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46,2

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Received May 2007  
Revised November 2007  
Accepted November 2007

# Tightening the link between employee wellbeing at work and performance

## A new dimension for HRM

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of the paper is to show that, though essential, the achievement of business-oriented performance outcomes has obscured the importance of employee wellbeing at work, which is a neglected area of inquiry within the field of human resource management. Instead the emphasis typically placed on the business case for HRM suggests a one-sided focus on organisational outcomes at the expense of employees. With this in mind, this paper seeks to examine the effects of HRM practices on employee wellbeing and performance.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected from a public sector (local government) organisation to identify the link between HRM practices, employee wellbeing at work, and performance. A preliminary staff survey of employees provides a brief overview of the link between HRM practices, employee wellbeing at work and performance.

**Findings** – HRM practices adopted have a significant impact on employee wellbeing at work and tend to be more positive than negative. Overall a consistent result in the study was that management relationship behaviour in the form of support and development of trust, promoted employee wellbeing at work amongst workers. In general, the findings will prove helpful to human resource practitioners, management, policy makers and business practice.

**Research limitations/implications** – HRM practices that help to maximise employee wellbeing at work are not necessarily the same as those that make up “high performance” HR practices. Moreover, the promotion of wellbeing at work is not likely to be a result of the HRM practices but can be linked to line management leadership and relationships.

**Practical implications** – The importance of management relationships, support and employees’ trust was found to predict wellbeing at work. The decision by management to embrace the business case for employee wellbeing at work is likely to complement more conventional methods of improving employee attitudes and productivity, which in turn can enhance organisational effectiveness and decision making.

**Originality/value** – This paper builds on existing work within HRM and provides a framework for establishing the linkage between HRM practices, employee wellbeing at work and performance in the public sector that it is suggested could improve individual and organisational outcomes through enhanced efficiency and productivity.

**Keywords** HRM practices, Employee wellbeing at work, Business performance

**Paper type** Research paper



### Introduction

The influence of employee wellbeing at work has attracted increasing interest in recent years (Currie, 2001; Department for Work and Pensions, 2006; Kersley *et al.*, 2006;

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MacDonald, 2005; Peccei, 2004; Tehrani *et al.*, 2007; Warr, 2002). In the modern world where there are rising dependencies on global market forces places an ever-greater burden on those of working age in the delivery of products and services. This in turn has had a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of workers. This resulted in issues of the high cost to business and the public purse of employee absence (MacDonald, 2005), with public sector absence levels and costs being higher at nearly ten days per employee every year (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005); the spiralling number of incapacity benefit claimants increasing from 0.7 million in late 1970s to around 2.7 million in 2006 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006); increases in the prevalence of mental health conditions from 25 per cent in the mid-1990s to 40 per cent today (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006); with stress and other mental health conditions now being the main causes of employee absence (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), 2007). The Health and Safety Executive (Health and Safety Executive, 2006) estimates that stress costs business £3.8 billion a year. Similarly, the increase in obesity is also a major worry for policy makers where research reveals that obesity in men will have risen to 33 per cent by 2010 from 22 per cent in 2003 and the number of obese women will rise from 23 to 28 per cent over the same period (Department of Health, 2004). Similarly other factors include an aging workforce and the need for individuals to work longer to support their retirement and fund their pensions is also contributing to employees' health and wellbeing at work (MacDonald, 2005). Moreover, the introduction of new technology is hastening the pace of change (Currie, 2001) and demanding the immediacy of response and dual earning families is now commonplace and viewed as an average family (Cox *et al.*, 2005), creating problems of balance between work, family and life satisfaction (Cooper and Robertson, 2001; Guest, 2002).

With this in mind, the issue of employee wellbeing at work has increasingly attracted Government attention, as employment will continue to change (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005). Concentration on problems such as absenteeism and accidental injury is giving way to a broader vision of what a healthier and happier and more productive workforce can achieve in terms of higher performance and productivity (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005; Economic and Social Research Council, 2006). Therefore the fundamental principle outlined by policy makers are that all working age people have the opportunity to make the optimum contribution to their organisations while enjoying a safer, more satisfying and healthier working life (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006). This vision of "Health, work and wellbeing – caring for the future" has been embraced by cutting edge companies that have invested deeply in the wellbeing of their workforce are now reaping the benefits as it appears that wellbeing at work is increasingly being recognised as an important factor in determining organisational success (Peccei, 2004; Tehrani *et al.*, 2007; Warr, 2002).

The increasing interest in wellbeing at work has emerged against the backdrop of the general decline in nature of workplace ill health resulting from physical, psychosocial and personal factors. The Department for Work and Pensions (2006) comment that healthy and fit employees are essential to ensuring a company remains efficient and profitable. Similarly, Tehrani *et al.* (2007) points out that wellbeing in the workplace is steadily rising up the business agenda as more employers recognise the benefits and contribution that can be made by introducing workplace health and wellness policies. Strategies embraced by policy makers as well as organisations for

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tackling employees ill health issues are through good employment practice, effective return to work and rehabilitation strategies, as well as through proactive employee wellbeing support by employers (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006).

Rousseau (2003) points out that the psychological contract that existed between employers and employees has changed and (Rogers, 1995, p. 15) concurs that the perception of personal agendas, short-term focus and unethical leadership behaviour has all contributed to a growing cynicism in the workplace. It is likely that once increasing cynicism exists within organisations it affects employees' wellbeing and consequently performance. The solution to such perceptions as argued by (Rogers, 1995, p. 15) is that management need to place high value on trust and respect for individuals and communicate this to all employees in a way that conveys honesty and commitment.

All businesses strive to be in a healthy state. If their employees are not in a good state of health and wellbeing, this is likely to contribute to successful performance (Economic and Social Research Council, 2006; MacDonald, 2005). Despite the appeal for such initiatives, until recently there has been relatively little empirical research devoted to clarifying the dimensions of the link between HRM practices, employee wellbeing, and performance relationship. This is certainly true for employees' wellbeing at work within the public sector. Given the impact that management implementation of people management practices can have on employees (Guest, 2002; Pfeffer, 2005; Purcell *et al.*, 2003) and given the considerable changes, which have occurred in the public sector over the past decade and are still occurring, this seems a fascinating and essential area of investigation.

The British public sector, from its expansion under the first post-war Labour Government as an accompaniment to the establishment to the Welfare State, to the present day has never been immune from change (Dibben and James, 2007). However, the pace and scale of change has arguably never been greater than that which has occurred over the last quarter of the century. Similarly, modernisation has become effectively the central theme of government approaches towards the sector during this period. Hughes (1994) argued that major changes occurred as government tried to respond to challenges of technological change, globalisation, and international competition. Therefore modernisation provided the basis of a more cost effective, efficient and responsive public sector (Dibbens *et al.*, 2007). To this end, Dibben and James (2007) claimed that the direction of reform embodied a number of problematic employment-related consequences which was marked by dysfunctional outcomes (i.e. lowered levels of job security, work intensification, the delivery of public services by ill-trained and poorly rewarded contractor staff, as well as intensified and greater usage of government imposed targets and related mechanisms of audits, and more recently, through the pursuit of greater consumer choice). These issues are likely to be of fundamental importance to policy makers given the implications that they carry for future public welfare and even more general the wellbeing of those engaged in public sector work. Given the claims that employee wellbeing is central to public sector effectiveness, the author argues that the general understanding of the construct needs to be firmly grounded in theory and supported by empirical research.

