

# Middlesex University Research Repository

An open access repository of

Middlesex University research

<http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk>

Martins, Lola-Peach ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4433-9861> (2007) A holistic framework for the strategic management of first tier managers. *Management Decision*, 45 (3) . pp. 616-641. ISSN 0025-1747 [Article] (doi:10.1108/00251740710745151)

This version is available at: <https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/4259/>

## Copyright:

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this work are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge.

Works, including theses and research projects, may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from them, or their content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). They may not be sold or exploited commercially in any format or medium without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s).

Full bibliographic details must be given when referring to, or quoting from full items including the author's name, the title of the work, publication details where relevant (place, publisher, date), pagination, and for theses or dissertations the awarding institution, the degree type awarded, and the date of the award.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address:

[eprints@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@mdx.ac.uk)

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

See also repository copyright: re-use policy: <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/policies.html#copy>

**A HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE STRATEGIC  
MANAGEMENT  
OF FIRST TIER MANAGERS**

**Lola Peach Martins, Chartered MCIPD, Middlesex University**

# A HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF FIRST TIER MANAGERS

Lola Peach Martins, Chartered MCIPD, Middlesex University

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – The intention of this research paper is to shed light on the key factors influencing the human resource management (HRM) performance of first tier managers (FTMs), and the vital importance that a holistic strategic framework<sup>1</sup> can have in this regard.

**Design/methodology/approach** - The research paper uses an up to date historical approach, and additionally, draws on detailed case study evidence from an aerospace manufacturing/engineering company via manually and electronically analysed in-depth semi-structured interview and company documentation.

**Findings** - The case study findings reveal that the FTM's HRM performance is greatly influenced by a group of four key factors, and their interrelationships:

**Research limitations** – The literature survey was mainly industry specific (manufacturing), and the sample was restricted to one sector (aerospace), as well as one case study organisation. Furthermore, the views of FTMs' staff are not directly represented.

**Originality** – The FTM's HRM role shows no signs of abating; in addition, questions regarding their performance of this role have increasingly emerged. This has become more evident as organisations have continued to expand the FTM's role by devolving greater HRM responsibilities to them, and their performance of the role demonstrates that many FTMs are ill equipped to perform their HRM duties to the required standard. However, the vital importance that a holistic strategic framework (which encompasses the four key factors influencing their performance) can have on their performance of this role is not acknowledged. The present research paper, gives an empirical example of a case study, and therefore provides a springboard to address the weakness in the literature.

**Key words** – First tier managers, Strategic management, HRM performance, HRM role, Aerospace manufacturing, Change, Framework.

**Article type** – Research paper

Middlesex University Business School  
The Burroughs, Hendon, NW4 4BT  
Lola2@mdx.ac.uk

---

<sup>1</sup> Strategic HRM has been conceptualised in number of similar ways, for example *strategic fit or integration* (Morris and Pennington, 1998; Wood, 1999; Sheehan, 2003; Karami et al., 2004). Child (2005) describes "*integration* as a condition in which there is adequate coordination between the different, but complementary, activities that collectively create value." According to Brewster and Larsen (1992) Strategic integration is defined as the degree to which HRM issues are considered as part of the formulation of the business strategy. Similarly, Armstrong (2001) states, "Strategic HRM is concerned with the relationship between HRM and strategic management of the firm. It refers to the overall direction the organisation wishes to pursue in achieving its objectives through people...Strategic HRM addresses broad organisational issues relating to changes in structure and culture, organisational effectiveness and performance, matching resources to future requirements, the development of distinctive capabilities, knowledge management and the management of change."

# **A HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF FIRST TIER MANAGERS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The strategic management of FTMs is crucial for various reasons: Firstly, there is a burgeoning importance attached to the role due to HRM devolution, which shows no signs of abating; secondly, to manage the uncertainties that tend to arise about the FTM's HRM role; and thirdly, in order to effectively manage the problems associated with their performance of this devolved role.

According to Larsen and Brewster (2000), and Budhwar (2000), the *raison d'être* of HRM devolution to FTMs can be put down to the following:

- (1) The complexities of some issues which top management find difficult to comprehend
- (2) It helps in terms of reducing costs;
- (3) FTMs are faster when it comes to responding to frontline state of affairs
- (4) The experiential learning of FTMs acquired through devolution of core HRM activities propels them towards promotion for future managerial positions, which requires higher level decision-making skills
- (5) It results in creating a motivational environment, as well as effective control, as line managers are in constant contact with frontline staff.

Regarding the uncertainties attached to this role, several pertinent views are highlighted. Renwick (2002) states that, FTMs have always been involved in managing human resources, however, according to research carried out by Thurley and Wirdenus (1973), Child and Partridge (1982), Lowe (1995), Renwick (2003), and Hales (2005) the nature of this role and the importance attached to it has varied, and has not always been clear. Core debates linked to this variation tends to stem from uncertainties about (1) Whether they are managers or not; and uncertainties about (2) Where to place the responsibility of people management (Renwick, 2003) – with senior managers, middle managers, human resource management (HRM) professionals, or with FTMs. Notwithstanding these reservations, Cooper (2001), Sisson and Storey (2000), and Cunningham and Hyman (1999) have revealed that FTMs are in the best position to adopt and deliver the most appropriate human resource management styles and practices, as they are the closest to frontline staff. Whittaker and Marchington's study (2003), have also suggested that FTMs are in a good position to take on the role, but in partnership with human resource professionals.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2004) have revealed that whilst some FTMs accept this 'new' role, and are able to perform the HRM tasks very well, at the same time, other studies show that FTMs frequently fall short of discharging their HRM responsibilities

effectively, therefore, pointing a ‘rhetoric and reality’ gap (Cunningham et al, 2004). A number of factors have been identified as contributing to this problematic performance. These include, an unwillingness on the part of the FTMs to take on such people management tasks (Roffey Park, 2000), the lack of relevant training provided to them (Gwent TEC, 2000, Priestland and Hanig, 2005), and the absence of supportive surrounding management culture, systems and structures (Purcell, 2001; Guest, 2004; Hartog and Deanne, 2004; Priestland and Hanig, 2005). According to Earnshaw et al (2000) and Renwick (2000), the FTM’s HRM role or rather, the performance of it has been problematic because their primary responsibilities are in meeting service or production goals.

Generally speaking, the people management role of FTMs is well documented (Renwick, 2003), and has long history, stretching from the early factory system of production to the present era<sup>2</sup>. However, whilst the various studies point out disparate HRM performance deficiency factors, very little is said about the contribution a more holistic strategy can make to the HRM performance of FTMs, if adopted. It is nonetheless clear that, together, the various explanations draw attention to the essence of managing FTMs strategically as human resources; that is, an approach that takes a broader range of integrated strategic factors that are beneficial to FTMs and the organisation, into consideration.

