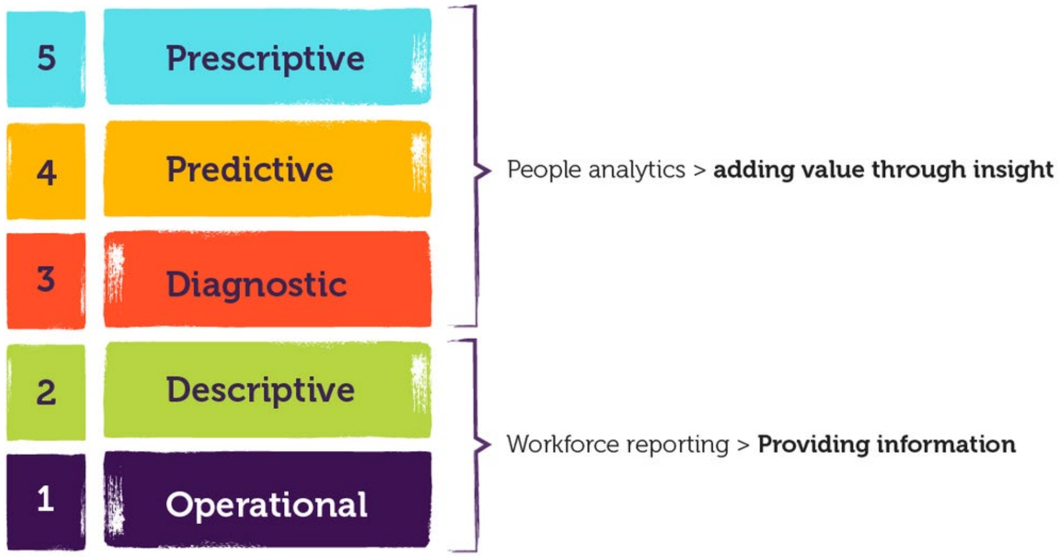
(Source: Ulrich, 2024)

2.4: HR Analytics

HRA is a growing area within the HR profession with the intention of measuring the value of human capital. Khan and Milner (2023) explain there are 4 core levels data within HRA, these are Descriptive, Predictive, Diagnostic and Prescriptive. CIPD (2023b) however would argue there is in fact a level before descriptive analytics which is unorganised Operational data points with little value adding insights, descriptive analytics highlights patterns and trends, for example highlighting strengths and weaknesses through benchmarking against previous years or between departments along with comparing to recruitment and attrition rates thus allowing informed decision making. By combining multiple sources operational data can develop a level of descriptive analysis thus enabling the identification of patterns (Khan and Milner, 2023).

Figure 3 –

People Analytics Levels of Maturity



(Source: CIPD, 2023b)

Over time operational complexities and increased due to more nuanced contexts and variables, meaning not only do operational contexts encompass the organisation's overall competitive strategy (Mkakile and Salum, 2022) but the different locations in which the organisation is based impacts on how organisations function in a variety of ways such as the societal shifts (CIPD, 2022). All of these external factors combine to impact on the labour market (Armstrong, 2023). Choices are also influenced by internal factors such as the within the organisation such as individual backgrounds and dynamics (Noorbehbahani and Salehi, 2021) and educational backgrounds (Gwyther *et al.*, 2019). All of these contextual differences not only impact on the composition of human capital and functionality of the organisation, but they additionally create data points which are considered workforce data. Khan and Milner (2023) explain that data collected and reported on must align with the organisations strategy, failure to do this may result in data being reliable but not valid.

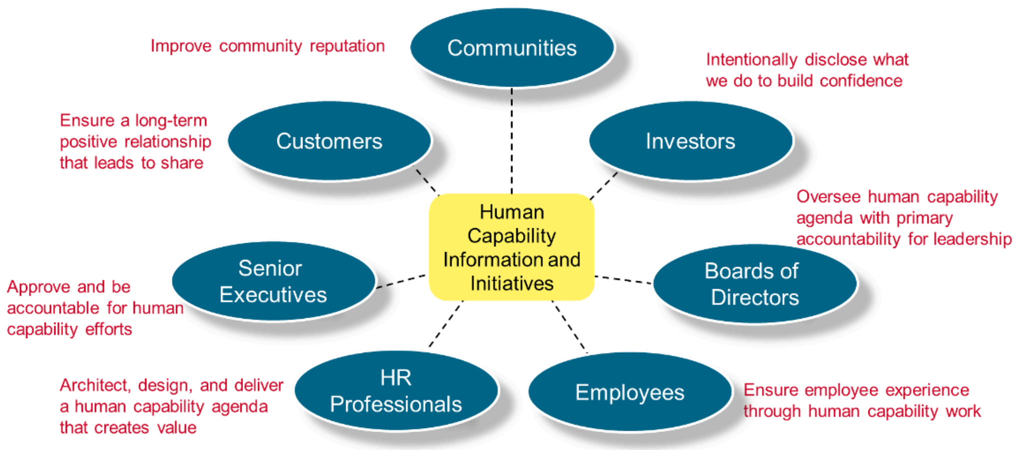
2.4.1: Data Reliability and Validity

Organisations often get lost in large pools of data sets, Marr (2018) instead would suggest, for effectiveness, focusing on small data already of importance to the organisation would be most reliable, then engaging with the data differently through HRA, the same data can become both reliable and valid in the context of the organisational strategy. Additionally, CIPD (2023a) explains the gap in strategic choices can often be linked to the kind of data collected and how it reported on by organisations in which senior level decisions are based on. Quantifying this human capital into data through HRA is therefore pivotal to make informed strategic decisions where people resourcing is concerned (Ulrich, 2023; Ulrich *et al,* 2012).

Organisational practices are often based on long-standing insights which are at times referred to as best practices, however CIPD (2023d) warns of a risk that these best practice insights can at times be outdated and can lead to seeing patterns in data which are not there. Ulrich and Smallwood (2021) would agree with this and suggest that for human capital data to provide value, then there needs to be a shift from benchmarking and best practice towards providing insight. Rasmussen *et al.* (2024) suggests true HRA only occurs once data provides value through insight whilst taking stakeholder views taken into consideration, which according to Ulrich *et al.* (2017) are both internal and external.

Figure 4 –

Stakeholders of Human Capabilities



(Source: Ulrich, 2024)

While research finds that HRA should be used in line with organisational strategies, the approach relates to the maturity and capabilities of the organisation (Fu *et al.*, 2022). However, there is limited research done into the value HRA has within specific organisational contexts (McCartney and Fu, 2022).

2.4.2: Value Through HR Analytics

Greasley and Thomas (2020) suggest that to achieve early value from HRA, projects must align to management needs in order justify it and demonstrate the benefits. Rasmussen *et al.* (2024) supports this in recommending avoiding HR specific problems and instead focus on solution-based projects enabled by HRA but can also empower leaders to take ownership of. Kryscynski *et al.* (2018) finds a positive correlation between talent management and HRA, however, there must be a clear recording and measurement strategy implemented to ensure reliability and valid data aligned to organisational goals (Khan and Milner, 2023). Cavanagh, Bartram and Walker (2024) find that within health services, human capital data are often not gathered or considered in decisions and would argue that incorporating this data through HRA would enhance evidence-based practices which in turn could improve on employee wellbeing and retention issues.

However, Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) warn that it not enough to showcase the ability of HRA, but rather to justify it's benefits to the organisation by aligning projects to stakeholder concerns. Considering LT&D is an area of importance within social care (CORU, 2022), while also being linked to compliance, motivation and engagement (Amah, 2023; Armstrong, 2023; Tupper and Ellis, 2022). Further research also shows that LT&D data can also be used to detect disengagement early by allowing to identify which employees may be at risk of leaving the organisation then intervene and potentially reduce turnover (Yahia, Hlel and Colomo-Palacios, 2021), this would exhibit evidence-based management through HRA. By following recommendations by Gunnigle and Moore (1994) of using best practices at a one level while implementing a best fit approach at a different level where needed, HRA can effectively ensure compliance requirements while allowing flexibility to meet differentiated organisational needs. This could allow for HRA to be dynamic in meeting multiple stakeholder needs. For example, the same LT&D data could be used to track metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) thus meeting compliance requirements, whilst simultaneously used through HRA to predict what LT&D initiatives may be ineffective or result in disengagement thus allowing the organisation to get ahead of this issue also (Kahn and Milner, 2023).

With LT&D practices being linked to engagement and talent retention (Amah, 2023), relying on one source of data to inform LT&D needs suggests a lack of evidence-based management which could be ineffective and damage trust in leadership and engagement (Mikołajczak, 2023; Ullah *et al.,* 2022). Mansi and Goswami (2024) support this in highlighting that HRA can help assess employee wellbeing and engagement then allowing the organisation to tailer LT&D options as needed. However, HRA should not replace expertise, rather supplement decisions, because while applying HRA into talent management allows for leaders to incorporate these insights into their own decision making does contribute directly to performance while negating both leadership bias through use of data, Greasley and Thomas (2020) therefore warns us not to dismiss expertise as incorporating expertise into decision-making can also negate any potential data bias through use of judgment. This supports McCartney, Murphy and McCarthy (2021) who find that HRA must be able to utilise data to provide actionable insights to decision-makers, otherwise known as storytelling through HRA. Kryscynski *et al.* (2018) also finds a correlation between talent management and the use of HRA, this suggests by aligning HRA projects to leadership needs can add value thus enhancing the overall HR strategy, this however requires leadership buy in.