Whilst the issue of employee wellbeing at work has reached a new level of importance in the minds of managers, there is still little evidence that attention has

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been paid to the link between employee wellbeing and performance in the public sector. There is however some research (Guest, 2002, Kersley *et al.*, 2006; Peccei, 2004) conducted on HRM practices and wellbeing of the workforce. Nevertheless, research within this area remains relatively untapped. With this in mind, this study aim to address this gap.

Consistent with this research are the use of various terms and concepts. Before proceeding there are general points that should be noted. The first point is the notion of HRM is widely defined in the literature (Daniels, 2006; Huselid, 1995) but for the purpose of this discussion HRM will be defined as a set of practices used to manage the workforce of an organisation, that is recruitment and selection, training and development, worker involvement, pay and rewards, flexibility, involvement in decision making, communications and employee welfare (Purcell *et al.*, 2003). The second general point is the notion of wellbeing at work, which (Peccei, 2004) suggests concern an overall sense of happiness, physical and mental health of the workforce (Currie, 2001). However, the more restricted concern in this paper is for job-related wellbeing that is, individual's feelings about themselves in relation to their job. Warr (2002) argues that job-related wellbeing refers to people's satisfaction with their jobs in terms of facets like pay, colleagues, supervisors, working conditions, job security, training opportunities, involvement, team working and the nature of the work undertaken.

The third general point is the concept of performance outcomes of HRM, which can be captured in a variety of ways. However, for the purpose of this discussion, performance adapted by Dyer and Reeves (1995) refers to output measures (e.g. improved retention, reduced absenteeism, productivity, product and service quality). According to Boselie and Dietz (2003) past research showed that productivity, financial measures, product and service quality and employee turnover appear to be the most popular performance indicators in prior research on HRM and performance. However, despite research being conducted on performance indicators (Dyer and Reeves, 1995) that have been used in previous research we are still not closer to understanding the fundamental principles of performance, which is geared to promote attitudinal and behavioural characteristics (e.g. commitment, job satisfaction and work-life balance satisfaction) amongst employees geared towards embracing the goals and objectives of the organisation. Understanding that sustainability is key to organisational survival is intrinsic to establishing the foundation of performance. With this in mind, it is only reasonable to assume that organisational survival can be predicated on the performance of its human capital. Human resources are a powerful potential internal resource that fits the resource based view concept (Purcell *et al.*, 2003; Paauwe, 2004). Therefore, HR practices increase the value of the human capital through flexibility and development and as such, the wellbeing of the workforce is critical to the performance and survival of organisations.

The fourth general point is the motivational processes of social exchanges (Blau, 1964; 2006), which is used to explain the links between HRM practices and employees' wellbeing at work. Social exchange theory (Blau, 2006) suggests that where there is perceived support from supervisors and employee trust in managers, then employees will reciprocate and respond with positive work attitudes through increased motivation and commitment that can lead to enhanced performance.

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**Literature review and hypotheses***HRM practices and performance*

Human Resource Management is a unitary system of management that attempts to elicit employees' commitment to (Guest, 2001), and involvement in (Wood, 1999), the purposes and goals of the organisation. Its principles and techniques influence how the whole organisation is managed (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). Traditionally, HRM is believed to improve business performance in response to external threat of increasing competition (Guest, 1999). Moreover, there has been growing interest in the notion of "best practice" human resource management sometimes referred to as "high performance work systems" (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2000), "high commitment" (Guest, 2001) or "high involvement" (Wood, 1999). With this in mind, managers are now endeavouring to develop a committed and qualified workforce in a climate of trust and comradeship (Gould-Williams, 2004). This approach is in contrast to the orthodox view in which employees were used objectively and rationally as any other capital resource (Legge, 1995). Even further, employee responses to HRM practices are at the heart of all HRM-performance models (Purcell and Kinnie, 2006) because the link between employee reactions and their subsequent behaviour is critical.

Past research suggests that when HR practices are used in conjunction with each other, the impact on performance will be greater than when used in isolation (Guest, 1998). In other words, organisations attempting to introduce individual HR practices will observe minimal if any change in performance, whereas those organisations successfully introducing a range of practices (generally referred to as "bundles") will experience a more dramatic change in performance (Gould-Williams, 2004; Guest *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, employee behaviour is usually subdivided into those concerning affective or attitudinal outcomes like job satisfaction and organisation commitment referred to as organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007).

Therefore, employees interpret organisational actions like human resource practices (Gallie *et al.*, 2001) and the trustworthiness of management (Snape and Redman, 2003) as indicative of the organisation's commitment to them (Wood and Albanese, 1995). This is supported by Armstrong and Baron's (2005) view that people and their collective skills, abilities, knowledge and experience, coupled with their willingness to deploy these into the interests of their employing organisation, are now recognised as making a significant contribution to organisational success and as constituting a significant source of competitive advantage.

The growing body of literature and research revealed little consensus about which "bundle" of HRM practices should be included in the analysis of HRM practices. Wood and Albanese (1995) argue that a variation in organisation policy or bundles of HRM policies is likely to be most effective in enhancing commitment. With this in mind, this study adopted those HRM practices identified by advocates of the "high commitment" approach (Guest, 1998; Pfeffer, 2005) that was modified for the UK/European context (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). There are generally mixed views regarding the number and nature of HRM practices (Guest, 1998) but it is generally accepted that six practices used in this study helps form the core (Pfeffer, 2005; Guest, 2001). These are thought to represent those used by UK/European private sector managers who have successfully achieved competitive advantage through the workforce (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). However (Guest, 1998) suggests that it is unlikely that any one

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organisation will utilise all these practices or even perform them equally well. Therefore, the list should be regarded, in the first instance at least, as a standard by which managers may monitor the level and extent of HR activity within the organisation.

The HRM practices signal management's trust in employees and include:

- *Selection practices and internal promotion* – This is a critical element of HRM and when an organisation adopts a strategy of achieving superior performance through the workforce, it will need the right people and will need innovative recruitment and selection strategies to obtain the right employees. Internal promotion is generally seen as a critical way to retain key members of the workforce (Pfeffer, 2005). Having recruited, developed and trained the “right sort of people”, it is unlikely that managers want to see these workers leave the organisation.
- *Employee voice* – employee voice has been viewed as an aspect of “high commitment” HRM, and it is considered essential that workers should have the opportunity to express their grievances openly and independently, in addition to being able to contribute to management decision making on task-related issues (Gould-Williams, 2004).
- *Employee involvement, information sharing* – employee involvement is an essential component of the high commitment paradigm. Open communication about business matters ensures workers are informed about organisational issues and conveys a symbolic and substantive message that they are to be trusted in an open and positive manner (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005).
- *High compensation contingent on performance* – there are a growing number of managers within the private sector who now reason that if employee performance results in enhanced organisational performance, then employees should share in the benefits received. In other words, they feel that workers should be appropriately and equitably rewarded for their effort.
- *Extensive training, learning and development* – having recruited outstanding talent, employers need to ensure that these people remain at the forefront of their field in terms of professional expertise and product knowledge gained through training which facilitates learning so that people can become more effective in carrying out aspects of their work (Bramley, 2003).