In summary, the historical literature on devolution implies that the way organisations manage change, including the way the discharge of the FTM’s HRM responsibilities have taken place, requires due attention. In other words, as suggested by Christiansen, 1997 (cited in O’Regan and Ghobadian, 2004), “there is something about the way decisions get made in successful organisations that sows seeds of eventual failure.” To date, however, relatively few integrated (in-depth, and systematic) studies of HRM devolution to FTMs associated with decision making have been undertaken that seek to address the performance of FTMs in the context of the way they, as human resources, are strategically managed.

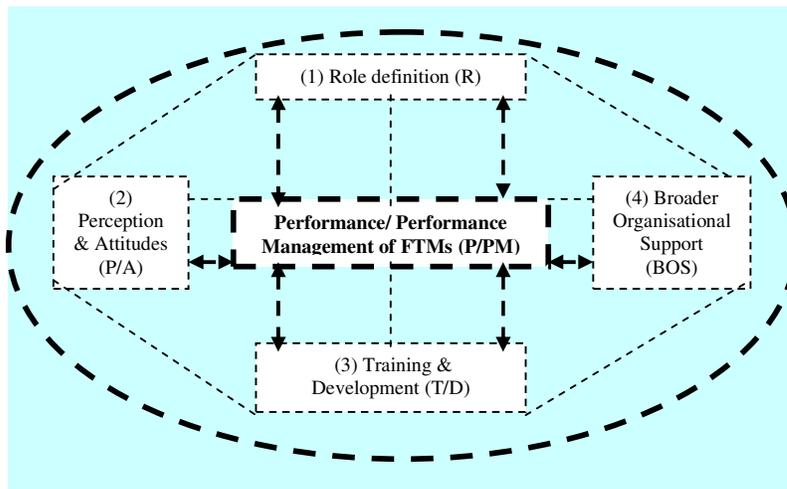
#### *Aim of the Research*

Evidentially, employers have sought to increase the responsibilities of FTMs for a range of soft and hard human resource management activities and issues (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003; Larsen and Brewster, 2003; Industrial Relations Services (IRS) study, 2004; and Hales, 2005). However, the historical legacy vis-à-vis the people management role is scarcely considered, when determining their suitability for the role and planning an effective HRM strategy for the successful implementation of devolution. A historical perspective sheds light

on pertinent issues that need to be well thought-out when an attempt is being made to solve an organisational dilemma (Wirdeus and Thurley, 1973; Child and Partridge, 1982; and Meshoulam and Baird, 1987). In the case of this study, the historical perspective sheds light on four interrelated key factors vis-à-vis the strategic management of FTMs and their HRM performance:

- (1) The perceptions and attitudes of primary stakeholders (including FTMs) of the role
- (2) The degree to which their new role is adequately defined and clearly communicated
- (3) The extent to which they receive appropriate training and the overall development opportunities made available; and
- (4) How far broader organisational systems and structures serve to facilitate or hinder role/performance

The broad aim of the case study was three-fold. First, the examination of how the company was seeking to change the people management role of its FTMs: to determine what factors were considered in doing so. Secondly, the exploration of how well the FTMs were performing this revised role: to determine their ability to handle their devolved HRM responsibilities. Thirdly, the identification of what key factors were acting to shape the way in which they performed this role. Here, however, attention is focussed on the findings obtained in this last area and, in particular, their relationship to previous findings regarding the factors that influence the way in which they perform the people management responsibilities devolved to them.



**Figure 1.**  
**FTM's Four Factor**  
**Framework By LP Martins**

This introduction provides the background for this article, which is based on research conducted in 2003 at a company I have named AeroCo. The case study participants (CSPs) were asked to comment on factors acting to enhance or hinder the FTMs performance, and actions, which they

---

<sup>2</sup> Hales (2005), Allen et al (2005), CIPD (2004, 2005), Cunningham et al (2004), Whittaker and Marchington

felt, could be taken to support FTMs in the undertaking of this role, to operationalise the four-factor framework (see figure 1). Additionally, the CSPs were asked to indicate the extent to which they understood the four factor framework vis-à-vis the HRM performance of FTMs. Therefore, the testing of the validity and usefulness of the framework via in-depth interviews was carried out.

What follows is divided into five sections. As a point of departure, the first of these draws on existing literature to highlight (a) the way in which the HRM role of FTMs, particularly in manufacturing organisations, has been changing, and within this (b) the elements depicting the four factors influencing their performance are taken into account. Following this, the next two sections briefly presents the study's research methodology and provides background information on the case study setting. Finally, the analysis and findings from the study are reported and the implications of them are discussed in a concluding section, and suggestions for further research are made.

### **THE CHANGING ROLE OF FTMS**

From a historical perspective, the role of FTMs can be seen to have gone through a number of periods of transition. In this section the change cycle, which shows that the FTM's role consists of four main periods of change, that is, the manager-in-charge, manager-in-the-middle, manager-on-the-margin, and manager-in-charge-*plus*, is discussed. More importantly, within these periods of transition, the four key factors acting to influence the FTM's HRM performance are highlighted.

#### *Manager-in-Charge (MiC)*

The role of FTMs during the 19<sup>th</sup> century effectively took the form of self-employed, or internally employed, sub-contractors (Dickson, 1975; Dawson, 1992; Wren, 1994). FTMs employed their own staff and were therefore effectively responsible for all the major aspects of labour management, such as the recruitment and selection, wages, and undertaking disciplinary action to deal with what they deemed as poor performance (Child and Partridge, 1975; Thurley and Hamblin, 1963; Thurley, and Wirdenius, 1973). As the factory system developed, in order to secure greater control, owners increasingly opted, to bring this labour management function 'in-house', through both the direct employment of FTMs and the people they managed. During this period of transition, FTMs continued to possess considerable power over those they managed and hence retained elements of their previous sub-contracting role (Thurley and Hamblin, 1963; George, 1972; Melling, 1980). Additionally, their findings suggest that, FTMs often displayed unfair behaviours towards their staff, such as hiring and firing them as they pleased. They were perceived as people with power or rather able to elicit control over those they recruited. In addition, they were not formally trained for any of these HRM activities; it can be assumed however that they may have acquired the necessary

---

(2003), Larsen and Brewster (2003), MacNeil (2003), Gibb (2002), Renwick (2002), and IDS (1991)

competencies through informal learning, or intuition, may have guided them in taking action. Finally, these studies highlighted that there was no formal strategy to guide the way they were recruited, although, it seems clear that organisations that recruited FTMs, as well as FTMs themselves were clear that their main responsibility was to control their staff. That is, they were recruited as a means of exercising greater control over the workforce.