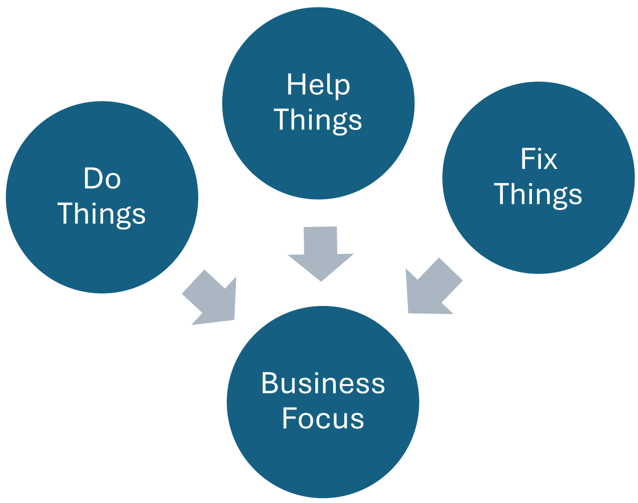
2.4.3: HR Analytics Approach

Fu *et al.* (2022) identifies two approaches to how HRA professionals engage in analytics to foster buy in, these are storytelling as showcasing and storytelling as curbing. While showcasing the dynamic abilities of HRA is important to promote buy in, organisations possess different levels of capabilities so showcasing may not be an option. Mansi and Goswami (2024) notes that the advantages of HRA or its detriments such as ethical and security concerns are linked to organisational abilities. Therefore, where organisations lack analytical abilities, projects should be slowed down to allow for projects to be well thought through allowing for diligently designed and sound analytical frameworks with the goal focusing on protecting employee interests and overall implementation quality, this is storytelling as curbing practices. Fu *et al.* (2022) finds that a dualistic approach to showcasing and curbing practices are required for HR to both promote and protect the analytics agenda, the work and the organisation.

McCartney and Fu (2022) advise that value of HRA comes when it allows for HR to directly contribute to organisational performance through by providing insights into talent management issues which enable HR and in turn frontline leaders to incorporate these insights into their decision making. This supports Ulrich *et al.* (2012) who states that value is determined by what the receiver get because of what the organisation does. While HRA is concerned with internal stakeholders, Rasmussen *et al.* (2024) argues that HRA can deliver value to stakeholders through meeting employee needs. Additionally, Falletta and Combs (2021) suggest that by focusing on stakeholder needs in the first instance will by default embed robust ethical principles in which HRA would function.

Khan and Milner (2023) propose achieving this through utilising the Do, Help, Fix Model as an enabling structure to approach HR Analytical. The model suggests three ways in which HR data can be compiled and presented to senior management to enable them to see the bigger picture in a reliable and valid way as required.

Figure 5 –
Do, Help, Fix Model



(Adapted from: Khan and Milner, 2023, p. 294)

Do Things relates to workforce and operational reports with analytics being focused on recruitment metrics, turnover, LT&D, and performance management emphasising the volume and efficiencies of day-to-day HR activities (Khan and Milner, 2023). This is an important element as Bersin (2015) suggests ownership of failures in these areas gets placed on HR as many CEO's consider the failure a result of poor strategy execution rather than a gap decision-making or capacity. As such, following this approach highlights the positive contributions HR makes which could work to enhance the level of trust towards HR (Khan and Milner, 2023). The second strand is Help Things, which Khan and Milner (2023) explains is focused on strategic input with HRA focused on organisational strategy and what data is relevant in context then through HRA, identify key issues to be addressed from a human capital perspective in order to enhance strategic execution. The final element of Fix Things is concerned with HR Business Partnering with Khan and Milner (2023) explaining that projects are undertaken to identify and understand anomalies, whether good or bad with the intention to use analytics to address or capitalise as appropriate through a data driven approach.

Chapter 3: Research Question

3.1: Research Question

According to McCartney and Fu (2022) to identify how HRA can add value to an organisation we need to bridge the gap between HRA and organisational context. Which Rasmussen *et al.* (2024) and Greasley and Thomas (2020) suggest can be done by understanding how HR can add more value to the organisation by meeting leadership needs and through this, as Fu *et al.,* (2022) explain, determine which approach will be most suitable.

The main research question posed by the research therefore is:

"How might frontline leaders perceive the value of HR Analytics in their decision-making process within the context of a Social Care NGO?"

3.2: Aims and Objectives

1. Gain insights into what it means to be a frontline leader.
2. Identify what sources of information is currently involved in leaders' decision-making.
3. What outcomes from LT&D do leaders seek and how these outcomes are factored into decision-making
4. Seek to understand frontline leaders' perceptions of the HR function.
5. Understand leadership challenges and how HR can help.

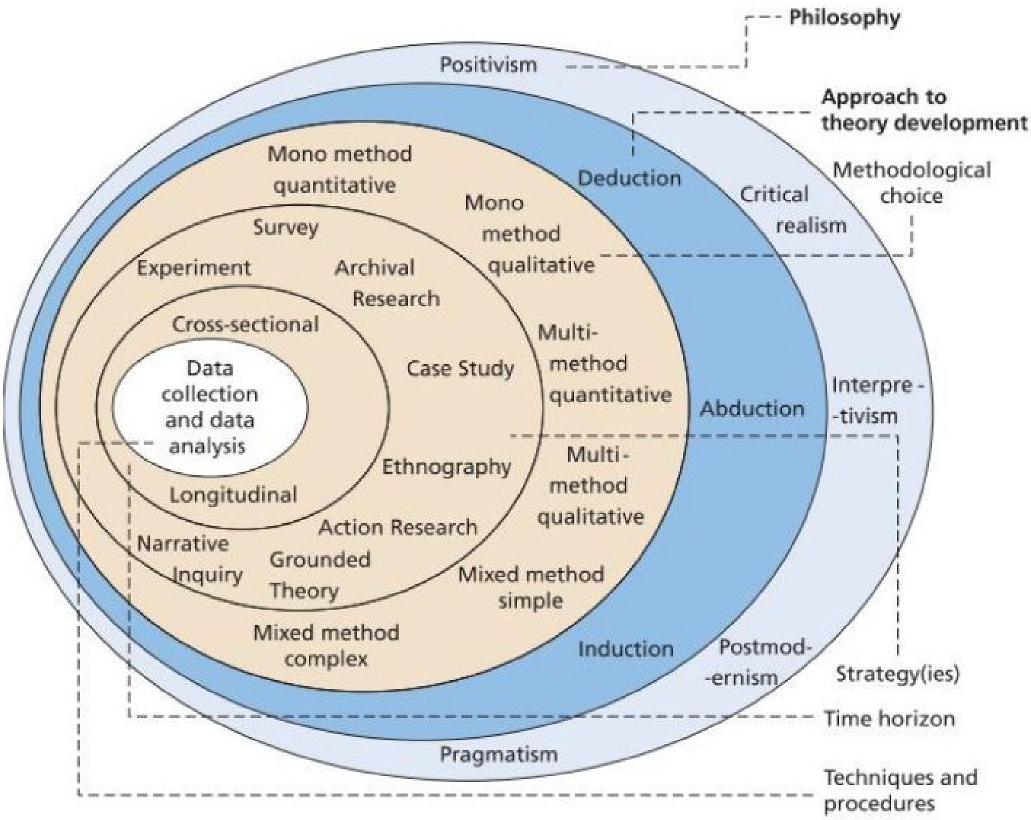
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1: Introduction

The Research Onion in Figure 6 provides a selection of tools available to a researcher in which they proceed to conduct their research.

Figure 6 –

The Research Onion



(Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019, p. 130)

However, before a specific tool is selected, the philosophical assumptions of the researcher must first be acknowledged (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Throughout the literature review, we have seen that perceptions can influence how decisions are made, this is true for research also. This is otherwise referred to as the research paradigm, which is how a body of research is conducted from a philosophical position. Within the realm of research, there are three key philosophical assumptions, which are ontological, epistemological and axiological. These assumptions not only inform how research is approached, but as Fife and Gossner (2024) explain, having an understanding can enhance the trustworthiness of research. This is because all assumptions combine to inform a researchers real world view (Anderson, Fontinha and Robson, 2020).

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2023) explain, Ontology is the basic assumptions the researcher has about reality itself, whether positive or negative and how they will engage with different situations. According to Ormston *et al.* (2013) the main ontological concern is if reality exists independently to human interpretations or if the nature of reality is inextricably linked to human interpretations of it. Anderson *et al.* (2020) suggests that economists see reality as independent to human perceptions and take an objective approach to research, whereas social and care workers are more likely to adopt a more socially constructed world view and pursue their research under a subjective approach.

Epistemology relates to how the researcher views knowledge and which sources of information are deemed to be acceptable to understand the world (Saunders *et al.*, 2023). There are two key epistemological perspectives, these are positivist and interpretivist. Armstrong (2023) explains, positivist researchers focus on observable reality and definite facts, whereas under phenomenology, researchers care about meanings of things, this is akin to interpretivism. Additionally, Axiology is the role values and ethics has within the research process, which according to Saunders *et al.* (2023) also inform the overall research topic along with data collection procedures. For example, selecting interviews above surveys suggests the researcher values data gained through interaction with the participants greater than that collected through anonymous surveys.