Finally, the sixth HRM practice is – *Greater involvement in decision making and work teams* – open communication about financial performance, strategy and operational matters not only ensures workers are informed about organisational issues, it also conveys a symbolic and substantive message that they are to be trusted in an open and positive manner, which in turn promoted performance. Second, they suggest that for team working to be successful workers require information in order to provide a basis from which to offer their suggestions and contribute to improvements in organisational performance. Participation can provide management with some legitimacy for its actions on the grounds that ideas have been put forward by workers and or at least considered by them before decision are ultimately made. Organisations that have tapped the power of teams have often experienced excellent results in performance (Pfeffer, 2005) through the pooling of ideas and improving work processes. It is

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suggested that through team working employees are encouraged to work together rather than on their own. Consequently, it is suggested by (Guzzo and Noonan, 1994) that employees often interpret HRM practices in unintended and eccentric ways in that an HRM practice can have different consequences depending on the employees' predisposition. Thus, it is important to collect employees' views of HRM practices rather than relying on HRM policy directives.

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### *Social exchanges*

In organisations HRM practices are implemented by line managers who manage the workforce for organisational performance. Promotion of social relationships by line managers is associated with employee beliefs and attitudes towards their employer, as seen in organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), 2007). Eisenberger *et al.* (1990) suggest that the process of social exchange is initiated by organisations when a general perception concerning the extent to which the organisation values employees' general contributions and cares for their wellbeing is achieved. With this in mind, once employees' perceive that organisations value and deal equitably with them, they will reciprocate these "good deeds" with positive work attitudes and behaviours (Aryee *et al.*, 2002). In social exchange, each partner in a relationship must somehow persuade the other of his/her trustworthiness (Haas and Deseran, 1981). However, Blau (1964) argues that trust is built up incrementally through a series of gradually increasing investments in the relationship, a series in which the partners can demonstrate their trustworthiness to each other. This is consistent with the view of (Whitener, 1997) who suggests that social exchanges are dependant on actors (line managers and employees) orienting themselves towards a general norm of reciprocity. Therefore, trust is regarded as a critical factor underpinning social exchanges in that the act of initiating social exchange relationships requires the originator to trust that the recipient will respond in kind (Blau, 2006; Haas and Deseran, 1981; Aryee *et al.*, 2002). Mayer *et al.* (1995) define trust as the willingness of a party (employees) to be vulnerable to the actions of another party (line manager) based on the expectations that the recipient will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability of the trustor to monitor or control the recipient.

The above review highlights, the six "high commitment" HRM practices as well as social exchanges that exist between line managers and employees in the implementation of such practices. This relationship promotes trust between employees and employers, which in turn contributes to organisational success and performance. The "high commitment" HRM practices may not be appropriate in all settings, but core practices may be essential in gaining employee wellbeing at work, reduced absenteeism and improved performance.

Therefore managers need to consider each of these practices carefully to ascertain their relevance in relation to the context in which they are working. Thus:

- H1.* Social relationships that exist between line managers and employees that are built on support and trust in management from HRM practices play an important long-term role in the development of positive employee attitudes and behaviour that constitute employee wellbeing at work and enhanced performance. Organisations that do not engage in these types of relationships will therefore perform worse in the long term than those that do.

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*Employee wellbeing at work impacts positively on performance*

The concept of employee wellbeing at work promotes advantages to organisations of having a healthy workforce (Cooper and Robertson, 2001). Therefore, the dynamics of employee wellbeing at work is pivotal in the understanding of the different domains that affect the quality of life at work. Research has been undertaken by economists, sociologists and psychologists into understanding people's sense of wellbeing or distress (Cox *et al.*, 2005; Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), 2007; Kersley *et al.*, 2006; Peccei, 2004; Warr, 2002). According to Warr (2002) cognitive factors that affect the quality of life is likely to be linked to people's perception of their own level of wellbeing. Therefore effective wellbeing (psychological) emphasises the centrality of feelings about life. Nevertheless, Currie (2001) views employee wellbeing at work as the physical and mental health of the workforce. That is, employees should be working in a stress-free and physically safe environment. Bakke (2005) supports this view and notes that wellbeing can be linked to promoting an environment that make-work exciting, rewarding, stimulating, enjoyable and proposes that joy-filled workplaces improve financial performance.

Personal wellbeing does not exist on its own or in the workplace but within a social context (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), 2007). Thus, individual lives are affected by social relations with organisational agents, lifestyle and employment changes (Guest, 1998). However, despite these shifts (Tehrani *et al.*, 2007) suggest that people still have the same basic physical and mental needs for social support, physical safety, health and a feeling that they are able to cope with life. With this in mind, employees are looking to employers to help them to achieve this since a large proportion of their lives are spent at work. In order for employers to assist employees with their personal wellbeing at work they will need to create an environment to promote a state of contentment, which allows an employee to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organisation (Tehrani *et al.*, 2007).

A healthy organisation is critical for survival in this competitive global environment in which we all live, work and operate. Essential factors leading to organisational and personal wellbeing involves open communication, team working and co-operation, flexibility, support, and a balance between work and personal life (Kraybill, 2003). For organisations to be able to remain sustainable it is inevitable that promoting the wellbeing of its employees is a necessary need to enhance performance, and thereby survival and further development of the organisation (Currie, 2001). This view is reinforced by (Schuster, 1998) who purports that a significant relationship exists between attention to employees and superior organisational performance. Introducing wellbeing at work into business and public sector organisations is likely to introduce a change in the organisational climate that makes room for innovative practices that can produce positive organisational outcomes. The next section discusses the three variables that constitute employee wellbeing at work (i.e. employee commitment, job satisfaction and work-life balance satisfaction).

*Employee commitment*

Organisational commitment is the heart of human resource management and the central feature that distinguishes HRM from traditional personnel management (Guest, 1998). The concept of organisational commitment refers to a person's affective

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reactions to characteristics of his employing organisation (Cook and Wall, 1980). It is concerned with feelings of attachment to the goals and values of the organisation, one's role in relation to this, and attachment to the organisation for its own sake rather than for its strictly instrumental value. Commitment is an internalised employee belief, often associated with "soft HRM" and a high-trust organisational culture (Mathews and Shepherd, 2002) and is frequently associated with an exchange relationship between the employer and employee.