Owen's (1994), in his work, has provided useful debates about how FTMs were recruited, and performed their 'people management' role during the Industrial Revolution era. Owen's empirical studies looked at managers in the UK steel industry. His work was concerned with the sociological aspects of the FTMs' early background and career. Particularly, his findings revealed that recruitment was geared towards favouring elitist groups, for example, those with middle class backgrounds with a broad education, whilst denying access to those less favourably advantaged, of management potential. Other authors writing of this period present a different story. That is, salaried FTMs of this era were usually illiterate workers promoted from the ranks because they evidenced a greater degree of technical skills or had the ability to keep their staff disciplined (George, 1972). Whereas, studies carried out by the Ministry Committee of Training of Supervisors (1954), drew attention to the need for the formal training of these FTMs. George (1972) also pointed out that FTMs of this era were untrained in the intricacies of management, and were left to their own devices – to develop their own leadership styles, and learnt very little from others.

#### *Manager-in the-Middle (MiM) and Manager-on-the-Margin (MoM)*

The increasing influence of 'scientific management', related managerial prescriptions, and the associated development of specialist management functions, such as personnel management, served to increasingly circumscribe the role of FTMs and diminish not only their managerial responsibilities, but also their decision-making authority (Wirdeus and Thurley, 1973; Child and Partridge, 1982). Subsequently, these moves towards weakening their role were compounded in the 1960s and 1970s by the growing power of trade unions and, in particular, workplace union organisations, with this growth having three somewhat distinctive effects in this regard. These being, first, attempts by shop stewards to by-pass FTMs and deal directly with more senior managers, secondly, a propensity on the part of such managers to also deal with stewards and thereby undermine the authority of FTMs and, thirdly, changes in pay relativities which operated to the disadvantage of FTMs and, indeed, prompted an expansion of unionism among them as their status (Boyd and Scanlon, 1965; Thurley, 1972; Wirdeus and Thurley, 1973; IDS Studies, 1987) and relative pay position deteriorated (Goodman and Wittingham, 1977).

Against this backcloth depicting a lack of support towards FTM in carrying out their 'people management role', commentators drew attention to the ambiguous and diminished position that

FTMs occupied in organisational management structures and the way in which this had affected their self-identity within them (Bowey, 1988; Lowe, 1995). In fact, for some they had become ‘lost managers’ (Child and Partridge, 1982).

#### *Manager-in-Charge-Plus (MiCP)*

The decline of trade union power from the beginning of the 1980s and the parallel growth in product market competition acted, in conjunction with the emergence of new managerial philosophies and increased interest in Japanese production techniques (Lowe, 1995), to encourage many employers to try to introduce more decentralised, cost-effective, focussed, and flexible management structures. In many cases, a central part of this process of reform was the re-configuration of the FTMs role in a way that sought to re-emphasise its managerial component (Cunningham and Hyman, 1997). At the same time, this encouraged them to move to a more facilitative and empowering type of leadership – strategic management type of role (Ghobadian et al., 1998). This role encompassed greater responsibility for human resource issues, such as training and development, staff recruitment, discipline and absence management, and crucially, managing their teams’ performance (IDS, January, 1991; IDS, March 1990; CBI, 1992; Milward et al, 2000; Kraut et al, 2005). Overall, the changes were made in the expectation that they would serve to engender improved workforce performance – ensuring quality products to meet customer demands. In the event, however, the existing evidence suggests that they have met with very mixed success, both within and across organisations (WRU, 1982; White, 1983; NEDC, 1991). In turn, this evidence has prompted a good deal of debate as to the reasons for this (Lowe, 1992; Beven and Hayday; 1994; IDS, 1990; Storey, 1992; CBI, 1992; IRS, 1994; Myland, 1996; Gwent TEC, 1999/2000; Roffey Park Management, 1998/1999; Karami et al, 2004; Armstrong, 2001; Edgar and Geare, 2005).

Within these debates, and the research findings that have informed it, the four broad sets of factors (The perceptions and attitudes of primary stakeholders (including FTMs) of the role; The degree to which their new role is adequately defined and clearly communicated; The extent to which they receive appropriate training and the overall development opportunities made available; and How far broader organisational systems and structures serve to facilitate or hinder role/performance) have been identified as exerting an important influence over the way in which FTMs respond to, and cope with, their new re-configured HRM roles (also see Figure 1).

Regarding Perception/Attitudes, Armstrong (2001) wrote, “Behaviour will be influenced by the perception of individuals about the situation they are in.” That is, their ability to sense things correctly or incorrectly.” Therefore, if behaviour is to be modified, a fundamental change in perception is necessary (Rose, 1987). The way in which people perceive and make judgements

about people at work can be explained via attribution theory, which is concerned with the assignment of causes to events. An attribution is made, for instance, when the primary stakeholders of the FTM's role (such as senior managers or frontline staff) perceive and describe FTMs as being inadequate for the HRM role because they are not HRM *experts* or because they are perceived and described as lacking the required authority to undertake certain tasks such as authorising training and handling grievance or discipline. Attitude on the other hand has been broadly defined as a settled way of thinking or feeling, and can be influenced by the work environment, such as organisational culture (norms and values). For example, where some FTMs in the manufacturing/engineering industry lack commitment to their HRM role because they believe that the function of managing people is a personnel/HRM specialist function which ought to be left to personnel/HRM professionals, like that of engineering, which requires technical competencies as opposed to 'people management competencies, should be left to engineers. Other work environment influences are stakeholders, and policies concerned with pay, recognition.

As for the role of FTMs, Woodall and Winstanley (1998), posit that the concept '*role*' is open to double meaning and can be challenged on many fronts. '*Role*' can be defined as "a part played by a person in a particular social setting and is influenced by his or her expectation of what is appropriate; a usual or customary function<sup>3</sup>." More specifically, "Roles are a set of expected behaviour patterns attributed to someone occupying a given position in a social unit such as an organisation."<sup>4</sup>

From his large number of case studies, Hale (1986) emphasised the need to understand what is known about what managers do. He adopted an *a posteriori* philosophy and looked at what managers actually did. He emphasised the need to base this on a wider context of managerial behaviour. That is, behaviour based on 'managerial tasks', 'managerial responsibilities' and the 'managerial function'. In doing so, Hale found some commonalties between the managerial roles. His findings identified five primary managerial indicators, which can also be used to evaluate the role of FTMs. These are:

- The substantive elements of managerial work (what managers do)<sup>5</sup>
- The distribution of managers' time between work elements (how managers work)
- Interactions (with whom managers work)

---

<sup>3</sup> Collins English Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1999

<sup>4</sup> Linda Manund, 2001, *An Introduction to Human Resource Management...*, Palgrave: New York

<sup>5</sup> The items enclosed within the brackets are added to Hale's (1986) original text as an attempt to merge Huczynski & Buchanan's (2004) theory with Hales theory.

- Informal elements of managerial work (what else managers do)
- Themes which pervade managerial work (what qualities managerial work has)

A major survey conducted by the IRS (2000) also identified the following as key HRM tasks of FTMs, therefore, further supporting Hales' five primary managerial indicators. The key tasks identified are monitoring/controlling absence, handling discipline, managing the health and safety aspect of their staff, team development, providing the necessary induction training of their staff, planning/allocation of work, recruitment, training their staff, appraising their staff, handling grievance, and briefing their team.