Saunders *et al.* (2023) suggests that methodology should be linked to the purpose of the research itself. Given that Mintzberg (1983) attests that in care-based organisations, employees should not be considered as end-users but rather as experts on the organisations mission, this coupled with Anderson *et al.* (2020) explanation that where research within HR is conducted to understand the operational contexts on an issue and inform HR professionals, then it is consistent with an interpretivist paradigm.

4.2: Research Approach

As shown by Saunders *et al.* (2023), there are two distinct approaches to research which are deduction and induction. Anderson *et al.* (2020) would suggest that deductive research is concerned with theory testing, while induction is concerned with building theory. In basic terms, deductive reasoning, take general observations, or a hypothesis, and test it with view to draw a specific conclusion of the hypothesis being true or untrue. Alternatively, inductive reasoning identifies a specific observation, seeks to gather more data with view to explain the phenomenon. Given that deductive is associated with proving a hypostasis true or false, it is therefore mainly linked to a positivist paradigm whereas inductive is about interpreting data to explain a phenomenon which is linked to an interpretivist paradigm. Finn, Dueñas and Kehoe (2022) warn of the importance not to mix paradigms within the methodological approach.

While Anderson *et al.* (2020) explains there is value for both deductive and inductive approaches within HR, this research will however follow an inductive approach under an interpretivist philosophy. The appropriateness is two-fold, firstly as research highlights, NGOs operate with a dual commitment meeting obligations that are both finance-based and value-based (Mikołajczak, 2023, Mikołajczak, 2022). Secondly, as McCartney and Fu (2022) further explain, organisational contexts must be considered to establish insights, this suggests that not only is it important to establish explanations and insights, but context must also be considered to effectively do so, which Anderson *et al.* (2020) explains can be best achieved through an inductive approach.

4.3: Methodological choice

As shown in the Research Onion (Fig. 3), there are two methodological choices at the disposal of a researcher, these are quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research is connected to the quantification of data, while qualitative is linked to identifying meaning within the data (Saunders *et al.*, 2023). HR is at the crux between business and humans, for this reason both methodologies can bring benefits for a HR researcher (Anderson et al., 2020). While HRA is in some ways akin to quantitative research in that it is concerned with quantifying and analysing data, while HRA is about with interpreting data through quantification and presenting it to tell a story. Despite the commonality however, this is not to say that a quantitative research method should be applied, as Anderson *et al.* (2020) explains, qualitative data enables richer insights into organisational contexts. Thus, a qualitative methodology is appropriate to understand leadership needs as this methodology is concerned with interpreting meaning rather than the quantification of data (Saunders *et al.,* 2023).

4.4: Data Collection Instrument

According to Pratt, Kaplan and Whittington (2020) to achieve highest quality of data possible, qualitative researchers must tweak their methods based on interactions with participants. As such, a semi-structured interview will be conducted with participants as this method is structured while remaining flexible allowing researchers to pivot questions and depth of probing based on responses from participants (Saunders *et al.,* 2019). The challenge as explained by Warren and Karner (2010) is that for this to work, rapport must be bult with the interviewee which requires involvement from the interviewer, this simultaneously causes issues with trustworthiness and replication of outcomes of this method (Heath and Tynan, 2010), therefore highlighting a strength of structured interviews or surveys as they are closed ended questions with minimal involvement from the researcher. However, Gelade (2006) would alternatively argue that from a practitioner perspective, being more involved in the research process can bolster reliability. Additionally, Saunders *et al.* (2019) explains that semi-structured interviews are designed to reflect the specific context in which they were conducted and should therefore be of no reflection of the reliability or rigor of the research conducted. This is vital as research shows role of HR is heavily informed by operational contexts (Anderson, 2020; Lepak and Snell; 2002). Semi-structured interviews will therefore equip the researcher to gather data while probing into underlying meaning.

In following research conducted by Fu *et al.* (2022), this research will utilise a semi-structured interview lead by the pace the participant is most comfortable at, with the goal of gaining insights into the kind of data being collected, how this data is utilised, how the participants evaluate it, and what kind of enablers or barriers exist in enhancing the value of HRA.

4.5: Sample

The researcher set out to recruit interviewees using a non-probability purposive sampling method as this would allow the researcher to identify the most suitable participants based on their current roles as Team Leader, Manager or a Head of Service in addition to the expertise they can bring based on their experience as frontline leaders (Saunders *et al.* 2019). However, due to organisational processes, the researcher encountered unforeseen issues in gaining access to potential participants within a timely manner.

Initially the researcher contacted a total of 13 individuals deemed to meet the criteria, while two of the 13 never responded to initial requests nor a follow up, the remaining 11 did express an interest. However, due to the previously mentioned delays in gaining access, this meant the availability of those interested was limited and presented logistical issues, therefore the researcher only managed to arrange an interview with seven of the 11 those interested potential participants. This represents a limited availability of participants, meaning interviewees were instead recruited through non-probability convenience sampling. It can be argued that information gained under this approach is not statistically reflective of society (Saunders *et al.* 2023), an additional concern as highlighted by research is leadership bias (Feichter, 2023), thus causing potential issues with reliability and validity.

However, in skill-based organisations such as a social care NGO, professional expertise cannot be duplicated or replaced (Work Foundation, 2018), this is supported by Andreasson *et al.* (2018) who argues that input from individuals with relevant experience and expertise remains valid. Furthermore, as McCartney and Fu (2022) also explain, the link between theory and context must be bridged to highlight how HRA can add value, with Rasmussen *et al.* (2024) suggesting this value comes from addressing leadership needs, which as Greasley and Thomas (2020) notes requires leadership input. Therefore, convenience sampling remains suitable as it allows for the collection of meaningful data in qualitative research projects conducted within limited time and access constraints (Anderson *et al.*, 2020).

Table 1–

Participant Breakdown

Role	*Years with NGO*	*Years as a Formal Leader*	*Pseudonym*
Manager	9	7	L1
Head of Service	8	5	L2
Manager	10	5	L3
Head of Service	15	7	L4
Manager	5	3	L5
Head of Service	14	11	L6
Manager	10	6	L7

4.6: Pilot

Given the potential issues associated with semi-structured interviews conducted with participants recruited under a non-probability sampling, to further ensure clarity and robustness of interview, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study contained two elements, firstly before scheduling any interviews, to ensure full transparency, proposed interview questions were shared with the Director of HR along with the Research and Policy Officer of the NGO.

Secondly, a pilot interview was conducted with a former frontline leader who is now embedded within a HR role. Based on feedback and experiences within this interview, some questions were rephrased to allow greater understanding of the questions. Additionally, the interviewee felt some questions were slightly too long, making them difficult to follow and would have asked for them to be repeated, to address this, these questions were shortened and more direct. It was also found that some questions were obsolete due to interviewees previous responses having already covered it. Therefore, these questions were removed and reserved as potential prompts should it be required.

4.7: Data Analysis

This study leans on theoretical interplay of Leadership as a bridge between Talant and Organisation as outlined in the Human Capability Framework (Fig. 2) as a guide to analysis of data. As the purpose of this research is to identify if frontline leaders perceive the value of HRA in decision-making, this suggests the need to understand leadership needs and perceptions of value. For this reason, the data analysis will be guided by the Thematic Analysis (TA) as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) who explain its strength lies in allowing the researcher to identify meanings in the data gathered. While TA does have its foundations in psychology, Terry *et al.* (2017) explain TA is method used beyond psychology wherever researchers are aiming to understand meaning and perceptions. While there are some criticisms of the quality of TA in comparison to other methods (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). This could be due to the fact that unlike other approaches, TA has no ridged frameworks to follow and can be either objective or subjective depending on the kind of value or meaning being sought. Braun and Clarke (2021b) suggest that this therefore requires the highest level of thoughtful and diligent choices within TA process to counter the perceived quality issues stemming from ill informed uptake of TA and the inevitable poor research that follows. This is supported by Finn *et al.* (2022) who shows poor qualitative research is related to a researcher mixing research paradigms within their approach. It is for these reasons that Terry *et al.* (2017) explains the researcher must not only be actively involved in TA but understand the purpose of their research, therefore having a practitioner involved in the research process can aid this (Gelade, 2006). Briner and Walshe (2015) and Barends *et al.* (2014) support this in showing the most robust and reliable information is attained through active engagement in the collecting of the data rather than being passive in the process. Interviews will then be transcribed, anonymised, themes will be identified and developed based on content.

4.8: Ethical Considerations

As a Social Care NGO employer, the interests of employees and other stakeholders are of the main concern of the organisation as such, within this research the priorities are to take consideration as to what is in the best interest of participants and stakeholders (Anderson *et al.*, 2020). This follows the axiology philosophy of interpretivism which relies on understanding and communication between parties (Saunders *et al.,* 2019).

Therefore, at all stages of the research process, from proposal through final dissertation, multiple discussions were had with various members of the NGO regarding ethical considerations around confidentiality and trust. Considering this, to ensure transparency the Director of HR was given final draft of interview questions that would be used. Additionally, to allow further transparency, curtesy phone calls were had with relevant Directors of Services to clarify purposes of research is academic and focused on leaders as being supervisors of team members rather than service provision or client group.