From the employees' perspective, they commit to an organisation in return for certain rewards, which can be extrinsic (salary) and intrinsic (belonging, job satisfaction). Legge (1995) suggests that the attitude conceptualisation suggests that committed employees have a strong belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values, show a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation and have a strong desire to maintain membership with the organisation. As such, affective commitment is viewed as an employee's positive attachment to the employing organisation and a willingness to contribute towards the attainment of organisational goals (Mowday *et al.*, 1979). However employee commitment to an organisation can be identified as factors underpinning behaviour where individuals may experience commitment to multiple foci (e.g. organisation, management, co-workers, career, and groups), which may predict a range of attitudes and behaviours. People are an organisation's most important asset and their effective development and deployment offers a distinctive and non-imitable competitive advantage through employer and employee engagement. The second component of employee wellbeing at work is job satisfaction.

#### *Job satisfaction*

According to Jernigan *et al.* (2002) work satisfaction is one's sense of satisfaction not only with work but also with the larger organisational context within which work exists. Job satisfaction is more narrowly defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke and Latham, 1990). Similarly, Fisher *et al.* (2004) claim that job satisfaction includes the positive feelings associated with the rewarding aspects of a job that can intuitively lead to improved work performance. Currie (2001) suggests that satisfaction is related to the degree to which an individual is satisfied with the terms and conditions of employment and the factors that make up the physical work environment. For example, individuals may be satisfied with their salaries and how well they get on with their peers and work, or are satisfied with company policy. Therefore, job satisfaction and job involvement are attitudes which are determined by individual's perceptions of their total job situations, including the physical work environment, the terms and conditions of their employment and the degree to which they are given autonomy, responsibility, authority and empowerment in their jobs (Kersley *et al.*, 2006). This study frames the perceptions of job satisfaction and its effects on employees' attitudes in terms of social exchanges between employees and employers[1]. The next section discusses work-life balance satisfaction, which is the third factor that describes employee wellbeing at work.

#### *Work-life balance satisfaction*

The changing world of work has presented several challenges to the wide-ranging discourse of work-life balance. There are various social, political and economic changes

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that have served to raise the profile of work-life balance in workplaces as well as amongst policy-makers and commentators (Daniels and French, 2006). Bratton and Gold (2003) define work-life balance as the need to “balance work and leisure/family activities”. The leisure activities might include such things as the desire to travel, be involved in community activities and the need to care for older relatives. This is further supported by (Platt, 1997) who suggests that a happy medium needs to be found between the demands of work and home and argues that their needs to be a “balance” between work and life.

The changing demographic composition of the labour market, especially increasing female participation, has undoubtedly served to raise the tricky issue of balancing working lives outside household tasks (Houston, 2005). The need for paid work to be compatible with caring responsibilities has become an important policy issue. Those with caring responsibilities for people with disabilities and of the elderly also face challenges in combining their work and non-work roles (Hurst *et al.*, 2006). Childcare arrangements pose particular difficulties for single parents and dual-earning parent households (Bacon *et al.*, 2005). But work-life balance difficulties are not confined to particular groups of employees as argued by (Daniels and French, 2006) who explain that all workers are working longer and working harder than they have done for over a generation. However, WERS 2004 survey show evidence to suggest that a requirement to working full-time or long hours, disadvantages employees with caring responsibilities, who are often women (Kersley *et al.*, 2006). Requiring employees to work long hours conflicts with the objective of creating “a level playing field” in the workplace, in line with the managing diversity agenda (Liff, 2003). Therefore, it is vital that organisations that have a diverse workforce, embrace the concept of work-life balance. If organisations were able to offer a range of different motivators (i.e. flexible working practices) then it is likely that employees will find something that fits with their needs that contributes to their motivation. Alternatively (Daniels, 2006) argues that employees seek employment in an organisation that fits with their personalities and is more likely to provide motivators that meet their needs. With this in mind, work-life balance satisfaction has become of key importance to organisations and is also an issue that is indicative of the individual nature of the employment relationship.

Therefore employers have embraced the issue of creating an acceptable work-life balance for employees through flexibility and the introduction of a wide range of different working patterns designed to fit individual needs[2]. However, flexibility that employees can request does not relate to hours of work only but can also relate to time of work and place of work (Houston, 2005). Similarly (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), 2004) facts suggests that organisations have numerous options available that can be extended to employees to assist them to achieve their desired work-life balance[3].

Therefore:

- H2. Organisations that promote and maintain commitment, job satisfaction and work-life balance satisfaction (wellbeing) of their employees through the implementation of high commitment HRM practices will benefit most by superior organisational outcomes and productivity through establishing long-term relationships of support and trust with employees. Organisations that do not pay attention to employee wellbeing at work will have in the long term to deal with the effects of less productive employees.

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**Methodology**

The research setting for this empirical analysis is in local government in North England. This was considered an appropriate context to analyse the relationship between employees' reactions to HRM practices and its effects on employee wellbeing at work. This is in keeping with best value regimes placing a statutory duty on local authorities to review the processes used in delivering services in an attempt to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of service provision and performance.

*Data collection and sample*

Data were collected from within a single directorate in a local government organisation in July 2006 through an employee opinion survey. Although an attempt was made to incorporate other directorates into the survey, access was limited to the business services directorate only. The sample frame was made up of the total population within the directorate, comprising 100 employees. Within the sample frame the survey was distributed to the entire population of the business services directorate. Saunders *et al.* (2000) suggest that it is possible to survey an entire population if it is of a manageable size. The questionnaires were distributed to employees through the internal postal system, accompanied by a cover letter, a participation information sheet and a return envelope addressed to the researcher. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were assured by having completed questionnaires directed to the researcher and a clear agreement with the organisation that the researcher would retain the data and not provide information to the public domain which could identify any individual employee or the organisation. A response rate of 51 per cent completed questionnaires was received. Reminder letters were used as a technique to enhance the response rate. Healey (1991) suggests that a response rate of 50 per cent for postal surveys is acceptable (Saunders *et al.*, 2000). It is also likely that respondents' questionnaire fatigue could be a contributory factor to the response rate.

The socio-demographic characteristics analysed from the sample of employees had the characteristics where 76.5 per cent of respondents were females with 23.5 per cent males. The age groups ranged from 16 to 59 years with 72.5 per cent of the sample being under the age of 50 with 27.5 per cent between the age ranges of 50-59 years with the second largest group ranging from 20-29 years. A total of 45.1 per cent of respondents' employment tenure was between 0-5 years followed by six to ten years 19.6 and 35.3 per cent employment tenure was 11-25 plus years. The occupational groups ranged from Assistant Director (2 per cent), Manager (15.6 per cent), Professional (39.2 per cent), Associate Professional (3.9 per cent), Clerical and Secretarial (37.3 per cent) and (3.9 per cent) falling in the "Other" category. A total of 2 per cent of respondents had no qualifications or formal education; 35.3 per cent had GCSC's ordinary and or advanced level education; 7.8 per cent had AGNVQ and HND/C; 23.5 per cent had a university degree; 3.9 per cent had a Master's degree and 27.5 per cent had a professional qualification. Closed questions about gender, age, salary, length of service and job title were asked so possible responses to these questions provided sufficient detail to compare the characteristics of the sample with the characteristics of the entire population of employees as recorded by the organisation's computerised personnel system. It was found that there was no statistically significant difference between the proportion of respondents in gender and length of service groups and the data obtained from the computerised personal

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database. This meant that the sample was representative of all employees with respect to gender and length of service. However, employees responding were (statistically) significantly more likely to be in professional, clerical/secretarial grades than in assistant directors, managerial, and associate professional/technical grades. Therefore it is likely that the sample might not be representative of all employees with respect to job titles. As a consequence of the sample size the results presented here are not generalisable but can be related to employees within similar organisations.