Huczynski and Buchanan (1991), state that '*role*' can be defined as 'the pattern of behaviour expected by others from a person occupying a certain position in an organisational hierarchy'. Such expectations may arise from both formally specified duties and responsibilities, and/or from individual experiences. For example, members of a particular organisation may expect a FTM to behave in a particular way based on what they have typically understood and witnessed FTMs doing in the past. Child and Partridge (1982) have noted that FTMs and their staff may well disagree as to the authority FTMs themselves possess. Therefore, it is necessary to recognise that a role, which is particularly perceived as managerial to certain members of the organisation, may be understood differently amongst other members of the same or different organisation (Gill and Johnson, 1997), when not clearly communicated.

It is clear from the literature on devolution to the line that the FTM's role tends to be imbued with ambiguity often influencing expected results – their performance of their HRM role. According to Armstrong (2001), individuals tend to become insecure or lose confidence in themselves when they are unclear about what their role is and indeed, what is expected of them. Therefore, it seems logical to suggest that defining the FTM's role should be part of the strategy to enhance performance. Laitainen (2002, cited in O'Regan and Ghobadian, 2005) defined performance as the ability of an object to produce results in a dimension determined a priori, in relation to a target. Poor performance has been known to be caused by roles having incompatible elements, for example, as identified in the literature, where there is a clash between what senior managers, HRM personnel, and the FTMs' own staff expect of them, and what FTMs themselves believe is expected of them (Armstrong, 2001). This can be deemed as an indication that the role had not been clearly established and communicated in the first place, which then makes it almost impossible to consider and put an appropriate training and development strategy in place.

Where training and development is concerned, several issues are highlighted for consideration. According to Wilson (1994), "managers are required to manage, and to manage effectively they have to be in control." Putting forward a case for holistic management systems (HMS), Wilson

posited, that in order to build upon their strength of managing, they need to be trained in learning to succeed, particularly if they are required to integrate their business and behavioural skills and to develop the perspective required for managing complex and changing organisations.

FTMs play a crucial role in the learning and development of their staff, however, they are unlikely to be successful without the organisation's substantial investment in management development as well (Gibb, 2003). Keep (2003) maintains that training investment symbolizes that employers value employees, which in turn enhances employee motivation and commitment to the organisation. This proposition also gained support from the Employment in Britain Survey, which drew from a dataset of 3,855 employed individuals. The results revealed that 94% of the respondents felt that the training received had been beneficial (financial/non-financial), for example, in terms of increased earnings, gaining job satisfaction or being promoted, achieving qualifications, and being committed to their job, (Gallie and White, 1993 cited in Santos and Stewart, 2003). Organisational commitment is defined as "the employees feelings of obligation to stay with the organisation: feelings resulting from the internalisation of normative pressures exerted on an individual prior to entry or following entry Allen and Meyer, 1990". Allen and Meyer, however, distinguish between three types of commitment. (1) Affective commitment: an employee identifies with, is involved in, and has emotional attachment to the organisation. (2) Normative commitment, which is based on a sense of obligation – an employee feels that they ought to stay, as things may change, for example. (3) Continuous commitment: an employee recognises the cost associated with leaving the organisation, and therefore, they feel that they have no choice but to stay. This may explain why some FTMs do not leave their organisation where they have not been offered training/development opportunities and as a result are not motivated to perform their HRM role to a high standard. From the discourse so far, there are clear indications that suggest that the provision of a clear definition of the role, and the way in which the FTMs HRM role is perceived/attitudes elicited in this regard, as well as training and development are linked to the issue of broader organisational support.

In the general body of HRM literature, there is increasing evidence, which supports the link between strategic integration and performance<sup>6</sup>, (Boselie et al, 2005; and Wright et al, 2006, O'Regan and Ghobadian, 2002). However, drawing from the literature on the devolution of HRM to line managers, a broader or integrated approach towards the strategic HRM of FTMs is rarely discussed and practiced. For example, signs of this are highlighted in Lowe (1992, and 1995). Particularly, in his thesis on supervisors in the automobile industry, Lowe (1995) posited that authors have tended to treat the subject of FTMs in a "peripheral and cursory way."

---

<sup>6</sup>strategic HRM and performance, or strategic planning and performance

Whittaker and Marchington (2003) reporting on the devolution of HRM to line managers, focus on two major concerns, which also implicitly draw attention to the need for broader organisational support for FTMs, or otherwise, their strategic management. Firstly, they posited that FTMs tend to have “many other pressing priorities than managing and developing the people working for them”, and are therefore likely to take HRM issues less seriously than production or service goals. Evidence of this is found in Gratton et al’s (1999) studies, carried out on *pioneering* organisations. The results of their research showed that there were no specific key HRM performance indicators or any other HRM performance criteria (formal or informal) vis-à-vis the role of FTMs. According to Cunningham and Hyman (1999), FTMs tended to find their HRM role frustrating where they were unable to devote sufficient time to their HRM duties. Secondly, FTMs, whilst having these HRM responsibilities devolved to them, were found to lack sufficient skills and competencies to carry out the HRM role successfully without the necessary support from HRM practitioners. This notion is supported by a vast amount of research for example, IRS (2000), Gennard and Kelly (1997), and McGovern et al (1997). Furthermore, as highlighted by several authors, for example, (Cooper, 2001) and Lowe (1995), often enough senior managers and HRM managers have been accused of not providing enough support towards FTMs in the undertaking their HRM role. One of the main reasons given for this is the fear of having their own HRM role disbanded if FTMs accept the responsibilities that are associated with HRM tasks devolved to them. In Whittaker and Marchington’s study (2003), they have revealed the importance of the primary stakeholders of the HRM role working in partnership with FTMs rather than against them, if decision-making regarding HRM issues are going to be fast and effective (Renwick, 2003). The mere fact that such unnecessary tensions exist between FTMs, senior line managers and HRM specialist, as well as the fact that the HRM function continues to appear to be vulnerable to further contractions (Cunningham and Hyman (1999) suggests that a much broader approach to managing FTMs is required if devolution is going to be successful. Furthermore, the fact that studies such as Whittaker and Marchington (2003, cited in Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003) “have shown that the devolution of HRM responsibilities to the line has left many FTMs under-prepared, under-supported, and under-trained” is a clear indication that a holistic strategic approach to managing FTMs is required. Particularly, an approach, which takes the key factors influencing the performance of their HRM role into consideration when determining the strategic process.

Overall, the literature, which comprises a large number of studies reasonably connected to this work, suggests that the four groups of factors (mentioned above), combine to either support or undermine the FTM’s effective HRM performance. The literature further suggests that, the FTM’s performance in this regard, is in large part, shaped by the degree to which they are designed, introduced, and operationalised – the strategic process (O’Regan and Ghobadian, 2002). The fact, nevertheless, remains that few studies have sought to explore these suggestions in a systematic and

holistic manner. In effect, therefore, the small, but in-depth, study reported here represents an attempt to address this weakness in the existing literature.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research paper seeks to address the issue of the key factors influencing the HRM performance of FTMs, drawing on detailed case study findings obtained from a company involved in the aerospace and automotive industries. The Company had recently sought to increase the HRM responsibilities of its FTMs, however, without a more holistic strategy; they have experienced some problems with the FTM's performance in this regard.