Participants were given all relevant information pertaining to the research and its objectives, along with how data will be stored and used before being asked to participate. Anyone who agreed to participate, where also informed that they are also free to withdraw their consent and guided how to do so. This same information was reiterated at the interview beforehand.

4.9: Limitations

One potential limitation of this study relates to sample size, while there is no steadfast rule on the ideal sample size (Francis *et al.,* 2010), according to Fu *et al.* (2022) there is a trend of the mid teens. This was not possible to achieve within the nature of this study due to the time limitations in which the study was conducted which impacted on the sample size.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Findings

The primary research discovered that between the seven frontline leaders interviewed, a combined number of 71 years experience with the NGO, 44 of those being in a frontline leadership capacity. Given the high level of turnover and burnout associated with the sector as explained Chapter 2, this makes their perspective and insights invaluable in the context of this study.

Upon analysis interview data the following of themes were identified and categorised into the three headings of Talent, Leadership and Organisation as provided for under the Human Capability Framework (Fig. 2).

5.1: Talent

Theme 1 – Human Capital

Only two out of the seven participants instinctively made the connection with the term Human Capital and the underpinning concepts;

"*So human capital…is obviously the number of staff we have, but also the capacities and abilities of that staff…so every time we train somebody, we increase our human capital…You increase the value, you make somebody valuable, so they're worth is higher*" (L7).

"*…when I think of human capital, I think of a phrase…you are your own toolbox…you're the person, you're how you think and how you phrase questions or your responses, or you're the care and gestures that you use… and that's why we prioritise development*" (L3).

With some probing however L1 did identify that value is; "*what the people are bringing to the company"* they continued; "*I think they [participants] do rely on the staff a lot, but I think they need the staff to, I suppose, have the knowledge to do their job to get them where they need to be"*.

Despite the general unfamiliarity with the terminology itself, there is an awareness of the value of human capital in daily practice as further evident by L5 when discussing the success of their team;

"*…they are the ones that really make the team, you know, I'm the manager, but at the end of the end of the day, they're doing the everyday stuff they're linking in with the participants. They're the ones that make the team so successful*" (L5).

Theme 2 – Development

A consistently recurring theme in all interviews is around the development of employees, as evident below;

"…my ultimate goal really is to make sure that everybody feels that they have the knowledge and the confidence that if they want to go for team leader, they absolutely could…But ultimately…I suppose, like guidance and mentoring " (L1).

The importance of development is elaborated on by L2 who explains;

"I had been kind of asked a couple of times to go for a team leader position, but I didn't feel ready to do it…I think you have to be ready for it".

Interestingly motivation was also identified as a factor within this;

"I was very conscious of, you know, wanting to be in the role before I even got to the position… looking at the team leaders, what their responsibilities were and in supervision, talking to my manager about, like, what can I do to progress to the next step" (L2).

However, one respondent suggests that development is not always about promotions;

"…some people are quite happy [in their current role]…Then their…personal development plan is going to be completely different than the person who…wants to progress [upward]…it has to be flexible…I don't think we have one outcome for everybody" (L4).

This correlates with Tupper and Ellis (2022) who found that LT&D ought to align with individuals' goals rather than just organisational needs. While on face value, this could be seen as hindering the leadership pipeline, two of the respondents suggest the benefits come by taking the pressure off the current cohort of leaders;

"The more they [staff] can do, the less I have to do, then it kind of makes my job a bit easier" (L1).

"…as a leader…you need to make sure that you build your staff's competency, and they feel supported and that that you feel…in your absence, that they're still going to, you know, perform the same way" (L5).

Additionally, one respondent explained their own intrinsic motivation plays a part in them wanting to develop employees purely to see their growth in current roles;

"*…when they [employees] first came into the service and when they're really wide eyed when they're here and you know the type of work that we do…the type of challenges that we have, but then I like seeing the, the progression, the confidence building…I really get something from that*" (L3).

Employees intrinsic motivation is factored into leaders' consideration;

"I always try to take like a strength-based approach…Have they got a serious passion for the people that we work with? And because you've always got like your job roles and what's expected of you. But I think…the staff generally do go above and beyond that" (L1).

This correlates with Slatten *et al.* (2021) findings that NGO employees are often motivated by non-financial elements.

5.2: Leadership

Theme 1 – Psychological Safety

All seven respondents covered the need to provide a supportive, safe space for employees within their employment, with this non-judgemental approach directly benefiting employees;

"…if they make a mistake, it's OK…we'll rectify it and if you don't tell me your mistakes then you can't learn from them because then I can't help you fix them" (L5).

Furthermore, L3 suggests the importance of being supportive is even greater within the social care sector itself;

"*…the only predictable piece, is the unpredictability. So, I think trying to support people to be able to recognise that and manage that".*

This is echoed by L6 who advises leaders need to;

"*Talk them [staff] through…why they're stressed, whether it be personal or work related…. they could be burnt out, they could be involved in an incident".*

Three out of the seven respondents suggest a cornerstone of achieving this is through fairness and respect;

"*…if you come at something with respect, with fairness and I suppose an element of integrity like you will get a positive result no matter what, even if it's a negative situation*" (L2).

"…as long as it's coming from a good place, [you should] feel like it's OK to ask…Then ensuring that if somebody asks me or asks another staff member…that it's received well and [understand] it's coming from a good place rather than a criticism" (L4).

This leadership style does not only benefit the employee as shown below L6, but providing a non-judgemental environment also establishes a leadership pipeline for the organisation as L3 suggests;

"…in my early stages of management…that happened to me with a staff member…I invited her in to meet with me for a coffee just before she returned to work and we talked through the issues and what was causing her stress…we were able to resolve that by like assigning her a different role which worked well" (L6).

"…I had to send her [staff] off the floor because she cried and for no other reason other than do you know the difficult incident happening…she'd never seen that before. But she's now after turning into, like she's in a leadership role at the minute and is probably one of the strongest leaders that we have" (L3).

One respondent also reinforces the importance of a supportive leader;

"*…something happened in my personal life that kind of prevented me from going for that [promotion]…my line manager at the time recognised that it was a role that I wanted and I just wasn't ready for…but directed me into an acting team leader role to make sure it was getting [me] the experience…that kind of allowed me then the time to sort of what was going on in my own life*" (L4).

L3 would support this approach to leadership in suggesting that if employees are not "*able to manage*" then choices they make as their leader should be made with care and consideration, so it is not "*detrimental*" to the employee. One respondent also links this to the Employer Brand;

"*…we always talk about having a non-judgmental approach to the participants, but I think you really have to have that with the staff as well*" (L1).

While there are slight differences in the aims of employee development and the different perspectives of maintaining a leadership pipeline, what comes through is importance for non-judgemental style of leadership which is consistent with psychological safety.

Theme 2 – Time Management and Workload

All seven respondents agree on the importance of developing and supporting employees, however availability plays factor in achieving this as evident below;

"Getting the time and that when you set the time that you, you really both stick to it and make the most out of that time because you can get pulled away from it so easy… and I do get that like it is important to make the time, but it's just impossible with everything that's going on, it's really, really hard" (L1).

Two respondents however did acknowledge service size and workload plays a part in themselves being able to achieve this balance;

"*…I have four staff only. So, it's obviously easier to do that than…when you have like a lot of staff*" (L5).

"[W]e would have tried to set that culture in some of the larger STAs (Supported Temporary Accommodation Services) that we've got, you know, teams of 30 and 40 people and it's a bit more difficult" (L4).

Despite the challenges, the importance remains the same;

"…there's no point to me sending out an e-mail to a staff member and expecting change you know, it's about meeting with the person…whether it's on one on one or a group and actually sitting down [with them]" (L2).

However, the pressures placed on leaders by different stakeholders that are, relatively speaking, not within their own control negatively impacts on employees;

"…it happens quite frequently…I was going to meet the staff…[then we got] notice that we were getting an NQSF (National Quality Standards Framework) inspection, so that…[goes] out the window because…there is no way, you need to prepare the service. You need to try and get extra staff in…part of the NQSF is then that two staff are getting interviewed, so you have to like, make time for that as well…everything got pushed out and there was no way I was able to sit down and do the supervision with people" (L1).

This demonstrates the pressures of meeting the competing value-based needs of employees and regulatory obligations, especially those in larger services, which presents a correlation of findings by Mikołajczak (2022) that the conflict in itself contributes to employee retention issues and leadership burnout. This issue is not only something that impacts on meeting with employees, but it also has a risk of impacting on overall leadership capacity which may be mitigated by allowing more understanding;

"I think there needs to be a bit more kind of leeway and give with regards to the managers and the roles that they're doing outside of being a supervisor and allowing them the time" (L1).

"*I'm part of a team. I manage the team, but I'm still part of that team*" (L7).

Three of the seven respondents suggest the struggle can be linked to leaders adapting to their roles, first in a practical sense plus through equipping leaders for their roles;

"…we're all project workers, you move up and into your role, but sure, we don't have any HR experience…you didn't go to college to do that. So that's all very like, not part of what you're used to" (L2).

"…you were a project worker yesterday you know, so sometimes you kind of feel like that's hard to [adjust to] even though I would have always kind of taken a leader role in on my shift anyway…I found it challenging [that] people [were] not doing things…to the standard that I would have liked things done. Whereas as a project worker…you're not overseeing everything, so it doesn't affect you as much" (L5).