#### *Independent variables*

The independent variables in this study are the HRM practices. This study adopted those HRM practices identified by advocates of the “high commitment” approach (Guest, 1998; Pfeffer, 2005) that was modified for the UK/European context (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2005). The study focuses on six HRM practices that are generally accepted and forms the core (i.e. selection practices and internal recruitment; employee voice; employee involvement and information sharing; high compensation contingent on performance; extensive training, learning and development; and involvement in decision making and work teams. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they strongly agree or disagree with these six statements relating to HRM practices using a five-point Likert scale. According to Meyer and Allen (1997) employees’ perceptions of “reality” are likely to influence their performance more so than formal policy documentation. Hence, the importance of collecting employees’ individual perception of and reactions to the HRM practices they are subjected to. It is anticipated that since line managers are responsible for the implementation of HRM practices, they will understand the importance of promoting a motivated and committed workforce.

This is consistent with HRM theory (Guest, 1998) where it is proposed that managers should recognise the importance of employees and behave in ways consistent with such beliefs. Measures of employee trust in management were based on items adopted from the (Cook and Wall’s, 1980) trust scale. These measures focused on good relations and management concern for employees’ best interests. Measures of supervisory support were adopted from social exchange theory (Blau, 2006). These measures focus on the employees’ perception that the organisation cares about their wellbeing at work.

#### *Dependent variables*

The dependent variables in this study are employee commitment, job satisfaction and work-life balance satisfaction, which collectively constitute “employee wellbeing at work”. Commitment is frequently associated with an exchange relationship between the employer and employee. From the employees’ perspective, they commit to an organisation in return for certain rewards, which can be extrinsic (salary) and intrinsic (belonging, job satisfaction). The commitment scale adopted for this study is from Cook and Wall’s (1980) British Organisational Commitment Scheme (BOCS) that discusses the identification, involvement and loyalty of employees towards the organisation. Job satisfaction is also an outcome of a motivated and committed workforce, which is likely to develop organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) amongst employees (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007).

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The concept of job satisfaction was adopted from WERS 2004 survey (Kersley *et al.*, 2006) and focuses on employees being satisfied with eight categories (i.e. sense of achievement, scope of using initiative, influence over job, pay, job security, training received, the work they do and involvement in decision making) of their job. Work-life balance satisfaction was also adapted from WERS 2004 survey, which assesses employees' reactions to HRM practices that promote the satisfaction of work-life balance amongst employees. The need to balance work and leisure/family activities' is likely to have a domino effect on employees' attitudes and behaviour that promote individual and organisational wellbeing.

### **Bivariate intercorrelations**

Table I provides the mean scores, standard deviations and t-test results of the differences between the mean scores and mid point. The standard deviations for each of the scores indicate the respondents' views varied considerably across the sample. In general, the difference between the mean scores and the mid-point indicates that respondents agreed that the organisation provides opportunities for employees to express views about work (mean = 3.47, SD = 0.946) and agreed that employees are kept informed about business issues (mean = 3.76, SD = 0.737). Respondents perceived that they were involved in decision making (mean = 3.57, SD = 1.100) and received training and development courses, which updated their skills within the last 12 months (mean = 3.57, SD = 1.188). However, respondents had a relatively neutral response towards the fact that their pay is performance or merit related (mean = 2.98, SD = 1.319). This is not an uncommon finding for a public sector organisation.

The mean score for items measuring job satisfaction, employee commitment and work-life balance satisfaction were high, with all of the indicators significantly above the mid-point. This was most notable with employees being satisfied with the work they did (mean = 3.59, SD = 0.779), and feeling loyalty towards their fellow employees implying a sense of comradeship (mean = 4.27, SD = 0.777), and embracing the benefits of the availability of flexible working (mean = 4.16, SD = 0.834) promoting their work-life balance satisfaction. Overall, respondents were satisfied with their jobs, committed to the organisation, supervisors, colleagues and clients; and enjoyed work-life balance satisfaction. Similarly, the mean scores for items measuring supervisory support and trust in management were also high with most of the indicator above the mid-point. In general, the results show that employees held the view that line managers support workers when necessary (mean = 3.96, SD = 0.916) and that there are good relations between managers and employees (mean = 3.53, SD = 0.966).

In summary, the mean scores, suggests that managers have initiated social exchanges with employees, which in turn promoted the affective, and attitudinal characteristics amongst employees in the form of employee wellbeing at work (i.e. job satisfaction, commitment and work-life balance satisfaction). Tehrani *et al.* (2007) note that where there are strong relationships between managers and staff, levels of wellbeing are enhanced. It is argued that once employee wellbeing at work is attained it can create a domino effect through enhanced performance. The result shows a very strong pattern of high worker voice and being informed of business issues are strongly correlated to high job satisfaction, commitment and work-life balance satisfaction amongst employees. The following section will consider the bivariate relationships between the dependent and independent variables. Thereafter the results of

Items	<i>n</i> = 51	Mean	SD	<i>t</i> -test*
<i>HRM practices (Cronbach alpha 0.72)</i>				
The council tries to fill new positions with people from inside the organisation	51	3.00	0.938	0.000
Organisation provides opportunities for employees to express views about work	51	3.47	0.946	3.544***
Organisation keeps employees informed about business issues	51	3.76	0.737	7.407***
My pay is performance- or merit-related	51	2.98	1.319	-0.106
Received training and development courses to update skills within the last 12 months	51	3.57	1.188	3.420***
Involved in decision making in work teams and programmes within the last 12 months	51	3.57	1.100	3.691***
<i>Job satisfaction (Cronbach alpha 0.84)</i>				
I am satisfied with the sense of achievement I get from my job	51	3.51	0.925	3.938***
I am satisfied with the scope for using initiative	51	3.55	0.923	4.246***
I have influence over my job	51	3.53	0.902	4.190***
I am satisfied with my pay	51	3.04	1.095	0.256
I feel my job is secure	51	3.41	1.099	2.677**
I am satisfied with the training I have received	51	3.43	1.136	2.677**
I am satisfied with the work I do	51	3.59	0.779	5.392***
My manager involves me in decision making	51	3.49	0.946	3.701***
<i>Employee commitment (Cronbach alpha 0.84)</i>				
I feel loyalty towards the organisation	51	3.80	0.917	6.261***
I feel loyalty towards my immediate supervisor	51	3.94	0.947	7.099***
I feel loyalty towards my fellow employees	51	4.27	0.777	11.720***
I feel loyalty towards customers and clients	51	4.20	0.633	13.492***
I am proud to tell people I work for the Council	51	3.86	0.825	7.467***
<i>Work-life balance satisfaction (Cronbach alpha 0.62)</i>				
My job requires that I work hard	51	4.06	0.835	9.061***
There is never enough time to get my work done	51	3.53	0.902	4.190***
I worry about my work outside working hours	51	3.27	1.218	1.610
My manager understands about my family responsibilities	51	3.76	0.839	6.511***
Flexible working options are available to me if needed	51	4.16	0.834	9.911***
<i>Supervisory support (Cronbach alpha 0.87)</i>				
I do receive help from my line manager which improves my performance	51	3.86	0.849	7.257***
I am given feedback by my immediate line manager on how I am doing	51	3.65	0.996	4.637***
My line manager provides praise and recognition when I do well	51	3.69	0.990	4.952***
My line manager supports me when necessary	51	3.96	0.9016	7.493***
I feel fairly treated by the Council	51	3.86	0.849	7.257***
<i>Trust in management (Cronbach alpha 0.87)</i>				
I trust management to look after my best interests	51	3.24	1.106	1.519
There are good relations between managers and employees	51	3.53	0.966	3.912***