### *Case Setting*

The company concerned, referred to as AeroCo, forms part of a large British multinational, and employs approximately 300 people. AeroCo commenced as a technical engineering development unit within its parent company - a global engineering company focused on the automotive and aerospace industries and active in more than 30 countries in Europe, the Americas and Asia Pacific. At the end of the 1990s, however, it was launched as a stand-alone business offering integrated engineering solutions to clients in these industries. Subsequently, it also expanded into working with clients in the rail industry and into offering recruitment services – supplying sub-contract resources to customers.

Up until towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the business environment for AeroCo was relatively benign, with growth rates of 30-40% a year occurring from 1997 until the end of the millennium. By 2000, however, the business climate had become less benign. Notwithstanding, the potential existed for large-scale growth, particularly in overseas markets such as the United States where a \$10 billion aerospace design market exists. This change in the business environment, linked to the setting of demanding growth targets by its parent company, prompted recognition on the part of AeroCo that it had to reform its 'way of doing business' in order to improve its market competitiveness. To this end, it embarked on a major change process.

As part of this change process, AeroCo sought to identify how it could improve the role currently played by Engineering Team Leaders (ETLs)<sup>7</sup> otherwise referred to as FTMs in this study. For example, between 2002 and 2003 the Company created a team, comprising five FTMS, two trade union representatives and two internal project sponsors (including the operations Director), to carry out a benchmarking exercise to examine how the role played by the company's FTMS compared with those which existed in a number (four) of comparable organisations. Based on this exercise,

---

<sup>7</sup> ETLs is the title used for FTMs at AeroCo

the company concluded that action was needed to improve a number of aspects of their role. In particular, it decided that it should henceforth embody a greater degree of responsibility for human resource issues, including:

- Matching team skills with the market environment
- Development of team members
- Project management, including the planning and allocation of work
- Internal communications
- Performance monitoring and control

Prior to the interviews for this study, FTMs were already involved in the undertaking of these HRM duties. In fact, as reported by some FTMs, although, tasks such as monitoring and controlling team performance was not part of their formal job description, they had carried out such tasks in the past but on an ad hoc basis.

#### *Research Methods*

The case study participants (CSPs) were asked to comment on factors acting to enhance or hinder the FTMs performance, and actions, which they felt could be taken to support FTMs in the undertaking of this role, in order to operationalise the four factor framework (see figure 1). Additionally, the CSPs were asked to indicate the extent to which they understood the four factor framework vis-à-vis the HRM performance of FTMs, therefore, testing the validity and usefulness of the framework via in-depth interviews.

Data for this study were obtained via two main data collection methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews and company documentation. FTMs and those who were involved in their management were interviewed. In all, four of the former were interviewed (including one shop steward) and these supplemented by further interviews with a human resource manager and six senior managers. These managerial personnel were selected because of their varied and/or expert knowledge and experience of the people management role and performance of FTMs. Thus, purposive sampling strategy was adopted, which also enabled the adoption a snowball effect, making it possible to gain access from one critical case study participant to another. Having access to a variety of critical case study participants was instrumental for generating and including the opinions of the primary stakeholders of the FTM's people management role, otherwise enabling a heterogeneous effect. The seeking of in-depth views as to the relevance of the framework outlined above, vis-à-vis the understanding of the people management role and the factors influencing the HRM performance of FTMs constituted a central component of these interviews. This sampling strategy compares favourably with studies conducted by Bryman and Bell (2003), Saka (2003), Willeminys et al,

(2003), and Boyd et al (1993), particularly, vis-à-vis studying management behaviour and decision-making. Simultaneously, company documentation was surveyed in order to triangulate, and thus substantiate the interview data.

On completion of the fieldwork, all interview data (tape recorded), were transcribed word by word, and later content and context analysed (and pattern-matched) manually and electronically using a Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis System (CAQDAS)<sup>8</sup> (Kelle, 1995, Maclaran and Catterall, 2002) to enable both quantitative and qualitative in-depth processing of the data, as well as cross-referencing with company documentation. Company documents also provided a general background, and these included benchmark exercise carried out, FTM role and attitude survey, and two confidential change management reports. Whilst both qualitative and quantitative analyses were carried out, it is the qualitative component of this analysis, however, which is drawn upon in this paper. The use of CAQDAS enabled the data to be explored both quantitatively and qualitatively through a combination of content analysis, context analysis, and pattern matching. This was done in order to identify the indicators of the themes (otherwise, framework components), and furthermore, to decipher the interrelationships between the themes. Thus, the indicators were categorised under the theme domain in which they emerged. The analysis involved the performance of several coding level tasks, and generating coding reports in order to scrutinise the data and decipher the relevant attributes of the themes. That is, to demonstrate for example, how the existence, otherwise, non-existence of appropriate HRM policies, practices and procedures are contributing to the performance of FTMs, thus organisational and business performance. Purcell et al (2003) referred to this type of scrutiny as dealing with the ‘black box’ problem.

## **CASE STUDY ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

In general, the findings obtained from the case study interviews revealed that whilst some FTMs were carrying out their human resource responsibilities effectively, this was far from universally the case. They further indicated that this variable performance reflected a number of influences, which acted to facilitate or hinder the way in which they carried out their people management responsibilities.

More specifically, those interviewed highlighted the way in which the people management performance of FTMs was critically influenced by all of the central elements of the conceptual framework that had developed based on the earlier literature. That is, the definition of their people management role; the training and development opportunities that had/had not been available to support it; the personal attitudes and perceptions of FTMs and other primary stakeholders; and the

---

<sup>8</sup> QSR NVivo 2.0

broader organisational arrangements which were in place or not in place, to support their effective management of people – and more generally, lent weight to its validity as a whole.

### ***The Perceptions and Attitudes of Primary Stakeholders (Including FTMs) of the Role***

The influence of the personal perceptions and attitudes of FTMs emerged strongly from the interviews. For example, describing the unreceptive, and in contrast, the practical, hands-on attitude of some FTMs towards their HRM role, a senior manager commented:

...You'll find that, it's the 'proactiveness' of people that makes them stand out as real people's people and outstanding developers. Some people will just come up to you and say, "I need some extra people, or I've got a problem, what are you going to do about it." And other people will come along with a solution. Umm, you know they've already done the thinking and the groundwork for what needs to be done. So I think you just find that it comes from the ETLs (Engineering Team Leaders) themselves...