"…don't become a super project worker. You know, your job is a manager, try not to take on the work of the staff, but also try not to leave them there if they're struggling…you have to strike that balance" (L4).

Despite this, there is an acknowledgement of the efforts being made to address struggles leaders are facing;

"*I feel like HR has kind of branched out in terms of, you know, providing more training and you know, meeting team leaders, meeting managers, meeting heads of services, talking about…what's the expectations, how to navigate employee relations issues*" (L2).

Unfortunately, two of the respondents felt that the approaches are counter productive;

"[From] my experience …I don't believe at the moment that managers are getting the proper training to be managers and to be team leaders, I think they need more support" (L6).

"I remember doing like a training piece with HR…But I think at the time what I had found was that it was quite like rushed instead of being like introduced slower. It was very much like…go, go and get it done for everybody…it was just being introduced, but it was, it was very, very rushed" (L1).

This added workload impacts on leaders decision-making freedom with regards to their own workload which additionally presents a correlation with Lundberg *et al.* (2009) who shows that freedom in decision-making and autonomy is linked to motivation. One respondent suggests that use of technology could alleviate some of this pressure;

"…it was online…I think it'll be more fluid and it allows us the flexibility to be able to put information in as it's happening rather than at one period of time" (L4).

Theme 3 – Data and Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Within their roles, all seven respondents show that evidence-based decision-making is a very big part of their practice;

"*There's so much risks involved, so you have to lead with, you know, guidelines and policy and all of these things such as systems and data that's going to inform your practice because…You can't provide that best practice to somebody if they're not informing your practices…So yeah, there'll be a big emphasis on, you know, what is* *the right thing to do physically, rather than just morally the right thing to do, if that makes sense*" (L2).

One respondent describes it as having a reason why a decision is made;

"*Evidence based decision making… like always having your reason why"* (L3).

One respondent notes that sometimes however, there may not be any reference point and leaders must rely on their own expertise and judgement;

"But you know, there's just things kind of sometimes that occur out that are ordinary that you're like, 'oh… I've never had that one before' and you kind of just have to, you know, [take it on a] case by case basis…I definitely think your past experiences do help definitely make you make better decisions and help you grow as a manager" (L5).

Reflective learning from the experience if therefore important;

"…the longer I'm in management role…if I made a decision about something I'm like, that wasn't really the best decision….I'll always make a note of it" (L5).

"…it's taking the learning out of absolutely everything that happens. If we're doing something really well, you know, we need to just make sure we're reiterating that within the team…and the KPIs are kind of coming out of that as well" (L4).

A further respondent referred to experience and expertise informing the data;

"So one of the pieces I think is very important with the evidence-based decision-making is if something has come up, so for example, if there's this new behaviour and we find a strategy or an approach that works really well for that, making sure that's recorded and handed over and communicated effectively is so important because then that becomes the basis for the next decision that needs to be made" (L3).

This correlates with Greasley and Thomas (2020) suggestion decision-making can be enhanced by combining data and expertise. However, one other respondent while acknowledging the role expertise has in informing evidence, highlights that even in situations that are new, it is important to refer to some form of evidence;

"I have to explain to other people the why and how…I can't go 'I felt it was the best thing to do', that would not go down well" (L7).

While leaders value evidence in relation to decision-making, much of the data they have access to is focused on service provision;

"…we would rely, I suppose, heavily on our systems in order to…gather our data around a particular [participant]…we would need all of that information for…how to support that individual in different areas of their lives…we would place a great emphasis on having those systems in place" (L2).

Generally, employee data is compiled through interaction and observations as demonstrated throughout, however while this is a valid source of information, it may not always be reliable one;

"I think it's just best to get it from the person themselves. So, I find that the kind of most valuable [source of information] … and sometimes you kind of have to take that with a pinch of salt as well, because they might not always tell you the truth" (L1).

One respondent notes that better use of technology can allow for enhanced value in employee data;

"One of the things I think we could do better is by removing that manual paperwork…we could pull up like a salesforce type platform that will give me their kind of a home page…but it also allows the HR department to be able to go in and actively see where a person is at, and I think that would be very beneficial" (L4).

Having access to more employee related data could lead to more ownership and accountability;

"I think managers as leaders should have more access to that and I don't think things will get lost as much or missed. It gives managers and team leaders, more of an accountability within their own services" (L6).

L1 supports this and also alludes to employee data enabling leaders to better meet expectations of their roles;

"I always feel absolutely terrible when it comes to inspections…I think there should just be like a database where it's just this is the person, this is their training…I think

that would make it a lot easier than when it comes to inspections and everything else. It's just there. And even when you're sitting down doing your supervisions and stuff like that to just have access to it".

5.3: Organisation

Theme 1 – Human Capability and Stakeholder Value

When discussing the decision-making processes behind LT&D, the theme of stakeholder value was identified in multiple variations;

"The main stakeholders that I would interact with is really like the staff and the participants because the participants are also giving me feedback as well on the staff" (L1).

"So obviously like we would be conscious of our neighbours… like making sure that…we have a really good neighbourhood policy that we are making sure that there's no…antisocial behaviour" (L5).

This demonstrates that stakeholder value is a factor in leadership choices which comes from;

"…an expectation that the bottom line is we need to support everybody that we work with" (L4).

Leaders therefore see LT&D as a tool to bridge the gap between an individual's ability and the organisations capability to meet stakeholder needs;

"…it's all well and good going to college and getting a degree… [but] when you're working in frontline…meeting somebody where they're at…being able to relate and being able to build rapport with somebody. College or a course isn't going to teach you that., so the desired outcome for me for training is that so people have a bit more of an understanding as to what it is in reality" (L2).

What social care expertise does find however is that there is a link between LT&D and engagement, therefore the success of which is also determined by what benefit it is to the employee in the first instance then how those benefits can filter through to the whole team;

"So that's what we're trying to look at is that they actually got something out of it rather than just turning up you know getting a day off work to go and sit in the classroom ticking the box for the day you know" (L4).

"Are they going to be able to bring the information back and ultimately like, am I going to benefit from sending them on this training?" (L1).

There is an acknowledgement that the NGO is good at LT&D but suggests there is a gap in meeting employee needs over the longer term;

"I think one of the things that we do very well is that we have a grad programme which encourages people into the organisation. It's the retention piece is the [struggle]. So, we get people in and they get experience and then what they do is they tend to migrate them to other organisations or other sectors that maybe are along the same lines…So that's the big piece., it's getting people in and it's retaining those staff" (L4).

This presents a correlation with Batistič *et al.* (2022) who suggests the importance of considering employees needs. While this is a general finding in the data, the value of LT&D is determined by the participant themselves;

"…obviously you know our goal for everybody is kind of the same. But the way we talk and the way we communicate with everybody…depending on what's going on for our participant, we do it differently" (L4).

This demonstrates the value of care in a practical sense (Marino and Capone, 2023). To this end LT&D should be based on what the participants themselves require from the organisation;

"…when that situation happened, I said look, she obviously just needs a little bit more training…I sat down with her and she named, you know, that [the training] was very, very helpful that it made her see things from a different point of view, from the participants point of view" (L5).

This correlates with the outside in approach to decisions whereby the value of something is determined by what the stakeholder received because of the organisation's actions (Ulrich *et al.,* 2012).

Theme 2 – The Role of HR

One of the respondents would consider the role of HR to encompass a transactional supportive role;

"…answering any questions that we have, regardless of how relevant they are or not, because I know that sometimes happens. And so, it's just being able to have someone to answer the phone. Like I said, to just have someone…that just knows or can find the information to come back to you…I've always felt very, very important and it supports what we do because it's one less thing we then have to try and manage" (L3).

The expectation of HR varies from this, for example, four out of the seven respondents consider that the role of HR should more of a collaborative partnership as evident by L1;

"...so, for HR to be able to work with the managers and team leaders on how to retain staff and I think for everybody to be honest as well…if something's not working, just say look, actually this isn't working, we need to do something different".

Within this, three of the respondents also note there has been a shift away from them considering HR to be purely as recruitment and dismissal focused;

"…the staff retention rate [isn't great] within...social care and our kind of line of work…historically it would have felt like we were just kind of hiring, hiring, hiring all the time instead of actually just wandering like, why are people leaving, like, do they not feel supported?" (L5).

"...back then they [HR] were just, the concern was on hiring people and still is, but that's changed...maybe the word staff retention has become a phrase and I think it's become potentially more important than, 'oh, it doesn't matter if 20 are leaving, let's hire 30'" (L7).

"We're interacting more a little bit about bringing the best out when your employees…and that will all gain in terms of staff retention…So you're kind of bringing the two together… there's a whole lot of layers to HR other than just hiring and firing…or just performance issues" (L2).

One respondent did recognise the role of HR was not one area over another but about supporting the full employee life cycle;

"So, I suppose from recruitment right through to somebody's employment being non-existent" (L6).

Theme 3 – Trust, Reliability and Communication

Five of the seven respondents suggest that communication between frontline and other areas of the organisation is a source of concern. Communication issues have resulted in negative perceptions of HR;

"I think historically…there kind of was that anticipation that…people thought of it [HR] as negatively…I feel like people would have been a little bit like, apprehensive thinking that they're automatically in trouble or something" (L5).