Notes: \*Difference between mean and mid point (3); \*Statistically significant at 0.05 level; \*\*Statistically significant at 0.01 level; \*\*\*Statistically significant at 0.001 level

**Table I.**  
Mean and standard deviation

multivariate analyses between the three dependent variables and the independent variables are presented.

*Testing the hypotheses – correlation analysis*

- H1. Social relationships between line managers and employees in the employment relationship are important in the development of employee wellbeing at work and enhanced performance.

Overall, Table II shows the bi-variate relationships between the independent and dependent variables used in the study. The results shows that committed workers were more likely to have job satisfaction ( $r = 0.59, p = 0.01$ ) and work-life balance satisfaction ( $r = 0.45, p = 0.01$ ) than workers less committed to the organisation. Similarly, they are more likely to embrace supervisory support ( $r = 0.38, p = 0.01$ ); tend to trust management ( $r = 0.72, p = 0.01$ ); enjoy opportunities to express their views; like to be kept informed about business issues ( $r = 0.45, p = 0.01$ ) and be involved in decision-making ( $r = 0.51, p = 0.01$ ). It is also likely that committed workers also received training and development opportunities ( $r = 0.40, p = 0.01$ ) within the last 12 months.

There is a significant correlation for worker job satisfaction as it relates to work-life balance satisfaction ( $r = 0.38, p = 0.01$ ), supervisory support ( $r = 0.59, p = 0.01$ ), trust in managers ( $r = 0.70, p = 0.01$ ), opportunities to express views and being kept informed about business issues ( $r = 0.62, p = 0.01$ ), performance/merit pay ( $r = 0.35, p = 0.01$ ), training and development ( $r = 0.56, p = 0.01$ ), involvement in decision making ( $r = 0.62, p = 0.01$ ) and occupational group ( $r = 0.39, p = 0.01$ ). A similar pattern of findings is reported for work-life balance satisfaction with the size of the correlates being smaller than those reported for job satisfaction, which also showed a significant relationship between work-life balance satisfaction and worker tenure ( $r = 0.34, p = 0.01$ ).

There was also a significant correlation for employees work-life balance satisfaction as it relates to trust in management ( $r = 0.37, p = 0.01$ ), employee involvement ( $r = 0.39, p = 0.01$ ), training and development ( $r = 0.44, p = 0.01$ ), involvement in decision making ( $r = 0.47, p = 0.01$ ), tenure ( $r = 0.34, p = 0.01$ ) with performance merit/pay being relatively significant ( $r = 0.26, p = 0.05$ ). Overall, the results show a similar pattern of findings with a significant relationship between gender and age of respondents ( $r = 0.43, p = 0.01$ ), age and tenure ( $r = 0.59, p = 0.01$ ); and occupational group and education ( $r = 0.60, p = 0.01$ ). In general, occupational groups showed a significant correlation to worker job satisfaction ( $r = 0.39, p = 0.01$ ), performance/merit pay ( $r = 0.62, p = 0.01$ ), involvement in decision-making ( $r = 0.35, p = 0.01$ ) and gender ( $r = 0.37, p = 0.01$ ). On the whole, these relationships are consistent with social exchange theory, with the directions of associations between line management and employees being significant as a result of employees perception of support received from line managers which in turn promoted trust amongst workers, which is the framework that promotes employee wellbeing at work and enhanced performance. Canadian Centre for Management Development (2002) suggests that having a network of relationships that are supportive and nurturing is key for the promotion of employee wellbeing at work. The next section will consider the impact of each of the independent variables on the three individual

Correlations	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
EmpCommit	23.94	3.85	1.00														
Job satisfaction	27.55	5.39	0.59 <sup>***</sup>	1.00													
Work-life balance satisfaction	18.78	2.95	0.45 <sup>**</sup>	0.38 <sup>**</sup>	1.00												
Support	17.33	2.87	0.38 <sup>***</sup>	0.59 <sup>***</sup>	0.23 <sup>**</sup>	1.00											
Trust in management	6.76	1.96	0.72 <sup>***</sup>	0.70 <sup>***</sup>	0.37 <sup>***</sup>	0.61 <sup>***</sup>	1.00										
Employee involvement	7.24	1.38	0.45 <sup>***</sup>	0.62 <sup>***</sup>	0.39 <sup>***</sup>	0.54 <sup>***</sup>	0.63 <sup>***</sup>	1.00									
Fill new positions internally	3.00	0.94	.22	0.25 <sup>*</sup>	0.22	.45 <sup>***</sup>	0.32 <sup>*</sup>	0.32 <sup>*</sup>	1.00								
Performance/merit pay	2.98	1.32	0.24 <sup>*</sup>	0.35 <sup>***</sup>	0.26 <sup>*</sup>	0.27 <sup>***</sup>	0.25 <sup>*</sup>	0.23 <sup>*</sup>	0.15	1.00							
Training and development	3.57	1.19	0.40 <sup>***</sup>	0.56 <sup>***</sup>	0.44 <sup>***</sup>	0.28 <sup>***</sup>	0.50 <sup>***</sup>	0.61 <sup>***</sup>	0.00	0.13	1.00						
Involve in decision making	3.57	1.10	0.51 <sup>***</sup>	0.62 <sup>***</sup>	0.47 <sup>***</sup>	0.55 <sup>***</sup>	0.67 <sup>***</sup>	0.63 <sup>***</sup>	0.23	0.32 <sup>*</sup>	0.68 <sup>***</sup>	1.00					
Gender	1.76	0.43	-0.12	-0.19	-0.04	.07	-0.16	-0.01	0.30 <sup>*</sup>	-0.22	-0.32 <sup>*</sup>	-0.22	1.00				
Age	3.45	1.25	0.17	0.19	0.22	-0.13	-0.02	0.06	-0.39 <sup>***</sup>	0.09	0.21	-0.04	-0.43 <sup>***</sup>	1.00			
Education	4.24	2.42	0.05	0.17	-0.05	-0.09	0.11	0.20	-0.05	0.43 <sup>***</sup>	0.20	0.15	-0.31 <sup>*</sup>	0.06	1.00		
Tenure	2.53	1.80	0.22	0.21	0.34	0.22	0.13	0.29 <sup>*</sup>	-0.18	0.25 <sup>*</sup>	0.28 <sup>*</sup>	0.18	-0.25 <sup>**</sup>	0.39 <sup>***</sup>	-0.11	1.00	
Occupation group	4.80	1.46	-0.28 <sup>*</sup>	-0.39 <sup>***</sup>	-0.15	-0.14	-0.30 <sup>*</sup>	-0.23	0.04	-0.62 <sup>***</sup>	-0.30 <sup>**</sup>	-0.35 <sup>*</sup>	0.37 <sup>***</sup>	-0.11	-0.60 <sup>**</sup>	-0.09	1.00

Notes: \* statistically significant at 0.05 level; \*\* statistically significant at 0.01 level; \*\*\* statistically significant at 0.001 level; n = 51

Table II.  
Correlation analysis

worker outcomes (job satisfaction, employee commitment and work-life balance satisfaction).