Furthermore, the findings revealed that there were signs showing that some cultures embedded within Aero are expressed in the way FTMs behave towards their devolved people management responsibilities. That is, where FTMs elicited that their proactive or in contrast passive behaviours towards their HRM role could be ascribed to their settled way of thinking or feeling. For example, some FTMs at AeroCo held certain values such as – *people should do the jobs that they are employed to do*. Evidently, this belief was associated with a corresponding behaviour towards the role. As revealed by several comments made by senior managers. Particularly, revealing this type of FTM ethos, one manager stated:

...Now, some, as a result of their beliefs to do with the role are proactive, whereas those that are not it's down to their belief that it's not their responsibility to do it. It's the ones who are proactive that make sure that they get the support that they need, and they do get it somehow, and this makes you realise that it is possible to manage their role in such a way that it compliments the businesses objectives.

In a similar vein, another commented that:

How you perceive things will determine the way you behave, you know, your attitude towards the job. For example, the way the ETL perceives his or her role would determine how seriously he or she undertakes the tasks.

More specifically, in the context of an operational environment whose organisational culture had in the past, placed considerable emphasis on supervisory personnel possessing high levels of technical engineering competence as constituting the key qualifying attribute for the role, FTMs did not conceive their role in a broader and less technically orientated way. The following quote clearly illustrates this point:

If you asked them, they'd rather continue, as they were, they'd say no to getting more involved. People are used to, or comfortable with what they know. The moment you start putting the pressures on them to change and to go in a different direction, some people handle it but they'll say, "Well if you want me to do that, I can't do that, you'll have to get someone else in to do that." You'll actually end up moving people from the roles that they are good at a lot of the time; umm, some people take to this and say, "Yes, I've got more power, more responsibility, I own this, I can report it."

Above all, the quote suggests that some senior managers attributed the FTM's behaviour to their resentment towards change, particularly where FTMs felt that they lacked competencies, and that the time and weight of the change was burdensome. Resistance to change usually occurred because of the way in which individual FTMs perceived a situation, even though their awareness of the situation may have been false or at least misguided. For example, regarding the way some FTMs have perceived the devolution situation and the corresponding behaviour elicited, one senior manager commented:

Other people are saying, "... you're stopping me doing what I enjoy doing and what I'm paid to do, therefore I don't want to do it. All this needs to be considered if we are going to develop a highly skilled workforce"

### ***The Extent to which FTMs Receive Appropriate Training and the Overall Development Opportunities Made Available***

The actions that had, or had not been taken, by AeroCo to create training and development opportunities for FTMS in relation to their people management responsibilities were similarly highlighted by the CSPs as another key influential factor, as the quotes below demonstrated. Whilst it is clear that there was some form of training for FTMs, this was not specifically for HRM matters. Additionally, the actual training was not necessarily formalised or focussed and this demonstrated that policies were in this regard either fragmented or simply did not exist. As clearly stated by another manager:

We've been having talks about developing our ETLs, and we need to if business needs are going to be met. But the policies are not altogether there yet. If you're looking at policies for training ETLs, there aren't any specific policies governing our training methods, or recruiting FTMs. We tend to use workshop methods for training, that's the only one I've seen which has been used, but it's not regular and it's certainly not enough. Oh! And typically, we do on-the-job training... yes, we have on the job training. And we have internal trainers but mainly for the technical side of things. We also have a mentoring scheme, though it's not directly aimed at the ETLs, but graduates... So senior engineers and at times ETLs would be asked to mentor graduates." Generally they (ETLs) need more. Some have a lot of experience already, but they need to keep up with things. So all of them need this people management training of some sort, we can't rely on yesterday's. So policies in this respect would be helpful.

As highlighted in the literature review section, a core element of management as a function, is control. In order for managers to manage successfully they have to learn to be in control; and this learning comes from the learning opportunities provided, which in turn is derived from the training and development opportunities made available. However, training and development obstacles can exist because of an unwillingness to make any substantial investment in training, which in itself can be a consequence of disruptive organisational cultures. As vehemently stated by one of the FTMs:

I definitely think training and development is something we can do with; it's actually one of my objectives for the year, but I think the company's focus is on the technical and not on people management, and that's a barrier. What I think, we've got to become better at that, but historically we stem from being a technical company; we've looked at project management/people management as a separate function and not an extension of a technical role.

Normally you'd have your team leaders but certainly the assistant chief designer would be doing all the project roles, but then you lose any focus on that technical side.

One CSP, aware of the training methods, 'good' training strategy and policies in place, and the presence of a separate training department at his former place of work, believed that larger companies tended to show more concern regarding the training and development of their FTMs. He remarked:

On-the-job training tends to be the most common, but I'd say training's been inadequate. The reason I'm a bit iffy there is that, in my previous company, which is British Aerospace, I was there for 13 years, and being a very big company they had a training department separate from the HR department, and they had training on all aspects from technical to management to people management, this was reflective of the training policies on people management which were clear and realistic. So that is where I'd done some of my previous training. I must say, they had a good training strategy in place. But I've not had any here is, it might be my fault...., maybe it's just gone past me, perhaps they're not interested in it...I don't know.

This lack of attention to training and development existed, in turn, according to other CSPs, against the backdrop of a lack of clear criteria as to the competencies that FTMs needed to perform their role efficiently and effectively. For example, regarding the training and development of FTMs in the area of HRM, one CSP summed up the need for specific HRM criteria when she said:

There aren't any criteria for assessing people management skills and this isn't helpful, we know it and are working on it by developing better systems and procedures that help to put the role in a better frame, one that would make it clearer. At the moment, the criteria used in selecting them would be based on availability. Well, it would be technical skills, availability and the ability to run a team. Um, sometimes that ability is not proven by his people potential or ability. There is informal coaching, but I don't think there is formal people management training. I don't know, it could be a big seminar or something (laugh) that we do that has worked in the past, but that is not good though... something is being done about it, and that's why you are here.

Without any specific criteria for assessing people management skills, to some FTMs, it could seem as though AeroCo did not value them. In turn, this could materialize into a lack of motivation and commitment on the part of FTMs that feel this way, to undertake their devolved HRM role. Another senior manager (former FTM) who drew attention to pertinent training and development issues shared a similar view:

...ETLs are typically recruited in-house. It's non-objective. We tend to look at what is needed up the line. There's no formal selection criteria, and there is no recruitment process at the moment. We need to place more emphasis on the psychological contract, and we tend to introduce personality and psychometric tests without a clear focus on what these are meant to achieve. ETLs need people management training, we need to develop competency frameworks to match their training, and this needs to be linked to recruitment and pay. We could invest more time and money in up-skilling and development, but we need to consider the speed of application of skills and knowledge; they need to be applied immediately. They definitely need to be able to identify what would make them do their job better, and when we have done this, to make sure that we set clear objectives and we do everything possible to make sure we achieve them.