"I still have that thing every time my phone says 'HR' [I think to myself] 'what did I do now?' because it used to be the case back in the day, you get a phone call from HR, you've done something. So that trauma is still there" (L7).

Increased collaboration and communication can repair this damage as evident below;

"…there definitely needs to be a lot of collaboration between human resources and management…you never want it to feel like, oh, it's us versus them… I just think it should be like, honest and open" (L1).

This however requires consistency plays as suggested by two respondents;

"*[It] probably sounds really silly but like in terms of I think…having consistency*" (L3).

"…I'm constantly ringing that [one] person all the time…and sometimes you can feel a bit kind of funnelling down to the same person all the time, you know and so that's a bit confusing from the frontline staff members point of view. Sometimes we're not fully aware of what's going on in the back office" (L4).

Quality of communication impacts on employees;

"I think the staff members would suffer with that and so would I, not being able to give the right information or not being able to give the right support when it was needed" (L3).

This correlates to human capability approach whereby equipping leaders in their role benefits employees (Ulrich, 2023).

Chapter 6: Discussion

Frontline NGO leaders the see their role as developing their teams as it is the collective individual abilities of team members that makes a team effective, this is consistent with the purpose of leadership within the human capability framework (Ulrich, 2023), which in turn supports the concept of human capital where individual abilities contributes to the overall success of an organisation (McCarthy *et al.*, 2024). This is especially true for SCWs who must rely on their own abilities in order to do the work (Share and Lalor, 2009), literature also explains that social care expertise can only be gained through the context of being employed within the sector (Hamilton, 2011). NGO leaders reflect this, noting that as human capital is essential to the organisation LT&D is vital. This is especially urgent in social care due to CPD, suggesting LT&D strategies should be proactive, thus requiring employee centred investments (Deloitte Insights, 2024).

However, to effectively invest in human capital, there is a requirement to have some awareness of intangible value (McCarthy *et al.,* 2024). Within the social care NGO whose mission is to improve society overall, which depends on the abilities of SCWs, thus organisational value lies with SCWs making it important to develop employees to enhance the value of human capital. In social sciences, this intangible value is referred to as the value of care (Marino and Capone, 2023), which is provided by frontline employees based on a reliance on their own abilities (Share and Lalor, 2009; Mintzberg, 1983). Within the context of the NGO, this translates into identifying if the participants needs are being met by the LT&D. This is supported by Minion and Banerjee (2024) who show that the main point of interaction between a social care NGO and their client group are the SCWs. This correlates with stakeholder value (Ulrich, 2023). Which as Armstrong (2023), Tupper and Ellis (2022) and Gunnigle *et al.* (2017) all agree, employee abilities are tied to LT&D. However, while LT&D is key to achieving complex organisational goals (Gunnigle *et al.*, 2017), respondents feel that often employees join the NGO do not want to gain practical experience with the end goal of moving on to other organisations.

Generally, people who join NGOs are intrinsically motivated (Slatten *et al.*, 2021), with respondents highlighting that employees take pride in their work, going above and beyond in their basic duties. This in itself could arguably contribute to the issue as those in care-based professions have high self-awareness making them more susceptible to burnout (Laily *et al.,* 2022). Literature also shows the social care sector also has retention issues embedded in within the profession itself that is not unique to any one employer (Mahon, 2021; Keogh and Byrne, 2016; Share and Lalor, 2009), additionally all NGOs have their own struggles with retaining employees (Mikołajczak, 2022), this means NGOs operating within the social care sector will inevitably compound the issue. Respondents have noted this issue in explaining that the work itself is tough which can cause burnout. While LT&D can be used to improve retention (Amah, 2023), to achieve this the strategy must be designed based on what employees want, rather than what the organisation needs (Tupper and Ellis, 2022). Additionally, as not all employees want to progress within the NGO, LT&D strategies must reflect that. This backs up previous research that shows a failure to meet employee needs is counter-productive (Batistič *et al.*, 2022). The NGO however has to operate within budgeting restrictions compared to other organisations, thus making employee centred investments a challenge, which results in push factors leading to employees migrating to other more organisations who can meet their needs. Therefore, investing in LT&D with the success being measured in terms of improving retention or progression may not be reliable, based on findings, measuring effectiveness of LT&D based on meeting stakeholder needs may be more valid as respondents note service KPIs come from what staff performance. This however requires a shift from using data purely for workforce reporting towards analysing multiple sources of data through HRA (CIPD, 2023b; Khan and Milner, 2023).

While there is an awareness of the value employees bring, within care-based settings human capital data is not recorded (Cavanagh *et al.,* 2024). Respondents support this in explaining that there is no reliable source of information when it comes to employees, with the data they have access to is related to service provision and what little employee related data is to meet service compliance. Ulrich, *et al.,* (2012) explains there needs to be a wholistic consideration of human capital, however this is not the case within the NGO as respondents note, the current LT&D choices made within the NGO are based on participants needs, regulatory requirements as decided by external stakeholders, their own observations of what they employee may need and what employees tell them they would like, while these are valid avenues to gain clarity on LT&D needs, they are not fully reliable. One relies on leadership judgement which has a risk of bias (Feichter, 2023), while another relies on information from the employee themselves which as noted by respondents themselves, employees are not always honest about things. This can lead to gaps in decision-making due to level of reliability of the information sources (CIPD, 2023a) which can result in organisations failing to meet their goal due to acting on unreliable information (Weisbord, 1976). These inefficiencies can erode trust in leaders (Mikołajczak, 2023), which is of particular concern as respondents also suggest that the main goal of the NGO is to help meet participants needs and LT&D is essential equip employees to meet those needs.

6.1: NGO Leadership Needs

While frontline employees are the primary source of organisational value (Marino and Capone, 2023; Hirpa *et al.*, 2020) and therefore should be at the centre of decisions made to ensure participants needs are met (Rasmussen *et al.*, 2024). The driving force in enabling this value comes from leaders through direction and guidance (Ulrich, 2023; Armstrong, 2020). Findings support this with leaders seeing their role as facilitating their teams in fulfilling their duties, which is achieved in the NGO through supervision, team meetings and collaboration. However, this is not always achievable as leaders often have a multitude of competing stakeholder requirements which they are obliged to meet promptly which can take them away from the leadership side of their role without the guarantee the stakeholder expectation can be met. This puts pressures on leaders which can contribute to retention issues (Mikołajczak, 2022), as demonstrated, focusing on bureaucratic duties takes them away from supporting staff which impacts on the psychological safety. Simultaneously, this leads to burnout in leaders as responding to bureaucratic needs, even if promptly, can often lead them feel that the undertaking was not worthwhile given that their teams suffered the cost. This can be viewed as counter productive use of leaders' time in pursuit of organisational goals (Batistič *et al.,* 2022), which is to meet participants needs, as this relies on SCWs who in turn rely on their leaders.

While organisations need to meet stakeholder expectations the must manage the risks associated with doing so (McGahan, 2021). Respondents reflect this in explaining they must be accountable at all times with decisions being grounded in some form of evidence to justify choices made. This stems from a duty of care on leaders within clinical settings who while rely primarily on expertise and judgement, ought to apply some degree of evidence-based decision-making to mitigate potential gaps in judgement (Rousseau, 2020). This is true for the NGO as by incorporating data and evidence into decision-making, people are more forgiving if it does not go to plan as they can understand why that particular choice was made and you can show efforts were made to mitigate risks. This not only fosters a degree of trust, but evidence-based decision-making better equips leaders to navigate uncertainty (Hedayatipour *et al.*, 2024). Respondents have suggested having access dashboards relating to appropriate employee data rather than purely service provision could equip them to be more effective leaders whilst being able to meet regulatory obligations.

NGO leaders do understand the importance of the bureaucracy given the context that the NGO operates within (Mikołajczak, 2023, Mikołajczak, 2022), respondents however feel there needs to be more understanding of their obligations in a practical sense and how at times, the demands are not realistic. This contradicts the human compatibility concept that views leaders as the bridge between the organisation and its talent, meaning the organisation should enable them (Rasmussen *et al.*, 2024; Ulrich, 2023). One explanation for this could stem from a lack of communication within the organisation, with respondents highlighting a separation between those in frontline and head office which creates confusion. This is of concern because while strategies are decided by senior management, they rely on frontline leaders for successful implementation (Whittington *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, communication issues can cause in gaps in decision-making which, as strategies are decided based on information provided (CIPD, 2023a), resulting in strategies failing (Weisbord, 1976). Some leaders turn to HR in an attempt to close this separation, which suggests that HR should have more of an in put into organisational decisions. This requires HR to have greater influence which is not always possible as HR often takes a more transactional function in comparison to other departments, thus limiting its input (Bersin, 2015; Ulrich, 2015). Literature however shows that HR has a significant role to play in NGO sustainability through enabling human capital value (Slatten *et al.*, 2021; Domiter and Marciszewska, 2018).