*OLR regression analyses*

*H2.* Organisations that promote and maintain the wellbeing of their employees will benefit more through performance than those who do not.

This hypothesis was meaningfully supported, suggesting that there was a highly significant relationship between HRM practices and employee wellbeing at work. Thus, companies that promote support and trust in management in turn develop motivated and committed employees, which was also consistent for job satisfaction. However, the independent variables were not significant to work-life balance satisfaction. Overall, Table III provides the results of ordinary least squares regression analyses whereby the net effect of each independent variable is considered while controlling for the effects of the other explanatory variables. Overall, the independent variables explained a significant degree of variance in the dependent variables, with the explanatory variables explaining 59 percent of variance in employee commitment, 67 percent of variance in job satisfaction and 44 percent in respondents' work-life balance satisfaction. The results show that the predictor variables have captured a significant proportion of change in the dependent variables employee commitment ( $F$  value = 4.487,  $p$  = 0.001) and job satisfaction ( $F$  value = 6.524,  $p$  = 0.001). Similarly, there was also a relative significant change in work-life balance satisfaction ( $F$  value = 2.503,  $p$  = 0.05).

**Results**

*Predictors of employee commitment*

The exploratory variable explained 59 percent of variance in employee commitment ( $F$  value = 4.487,  $p$  = 0.001). The most significant predictor of commitment was trust in

Independent variables	Employee commitment $\beta$	Job satisfaction $\beta$	Work-life balance satisfaction $\beta$
Filling new positions internally	0.10	0.04	0.27
Performance/merit pay	0.02	0.10	0.19
Training and development	-0.02	0.18	0.20
Involve in decision making	0.15	0.05	0.35
Employee involvement	-0.06	0.13	-0.02
Support	-0.16	0.27*	-0.28
Trust in management	0.72***	0.29*	0.12
Gender	0.13	0.05	0.19
Age	0.25	0.31*	0.25
Educational attainment	-0.09	-0.05	-0.18
Tenure	0.03	-0.19	0.15
Occupation	-0.12	-0.13	0.00
$R^2$	0.59	0.67	0.44
$F$ value	4.487***	6.524***	2.503*

**Table III.**  
Regression analysis

**Notes:**  $n$  = 51; \*statistically significant at 0.05 level; \*\* statistically significant at 0.01 level; \*\*\* statistically significant at 0.001 level

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management ( $\beta = 0.72, p = 0.001$ ). Therefore, where employees trusted in management they were more likely to be committed and is likely to develop OCB leading to enhance performance. Robinson and Morrison (1995) reported that trust partly mediated the relationship between psychological contract breach and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB). On this basis, trust in management is a significant positive predictor of commitment. It is important for line managers to be aware of the implications of their actions on workers trust. For instance, if employees are not convinced that management trust them, they in turn, will be less likely to display committed behaviours. This will make it even more difficult for managers to achieve increased efficiency and effectiveness in a service industry like the public sector. The way line managers undertake their HR duties is inextricably linked to leadership behaviours (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007), which aim to influence employee attitudes and behaviour and give direction. Therefore people management activities, leadership behaviour and the application of HR practices imply a symbiotic relationship between them (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). Therefore the effective implementation of HRM practices can assist line managers to help motivate and reward employees and deal with performance issues and worker needs. In addition, many of the anticipated explanatory variables had no statistical significant effect on employee commitment. In this instance, this could be as a result of the bundle of HRM practices used in the study.

When employees trust in management they are more likely to be committed. Trust in management is a significant positive predictor of commitment; managers need to be aware of the implications of their actions on workers trust. Overall, the results indicate a strong and significant positive relationship between “employee commitment” trust in management and supervisory support. These results suggest that perceptions of supervisory support and trust in management enhance employee outcome such as commitment. Albrecht and Travaglione (2003) suggest that fairness and equity in organisational policies and procedures, perceived organisational support and satisfaction with job are significant determinants of trust in management.

If employees perceive that their employers do not care about their wellbeing it is likely that this can affect workers motivation, commitment and performance. In contrast, if employees perceive that they are supported and can trust management they reciprocate through high motivation and commitment towards the organisation, which in turn produces positive performance outcomes. Wayne *et al.* (1997) assert that positive employee attitudes depend on employees' perceptions of how committed the employing organisation is to them. This can be demonstrated through positive discretionary activities performed by the organisation that benefits the employee, leading to the assumption that organisation cares about the wellbeing of its employees. Therefore the approach to wellbeing at work that an organisation prefers to adopt will be informed by its interpretations of human resource management (HRM) practices (Currie, 2001). Therefore, the principal concern in local government organisations, especially its agents (line managers) should be to promote the opportunity for employee involvement, training and career development, as well as to ensure that employees are dealt with fairly, and given support.

#### *Predictors of job satisfaction*

The independent variables explained 67 percent of change in job satisfaction ( $F$  value = 6.524,  $p = 0.001$ ). Three of the study variables were found to be significant

predictors of job satisfaction. These were support ( $\beta = 0.27, p = 0.05$ ), trust in management ( $\beta = 0.29, p = 0.05$ ) and age ( $\beta = 0.31, p = 0.05$ ). In general these results are consistent with social exchange theory, with the exception of age, in that, job satisfaction of workers was determined by the age of employees. Moreover, social exchange relationships (Blau, 2006) that develop over time are likely to be reinforced by positive interactions from employees. Therefore, employees job satisfaction is likely to develop over time spent in the organisation, which in turn can enhance the support received and trust built. These findings were also supported as 51 per cent of respondents were over 40 years and 35.3 per cent of respondents have been with the organisation 11-25 plus years. Many of the anticipated explanatory variables had no statistically significant effect on job satisfaction. In this instance, this could be as a result of the bundle of HRM practices used in the study.

#### *Predictors of work-life balance satisfaction*

The final regression equation considered the extent to which the independent variables successfully predicted change in respondents' work-life balance satisfaction. Overall the independent variables predicted 44 percent of change in respondents' work-life balance satisfaction ( $F$  value = 2.503,  $p = 0.05$ ). There were no significant relationships that existed with the explanatory variables and work-life balance satisfaction. In this instance, this could be as a result of the bundle of HRM practices used in the study.