### ***The Degree to which the FTM's New Role is Adequately Defined and Clearly Communicated***

The issue of training and development was further linked, by CSPs, to a lack of clarity regarding the HRM role of FTMs. That is, clearly defining the role in terms of tasks, authority, status, as well as the competencies required to perform the tasks effectively and efficiently. For instance, some FTMs who did not have the required competencies treated their HRM role as if it was an 'easy job' or at least, their attitude demonstrated that they might have felt that it was. One FTM stated:

I'll be the first to admit that the proper project people, i.e. people with a project background like myself and people in that role with an engineering background, neither of us necessarily have the correct skill sets to handle the team leadership motivation or that kind of stuff. And this is a major failure. I mean I could run a project, I mean if you gave me a project and a big stick and a good engineering guy who knows what he's got to do to produce the deliverable, I could get the project out of the door to the time and cost of the programme. But I'd probably upset a whole lot of people in the process (laugh).

This explained why some FTMs would not seek the necessary training or be proactive in seeking out development opportunities in order to perform the role successfully.

Similarly, if those responsible for recruiting and managing FTMs perceived the HRM role as an '*anyone can do it*' type of job, then they are not likely to give much thought to defining the role in such a way that the training needs would be apparent and therefore clearly identified. As one of the managers interviewed put it:

...but if the training is going to be provided, now you see, this depends on how the role and the tasks they have to perform are perceived by those responsible for defining it. If it is vague, then that's no good. Because if people don't see it as difficult without training, then that's their attitude, isn't it? The problem we have here, is not everyone agrees with the role, so you get some supporting the role and others not. So first, I think we need to help the guys by making this clear to everyone, and that includes ETLs.

It is worth noting that in a rapid and continuous changing environment, pressures due to time limitations and organisational culture may act as barriers to training and development. Therefore, such barriers could make it difficult to follow formalised training procedures such as systematic training, which involves carrying out a training needs analysis (TNA) that would be based on a pre-planning (for example, clearly defining the role in terms of tasks, authority, status and competencies), actual planning, designing, implementation and evaluation of the training. However, at AeroCo, the problems that existed with regard to training and development stretched beyond following formalised training procedures. There were mixed views about whether formalised or focussed policies and procedures existed for FTMs or not. In addition to this, and perhaps more importantly, there was no consistency as to whether the FTMs HRM role was not clear or not, that is whilst some of the managers interviewed felt that the role was clear, a majority felt that this was

not the case. As part of AeroCo's move towards developing an appropriate strategy, they embarked upon a major change initiative involving the devolvement of greater HRM responsibilities to FTMs, and then later a benchmarking exercise with five other leading UK multinationals, which resulted in the role becoming clearer than in the past. In the words of one FTM:

The roles are much more clearly defined now. Again, over the last few years the human resources department particularly has established a number of processes and formalised the processes so that now it is much clearer. Just for example, the personal development plan process it is now formulated, embedded within the procedure and it has to be adhered to; whereas in the past it was always ad hoc, so in the last couple of years it's all been more structured.

It was apparent however, as at the time of the fieldwork investigation for this study, there were no formal job descriptions or personnel specifications for FTMs, which reflected their HRM responsibilities, and an appropriate internal job analysis had not been undertaken. This is an indication that the role still lacked the level of recognition that it deserved. Prior to the benchmark exercise the role tended to lack any formal structure, and was viewed as a temporary role which had a propensity to rotate than have any typical standard, and a majority of FTMs tended to adopt a hands-off approach where personnel issues were concerned. After the benchmark exercise, some structure had been put in place but the FTM's HRM role was still not made fully explicit. The extent to which the role lacked a clear definition was expressed by several CSPs. Indeed, the lack of clarity was identified as having, more generally, an adverse affect on those selected to fulfil the FTM role. One manager in his description of the situation remarked:

I don't think we've done that properly, things are not properly matched, for example, matching the right people with the right jobs – and I'm talking about ETLs that aren't good at the job and those that are but, you know. I mean, there was a hole, I think we recognised it and we've put something in that just to plug the gap, but we haven't done it the right way, but we've put something there. Are we really utilising these people who are frontline left-tenants properly in terms of the business need, the HR need. Are we clear about whom they are – the motivators and leaders of men? Of course we ain't! You can put them in but they ain't going to win us the battle. I mean, we've talked about roles and responsibilities and the recognition, the soft issues of man management skills within the team and I don't think we've done that.

Another CSP highlighted that some FTMs had not been able to set themselves apart from their former passive HRM role and embrace the their 'newly devolved HRM responsibilities'. To some extent, their inability to adapt to their new was attributed to the insecurity they felt or the loss of confidence associated with roles that are not properly defined. This tended to lead to uncertainties about what was expected of them – the psychological contract. It is therefore clear that if the FTM's HRM performance is going to be enhanced, then a training strategy, which encompasses a well defined, but somewhat, flexible HRM role description, leading to the identification of appropriate training and development needs must be developed first.

### ***How Far Broader Organisational Supports (Strategic HRM) Serves to Facilitate or Hinder the FTM's Role/Performance***

The influences wielded by the factors identified above clearly lend weight to the suggestion that if FTMs are to carry out their people management responsibilities effectively attention needs to be paid by employers to a number of, inevitably inter-related, factors. That is, the perceptions and attitudes of primary stakeholders (including FTMs), the development of clear role expectations and related selection criteria, and the putting in place of training and development activities that are closely linked to these expectations and that are likely to engender attitudes and behaviours supportive of them. The interview findings, however, further revealed that the occurrence of such attitudes and behaviours are facilitated or hindered by the degree to which the broader organisational environment is supportive of them. Alternatively, to put it another way, the extent to which the organisational and managerial cultures, structures and systems within which they work serve to reinforce their importance and desirability.

A number of features of these systems were identified as being of importance. These, notably, included effective:

- Internal channels of communicating what FTMs are expected to do
- The standards of performance they are expected to achieve and the opportunities available for skills development
- The establishment of clear and appropriate levels of authority and status
- The existence of effective performance management frameworks; and
- In the context of a project based operational environment and a matrix based management structure, adequate mechanisms for collaboration between FTMs and those in the wider organisation in possession of resources critical to the performance of them and their teams.

In combination, the following quotes serve to demonstrate the relevance of these factors:

Firstly, I think ETLs need to know that they are being thoroughly supported right throughout the organisation, and we can certainly show this through our organisation structure, which is complicated for starters, it doesn't quite allow the cooperation that is needed. We need commitment at all levels, and what would also help this is by providing the necessary information they need about the business itself, what they have at their disposal to meet their objectives and ultimately business objectives etc..., they need to

know exactly what training is available and that this is a learning organisation, not just by word but by the way provision is made... So, our communication could improve on that score.

They need to know that they have full cooperation and are able to collaborate throughout the organisation, it's about role acceptance, – not everybody knows what people management tasks they have authority to undertake, yet much is expected, and that's not good for their performance if we are going to enhance their performance.