Methods used to develop NGO leaders for their roles and workload on placed on them could also contribute to their struggles, with respondents feeling that often those who get promoted into leadership roles do not always have the required support and training to step into the role. There is an acknowledgement of efforts made to equip them, however it is a generalised approach rolled out under time constraints which adds to leadership pressures thus counterproductive. This is problematic with respondents noting different nuances exist within the NGO depending on the type of service, the number of participants, the needs of those participants and the number staff that they are leading. This suggests, failing to pivot and meet leadership needs can directly impact on achieving organisational goals whilst also damaging the leadership pipeline thus impacting organisational sustainability as leaders are vital in allowing the organisation to make effective decisions (Whittington *et al.*, 2020; Andreasson *et al.,* 2018; Mintzberg, 1983). While the main purpose of leadership is to enable teams to perform well in their role and exercise a degree of discretion (Armstrong, 2020), this is an essential component of the functionality within skills-based organisations (Share and Lalor, 2009; Mintzberg, 1983). As one respondent explains, while they are the manager, they are also members of the team, to this end, they too must be enabled to work at their own discretion. This represents a person culture whereby systems are implemented to support employees in their roles (Handy, 1999).

6.2: The Role of HR

Often those in frontline roles are promoted to positions where they can influence organisational decisions with a view to capitalise on their expertise in strategic development (Andreasson *et al.,* 2018; Mintzberg, 1983). Respondents however note that as they are promoted upwards, their roles take them away from direct interaction with participants with responsibilities encompassing elements of HR and finance, which respondents suggest the vast majority have backgrounds in social care or addiction studies, not HR or finance thus causing gaps in decision-making processes in which frontline leaders turn to HR for support. With leaders often unable to effectively lead their teams due to gaps in knowledge and therefore would expect to be able to turn to HR to get answers as they are needed and support in completing paperwork. This suggests that the role of HR is to fulfil a supportive transactional function, which is consistent with the general expectation of HR (Bersin, 2015; Ulrich, 2015).

There is a larger desire for a more collaborative partnership with HR, with respondents feeling that everyone in the organisation are working towards the same goal so if something is wrong, then it needs to be addressed. This is consistent with strategic partnering, which as an organisation grows, then HR needs to shift towards to have more impact (Khan and Millner, 2023; Ulrich *et al.,* 2012). For HR to have impact, trust and communication must be present which is something the NGO struggles with due to an apprehension that has accumulated over time due to negative perceptions of the profession, as traditionally HR was recruitment and employee relations focused, meaning the only time HR would be in touch with leaders was if there was something wrong. Respondents do note a change in recent years whereby HR expanded into other areas with an emphasis on supporting frontline leaders.

Trust however remains a factor as some respondents would typically go to the same person regardless of their suitability to resolve the issue, which goes back to the earlier issue of the perceived separation. Some respondents suggest this could be resolved by having a point of contact they could go to depending on what the specific issue is, this would reflect the frontline desire for a centre of excellence (CIPD, 2023e). However, given the reliance on HR to bridge the separation between frontline and head office within the NGO, transactional responsibilities cannot be discounted, as a failure to meet transactional expectations will prevent HR from being strategic (Ulrich, 1997). While this is true, autonomy is of importance to leaders with respondents nothing having a centralised system where they could handle a degree of HR tasks would make them effective leaders, this is consistent with shared services (Kew and Stredwick, 2016). This not only allows HR to meet transactional requirements but frees them up to add value to leadership through enhanced collaboration. By deploying the Three-Legged Stool approach to HR within the NGO could allow leaders differentiated needs be met through a strategic approach to transactional HR (Ulrich, 1997)

6.3: Value of HR Analytics

Perhaps the most surprising finding is that there is a desire for a greater collaborative partnership between HR and frontline leaders, this is a contradiction to professional bureaucracy which suggests that frontline leaders know best (Mintzberg, 1983). It does however demonstrate an awareness of their own limitations which supports suggestions in literature that care-based workers have high-levels of self-awareness (Laily *et al.,* 2022). Simultaneously however, while frontline leaders have acknowledged a shift in HR in recent years towards a more collaborative role, an apprehension towards HR from past negative perceptions exists. Given that frontline leaders get promoted to senior roles impacting organisational decisions, these negative perceptions of HR could link to why HR have a limited influence, as the negative perception may be the main reference point more senior decision-makers have. However, as there is high value placed on evidence-based practice, following more data-driven HR approach could repair trust (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2024).

Research suggests using HR data to provide value to internal and external stakeholders (Rasmussen *et al.*, 2024; Ulrich *et al.*, 2017), however, for data to add true value, it must move beyond benchmarking and best practices as often best practice can be outdated (Ulrich and Smallwood, 2021), therefore it may not be reliable to benchmark against another organisation's best practices (CIPD, 2023d). Instead, HR data should be used in line with organisational contexts (Fu *et al.*, 2022; McCartney and Fu, 2022) by aligning to management needs first (Greasley and Thomas, 2020) with a view of meeting stakeholder concerns (Ulrich and Dulebohn, 2015). HRA therefore is pivotal in enabling organisations to use employee related data in line with strategic objectives (Ulrich, 2023; Ulrich *et al,* 2012). However, to be effective there must be a clear strategy implemented to ensure reliability and validity in respect to organisational goals (Khan and Milner, 2023).

As discovered through the discussed findings, along with previous research by Minion and Banerjee (2024), the organisational goal is to support participants which relies on SCWs, who in turn are equipped through LT&D (Armstrong, 2023; Tupper and Ellis, 2022; Gunnigle *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, as LT&D is already essential and recorded for service compliance purposes, utilising the same data through HRA to enhance leadership choices regarding human capital value (Yahia *et al.*, 2021). This supports Rasmussen *et al.* (2024) who suggests the most valuable HRA projects are ones enabled by HR data that frontline leaders can take ownership of. Respondents reference this in suggesting that combining currently existing employee information with potential dashboards could allow them to be more effective, this is reflective of HRA.

We also see in the findings that the pain points of leaders relate to supervising their teams and the time management issues due to their workload. While research shows a positive correlation between talent management and HRA (Kryscynski *et al.,* 2018), Marr (2018) warns to achieve data validity and reliability, the focus should be on data already available and of importance. Moreover, some stakeholders may have ethical concerns in respect of HRA (Mansi and Goswami, 2024), as such projects should be curbed as appropriate to showcase the benefits, while limiting risks (Fu *et al.*, 2022). In development of HRA approach, incorporating Gunnigle and Moore (1994) suggestion of implementing best practice strategy at a service level and best fit at an organisational level can allow HRA equip leaders ensure best practice, regulatory responsibilities are met at a service level whilst implementing best fit strategies at an organisational level to tailor use of data requirements based on differentiated organisational needs.

6.4: Limitations

Some limitations as suggested from the findings are down to sample size and composition.

Some respondents have noted, different nuances exist within the NGO which heavily impact on how they view things, as when frontline workers move to different services or are promoted, their roles and experiences change and with that so do their expectations of the organisation. This is an element which this research was unable to properly examine for three reasons. Firstly, while the researcher notes that focus groups could have gained higher quality data in terms of these nuances this would require multiple people being available at the same time, due to time constraints, the research instrument chosen was semi-structured interviews as this method could better work around the availability of respondents. Finally, with a view to best maintain anonymity, the researcher chose not to dig down into too many specifics such as services respondents are leaders in.

It must also be noted that when we are discussing leadership, this is within the context of a Social Care NGO. This is an important distinction as leaders within other organisations such as a technology company would have vastly different expectations.

Time constraints also prevented the researcher from being able to include any Team Leaders in the sample, which would have greatly added to the quality of findings given that they would also maintain a more regular and frontline presence, additionally as are most recently appointed to leadership roles they may have exhibited fewer negative associations towards HR.

The researcher also acknowledges that artificial intelligence will impact on the future of HRA and human capability.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Given that HR holds the vast majority of data in relation to employees it suggests HR should have influence on strategic decisions, this is because organisations rely on employees to function which makes them the source of organisational value. Much like fixed assets require regular investments and a facilities team to support ensuring its functionality and value, the same is true for intangible assets of human capital. This is especially relevant for social care as it is SCWs who provide value of care to client groups. Despite this, employee information is rarely used to bring about value to either the employee or the organisation but used to meet service compliance requirements with key organisational decisions based on traditional metrics with an emphasis on financially tangible elements. This stems from the perspective that unlike fixed assets, an organisation does not own human capital or the intangible value associated, which is exacerbated by the high turnover within the sector. This results in a reluctance to invest in intangible value of human capital. In recent times this has changed with the increased uptake of HRA seeking to quantify intangible value of employees in a way that can give HR departments an equal influence in strategic discussions as finance departments hold. Previous research into HRA explains it can add value to organisations whilst also making HR departments more efficient and strategic, however there is a gap in the literature on how value in specific organisational contexts can be achieved.

As SCWs are the main point of contact between the organisation and participant groups, with the value of care being determined by participant group itself. Therefore, in applying an outside in approach to HR as provided for under the Human Capability Framework (Fig. 2), the value of HR is in fact determined by participant group based on what they receive because of what the NGO does. Thus, the effectiveness of LT&D ought to be evaluated based on meeting participant needs rather than retention, which requires moving beyond workforce reporting to HRA given the differences between NGO services. Research has found that while the organisation itself is responsible for strategic development, processes and procedures which ensures best practices are adhered, it is the SCWs who provide the care to participants and are therefore the source of organisational value. As leaders are the bridge between the organisation and frontline employees, leaders are the therefore most important cohort in enabling human capital, thus the organisations focus should be on enabling frontline leaders to be effective in their roles.