Work-life balance has important consequences for employee attitudes towards their organisation as well as for the lives of employees. Work-life balance is distinctive in meeting the needs of both employees and services and achieving a balance between work and home life for employees at all levels (Tehrani *et al.*, 2007). Scholarios and Marks (2004) suggest that the work-life balance boundary may be especially significant in the management of highly skilled knowledge workers, such as technical professionals, whose commitment and loyalty present a challenge to employers (Davenport, 1999). However, the work-life balance discourse has cascaded into all occupational groups.

#### **Discussion and conclusion**

This study sought to investigate the effects of HRM Practices on employee wellbeing at work and performance in the public sector. The findings presented offered strong support that line management support and trust were pivotal to good relations between managers and employees that subsequently promoted employee wellbeing at work. This strengthens the argument that employee wellbeing at work should be pursued as a business case in the public sector. The argument for the business case for employee wellbeing at work can stem from an economic perspective where around 28 million working days a year are lost due to absence from the workplace Economic and Social Research Council, 2006. Moreover, public sector absence levels and costs are even higher at nearly ten days per employee every year and £680 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006). It is found that commitment, job satisfaction and work-life balance satisfaction have important effects on levels of engagement, performance and intention to quit. Tehrani *et al.* (2007) suggest that managers can create a more positive environment where employees can flourish and increase their feelings of wellbeing at work. The results suggest that the wellbeing at work can certainly contribute to

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people's overall sense of happiness that is likely to be displayed through attitudes and behaviour (Peccei, 2004). This in turn, can provide an understanding of employee commitment, job satisfaction and work-life balance satisfaction, which is a result of the implementation of HRM practices by line managers.

A fundamental responsibility of line managers is the delivery and implementation of HR Practices and to ensure that the perception of support, trust, fairness and consistency are maintained amongst workers. At a practical level, it is noteworthy that these influential factors fall within the purview and control of human resource policy makers and practitioners. Moreover, managers could exert an influence on commitment, job satisfaction, work-life balance satisfaction, trust and support given by helping to establish and maintain selection practices; employee voice; employee involvement; communication; performance management; training and development; decision making and team working. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964, 2006) proposes that where employees perceived that they are valued and their individual contributions rewarded in ways that were perceived fair, they would develop trust in management, and as a consequence behave in a manner appropriate with such exchanges (Whitener, 1997).

Overall a consistent result in the study was that trust in management and support promoted employee wellbeing at work (commitment, job satisfaction, work-life balance satisfaction) amongst workers. Trust in management influences the extent to which employees feel emotionally committed to their organisation, the extent to which employees are cynical towards change and conditions under which employees intend to remain in the employ of the organisation (Albrecht and Travaglione, 2003). Moreover, managers' support at all levels was vital as was the engagement of employees. Similarly, businesses should seek to promote the mental and emotional health of employees by developing an attitude of mind that enables the employee to have self confidence, self-respect, having a sense of purpose, feelings of fulfilment and meaning and to be emotionally resilient (Canadian Centre for Management Development, 2002). This is likely to be done by having a network of relationships that are supportive and nurturing.

#### *Management implications*

There are practical implications to be drawn from these findings. Management who are responsible for the implementation of HR practices will be interested to know that by promoting commitment, trust and support through positive relationship with employees they can influence the extent to which employee wellbeing at work is positively or negatively promoted. By promoting employee wellbeing at work at all levels within their organisation, managers can thus contribute to developing a public-sector workforce, which is more committed, satisfied with their jobs and work-life balance and more positively predisposed towards enhanced performance, reduced absenteeism and turnover.

The implications of these findings for management are that positive relationships can be embedded into the organisational climate through the promotion of support, development of trust and involvement amongst workers (Rogers, 1995). This is likely to be promoted through effective implementation of HRM practices by managers' relationships with employees that are likely to promote positive attitudes and behaviour, which shape the culture and work environment. Developing an atmosphere

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of equality and fairness is conducive to the promotion of employee voice and opportunity to be involved in decision making and team working can have a cross fertilisation effect on workers wellbeing, which is the pre-requisite for co-operation, flexibility, balance between work and personal life, enhance performance and reduced absenteeism (Guest and Conway, 2004). To this end, line managers need to be enlightened that being a good employer involves attracting, motivating and retaining staff (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). Therefore, organisational objectives are not just economic (targets and bottom line) but should involve a crucial and often overlooked element of the discourse employee wellbeing at work, which can be used as the holistic framework for worker happiness and organisational success. Failure to evaluate employee wellbeing at work in terms of improved productivity, reduced sickness absence or other organisational benefits can hinder organisational sustainability, employee and societal wellbeing.

Given the preliminary nature of this study, further research needs to be conducted on HRM practices, employee wellbeing and performance relationship. The importance of gaining greater understanding of additional antecedent constructs that might be included in the promotion of wellbeing at work is vital to this relationship. The author speculates that line management leadership might be a salient predictor of employee wellbeing at work in the public sector domain. That is, managers may well not transmit the articulated values of top management but reflect instead the informal culture of the firm (Truss, 2001). While some HR practices may impact on employees directly, most rely on line management action or support, and the quality of the relationship between employees and their immediate line managers is also liable too, to influence perceptions not only of HR practices but also of leadership and work climate either positively or negatively. Therefore management practices are aligned to leadership amelioration through adaptive leadership where openness to change, flexibility and “thinking outside the box” are commonplace (Glover *et al.*, 2002).

As public sector organisations continue to go through fundamental changes, employee wellbeing at work appears to be a critical factor in determining employee attitudes to change, therefore the central role played by trust in management and supervisory support in the promotion of employee wellbeing at work should be widely acknowledged. Therefore, the success and effectiveness of organisations meeting their objectives depends to a large extent on the social relations that exist between managers and employees in pursuit of organisational outcomes. In conclusion, investment in “people” catapults the laws of reciprocity as organisations who have embraced and embedded this concept in their culture and values will reap that which they have sown.

### Notes

1. It is proposed that employees’ perceptions of how their job has an impact on job satisfaction will be related to the overall belief about the extent to which their organisation cares about their employee wellbeing. Once employees hold that belief it creates a desire among employees to reciprocate towards the organisation in the form of positive attitudes and behaviour. Such reciprocation implies positive outcomes both for employees (motivation, employee commitment, job satisfaction and work-life balance satisfaction) and employers (e.g. lower sicknesses, absenteeism and turnover and higher productivity and intention to remain with the organisation).
2. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), 2004) survey suggests common forms of flexible working introduced

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into UK organisations entail part-time, variable hours, job sharing, working from home, term-time only working, annualised hours and nine-day fortnight.

3. The CIPD 2004 fact sheet suggests this can be done through: career breaks for carers; sabbaticals; study leave; secondments and through additional support like – employee assistance programme; financial services through subsidised insurance or loans; workplace facilities like crèches or medical centres; and loans allowances to help pay for childcare.

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