As identified, NGOs operate on a fine line between meeting value-based needs of stakeholders in addition to regulatory obligations, however best practice financial practices results in highly bureaucratic systems which can cause failures in meeting value-based needs, which as shows depends on human capital who relies on psychological safety, development and autonomy. Frontline NGO leaders therefore need to be agile to meet both conflicting needs, however, currently to effectively meet bureaucratic requirements means neglecting employees to a degree, and vice versa. This suggests HRA projects applies under the Do, Help, Fix Model (Fig. 5) should seek to bridge this gap.

7.1: Recommendations

Given the previously discussed limitations of the findings and that HRA projects must assign to management needs, further research is needed. Ideally, this would be through a series of focus groups with the intention to identify differences and similarities in frontline leadership perspectives based on seniority and service locations. The researcher would suggest one focus group of Team Leaders, another of Managers and another of Head of Services, this is to identify specific needs of those cohorts. These focus groups, from arranging through to analysing findings could take 8 to 12 months depending on organisational capacity.

While LT&D data is already recorded within the NGO, data used for effective HRA needs to be both valid and reliable, it would therefore be advisable to conduct a data cleaning exercise. This project would be a time-consuming endeavour, one that the HR department would not be in a position to complete currently given the expectations from frontline leaders to remain efficient within transactional duties. However, this would best be completed concurrently with focus groups for more streamlined implementation of future HRA strategies. One recommendation in order to complete this stage would be to recruit an intern with the primary focus on cleaning data to support the development of a reliable HRA strategy. Within a 12-month period, this would cost the NGO the salary of an intern, approximately €25,000.

Finally, a working group combining all seniority levels should be assembled to action the focus group recommendations. This could allow to further fine tune what would be the most valuable HRA projects to pursue which would benefit the widest number of stakeholders.

Personal Learning Statement

Having completed a short Erasmus work placement in the Netherlands where I got to interact with a HR professional within a large childcare organisation, I discovered HR was my career path, this was reinforced during my undergrad. However, while I had solid understanding of HR, I struggled to link academic knowledge into real world application. Then during my postgrad studies, I completed a HR analytics module which seemed to open the door for me to make those connections which in turn inspired my thesis topic.

Professionally, I have discovered the role of HR is more critical than ever as frontline leaders are seeking more collaboration than ever before, which in reality, the needs of frontline leaders align so closely with what the future of HR ought to be. The challenge is doing this in a way that senior decision-makers can find value in, this is where the role of HRA can play by enhancing frontline evidence-based decision-making.

Personally, whilst completing this project, a lot of personal and professional challenges occurred which impacted on the level which I could engage with the study. However, the process has enabled me to turn perceived weaknesses into actionable strengths such as such as resiliency, emotional intelligence, reflective learning and an element of future thinking given the topic of the study itself. Furthermore, the collaborative process of the interviews was something I enjoyed to a level that I was not expecting and found personally rewarding. The experience has brought newfound confidence in my chosen profession in HR.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Interview Guide

<u>Interview Questions 06062024</u>

1. Please would you be able to talk me through your career progression within Social Care NGOs?
    - how long in a formal leadership role?
2. Can you talk to me about your experience within your leadership role(s)?
3. Who do you consider to be your stakeholders?
4. What data, if any, do you have access to?
5. To what level of value you do place on data sources in your decision-making process?
6. How is Learning, Training and Development information used to inform decision-making?
7. Could you discuss your own awareness of the concept of Human Capital
8. Please describe how the concept of "Evidence-based Decision-making" impacts on your practice?
9. How would you describe the profession of HR?
10. Could the future of Social Care NGOs be improved through greater input from HR, please explain why/why not.
11. What challenges, if any, would you anticipate would prevent the inclusion of HR data in decision-making within frontline NGO leadership?
12. Finally, is there anything I have not touched on or asked that you believe would be important for this study?

Appendix II: Informed Consent Form

Liam Brannelly
x22119701@student.ncirl.ie
MAHRM08

National College of Ireland

Informed Consent Form

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project titled "**HR Analytics and Frontline Leadership Decision-Making: An Investigation into the Role HR Analytics May Have in Enhancing the Human Capability of a Social Care NGO**". Please read the provided Participant Information Leaflet before completing this consent form. If you have any question about this research study, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher or their research supervisor.

Please tick the appropriate box for **each** of the statements below. It will be assumed that unticked boxes mean you **DO NOT** consent to that element of the study.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Leaflet about this project. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that I do not have to take part in this project and that I can opt out at any time up to such point data has been incorporated into findings/analysis. I understand that I don't have to give a reason for opting out.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I have been assured that information about me will be kept private and confidential.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I consent to participating in a Semi-Structured Interview, and I understand and consent to my interview being audio-recorded if in person or video-recorded if via MS Teams for transcription purposes.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I have been given a copy of the Participant Information Leaflet for my records.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I consent to take part in this project, having been fully informed of the risks, benefits and alternatives.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I give informed, explicit consent to have my data processed as part of **this** project.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I give additional informed, explicit consent to have my fully anonymised transcript utilised as part of **future** academic research by the researcher, such as publication within an academic journal.	Yes ☐	No ☐

Name (Block Capitals): ______________________ Signature: ______________________

Date: ____________________

You may also withdraw consent at any time if you wish to do so by signing below:

I (print name) ______________________________________ hereby withdraw my consent for participating in this project.

Name (Block Capitals): ______________________ Signature: ______________________

Date: ____________________

Appendix III: Participant Information Leaflet

Liam Brannelly
x22119701@student.ncirl.ie
MAHRM08

National College of Ireland

Participant Information Leaflet

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project titled "**HR Analytics and Frontline Leadership Decision-Making: An Investigation into the Role HR Analytics May Have in Enhancing the Human Capability of a Social Care NGO**".

Please read this Information Leaflet very carefully before completing the Informed Consent Form.

Details
My name is Liam Brannelly and I am a Human Resource Management Masters student working under the supervision of Stephen Sands in the School of Business at the National College of Ireland. As part of my Masters degree, I am conducting a research study to identify if HR related data may have a role in enhancing organisational decision-making at a frontline leadership level within the context of a Social Care NGO. This study has received relevant ethics clearance by the National College of Ireland, with supporting evidence by the Vice Dean of Postgraduate Studies & Research available on request. *Please note, this study is academic in nature and you are **not** being requested to respond, or act, on behalf of your employer through engaging in this study but rather your own opinions stemming from your professional expertise as a formal leader within a Social Care NGO setting.*
Who should be contacted for further information?
If you require additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please do not hesitate to contact me at *x22119701@student.ncirl.ie*. Alternatively, you may also contact my research supervisor, Steve Sands, Adjunct Professor in HR at National College of Ireland via email at *Stephen.Sands@ncirl.ie*
What is the purpose of this project?
The project is conducted as partial fulfilment of a Masters Award and aims to evaluate the current use of data at a frontline leadership level with a view to better understand how appropriate HR data may enhance organisational value through HR Analytics by meeting frontline leadership needs along with determining a suitable approach, if any.

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National College of Ireland

Participant Information Leaflet

How would you participate?
You are invited to participate in this project by partaking in a semi-structured interview. During the interview you will be asked a series of questions designed to better understand the sources of information you utilised in your role as a frontline leader within a Social Care NGO which would inform your decision-making processes, with a specific focus on employees. The interview is expected to take between 40 to 60 minutes. During the interview you will be given the opportunity to speak openly about your own professional views and experiences of what challenges or opportunities are currently faced within this context. To ensure accurate transcription, the interview will be recorded. For in person interviews, this will be an audio-recording, for interviews conducted via MS Teams, this will be a video-recording. The recording will be treated with care and confidentiality and will not be shared with outside parties. If you do not wish to participate in the interview, you are under no obligation to do so. You also have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, until such point data has been incorporated into findings/analysis. Not participating in this project will not negatively affect you.
What happens after the interview?
After participating in the interview, the recording of the conversation taken during the interview will be transcribed and pseudonymised with all potentially identifying elements fully redacted. This pseudonymised transcript will then be utilised for the completion of the project.
Data Use and Storage
All data collected during the interview will be used to produce a Dissertation as partial fulfilment of a Masters Award. You are ***not*** being requested to respond, or act, on behalf of your employer through engaging with this study. In line with National College of Ireland's current data retention policy, the recordings, transcribed data and signed participant consent forms will be stored for a period of 5 years

and then destroyed. The data will be stored securely in an encrypted, password protected folder on a drive within the possession of the researcher. The results from this study may further be presented at internally within the college or at conferences on a wider level. With additional explicit consent, fully anonymised transcript/findings may be utilised as part of future academic research by the researcher, such as publication within an academic journal.
Are there any risks or benefits?
Risks: This project is academic in nature and there are no risks associated with participating in this project. You are ***not*** being requested to respond, or act, on behalf of your employer through engaging with this study. All questions posed throughout the interview will focus on your own personal opinions stemming from your professional expertise as a formal leader within a Social Care NGO setting and you will be asked to share only as much as you are comfortable with. **Benefits:** As this project is academic in nature, there are also no direct benefits associated with participating in this project; however, by participating in this project, you are contributing to the advancement of the ever-evolving field of the HR Profession.