Well, obviously if you want them to get more involved managing the business, then you need to be clear that that's what you want them to do; likewise with their people management role if you want them more involved in this then how you make this clear is important. I did say this before; we have done this to some degree on some of the other programmes actually. When they come and do these nine to eight plans with this business development strategy to sort of improve our position with the customer, by inviting the team leader into those sorts of activities gives them a greater sense of understanding and the direction of the business a bit more. We know it is his responsibility to manage his team to achieve that goal, but we should be supporting anything that would enable him or her to do that – training if it's training, HR advice if it's advice they need. Again, we have this problem with this high-level team leader that doesn't necessarily feel involved with the decisions that are made. It's not necessarily making decisions cause they're made at the business level, but at least having a say at some of the meetings that are involved around them, there's visibility and he knows what's going on.

## **APPLICABILITY OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Taken together, the findings obtained from the interviews, then, added weight to the conceptual explanatory framework that had been developed from the earlier literature review and the related view that the performance of FTMs is a product of the degree of strategic fit, both vertical and horizontal, that exists between their role and wider business strategies, structures, and systems on the one hand, and human resource policies, activities and resources, on the other. In fact, these conclusions received reinforcement from the responses that CSPs gave when explicitly asked, towards the end of interviews, for their views on this framework. Thus, as the following quotes show, they invariably made comments that supported its relevance to an understanding of how FTMs performed in relation to their people management role:

Well, first and foremost, the role needs to be made clear and we've done that to some extent. But that depends on how that role is perceived by those responsible for defining it in the first place. In fact, then we can look at the broader organisational support along with training and development, which feed into performances. Because from this we can see, those behaviours and the things we do that are not supporting the role and performance in a positive way. It's like a cycle with one thing feeding into the other and that being done constantly – positive attitudes can be continuous and so can negative ones: with this, this can help you monitor what you see. Well that's how I see it anyway, and that's how I'm interpreting the diagram you've got there. It's a good one actually.

Especially, the perception and attitudes are going to be linked to the business support that you've got, which also links to performance management because that feeds back into the

perception. Yes, I think they're all very strongly linked really. And training and development, I mean again that's linked to performance assessment; but I mean the training and development is driven by the business needs probably more than anything else actually. As I said before, the strategic need, it's driven by the project need at the moment. Training and development is probably less of a driver, I mean the role is driven by the business requirement and you may have training to supplement that role. Umm, we rarely look at a strategic map and say, although we are starting to, say we need to focus into position; that's what we're starting to do now, and training up team leaders in technical skills, and we need to this with their people management as well. So this if you like, is like a strategic map, and you could call this a strategic map.

So if you are going to do these things you can't disassociate any of them. Ultimately, for me, what I'm out to get is performance, and you get a sense of this during appraisals, and quality of output - that's what we're after, so really these are in-put if you like. All of these have to be modified by the individuals because we're a complex organization as we all are. Whilst there is commonality in the ETL role, there is 20% difference because of the nature of each project or each team or whatever.

Looking at your diagram..., I see a good starting point would be to understand the perceptions and attitudes below and above, as well as ETLs of this people management role. Trying to get these to merge is a tough challenge, but we must aim to get them to be the same to make the role work, and of course, the role must be made clear. Then training and development, which part of it is mentoring (see left side of structure); broader organisational support, and then their performance must be monitored and managed successfully. It is important to understand that each one feeds into the other, and to get some perspectives on how. We are not doing this at the moment; we need to get better at communication. If you remember, I said that we could do with investing more time and money in up-skilling and development and to do this the role must be clear. So that's the role that needs to be clearly outlined, and the wider organisational support or broader support you have here; and then yes, the training and development would come into it, but then again that depends on the one hand, the perception of – whose perception are we talking about? Cause, whether training is offered, depends on the way those in charge of training perceive it – if it is a necessity or not; but if you are talking about team leaders receiving training or asking for training then of course, this depends on whether they perceive it as a necessity or not. If they hate the role, or have been forced to take on the role, their attitude will show this when they are offered training or after training...it will be; you know “well I didn't ask for it did I. If they are keen, then they would take the initiative for their personal development, and some do already.

More specifically, as the above quotes suggest, the variable way in which, FTMs had carried out their new people management responsibilities, was seen as being explicable in terms of the company's inadequate strategic approach towards their definition and operationalisation, with the result that the full intended benefits of the changes made were substandard. The following, and final two quotes, serve to make this point more explicitly:

If I can just go back to your previous question then I'll link it with the framework you have here. We are working on pulling everything together – ‘the fit’. This is evident with the evolution of PDPs<sup>9</sup> and the grading system, trying to bring this in line with the business needs. The achievement of the fit is not HR driven at the moment and it should be, it should be a HRM driven initiative, and flexible. We need to establish where the weaknesses are and what the development needs are, where they lie, and the best ways of implementation. We need a better understanding of the evolution process in order to understand the role

---

<sup>9</sup> Performance Development Plans

more. We need to improve communication, for example, when the pay system changed this was not communicated properly and there are implications for this I've talked about this already.

And therefore we've created a role within the organisation because we believe that there is a need for that role. But we haven't equipped the occupants of that role sufficiently to get the benefits that we would be getting if that role was being implemented and applied fully...It's about enabling and empowering. I can't understand for the life of me, I mean, and it is a classic set of leadership rules, how do we on the one hand orchestrate a massive leadership undertaking like the Gulf war and yet we can't motivate four of five engineer designers.... Where are the lessons learnt? So is the fit right? No it isn't.

## **CONCLUSION**

The past decade has seen employers seeking to establish more devolved management structures that place more emphasis on local level managerial decision-making. An important component of this shift in many organisations has been the re-configuration of the role of FTMs to encompass a wider range of people management responsibilities.

Recent evidence pointing to the crucial influence FTMs can exert over worker perceptions, attitudes and motivation has lent some weight to the wisdom of this change (Purcell et al, 2003). At the same time, the available evidence also indicates that, in practice, it has often proved to be problematic.

Against this background, the present paper has used detailed case study evidence to explore how far the success or otherwise of such a process of change is explicable in terms of the role played by FOUR, inevitably to some extent inter-related, sets of factors:

- (1) The perceptions and attitudes of FTMs and other primary stakeholders of the role
- (2) The clarity with which their new role is defined; the degree to which its introduction is linked to,
- (3) The provision of appropriate training and development activities, and,
- (4) The extent to which all this is integrated into the broader way in which the organisation is structured and operates. The findings obtained served to highlight the relevance of all of these factors and, in doing so, pointed to the fact that to be successful attempts to reform the role of FTMs, organisations need to take due cognisance of all of them.

In short, the study's findings highlight the fact that those organisations that wish to enhance the people management role of FTMs need to adopt a holistic strategic approach towards achieving this objective. This is because, organisations which use a multifaceted framework such as that presented here, to assist with the close coordination of business and HRM activities, more specifically HRM devolution and the strategic management of FTMs are likely to perform better.

Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that such an approach needs to encompass both 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions, which the framework suggests. Thus, regarding the former, the strategic approach has to extend to ensuring that the new role not only 'fits' with operational business needs, but also wider management decision-making structures. Meanwhile, in relation to the latter, the holistic strategic approach needs to encompass a close integration between all aspects of relevant human resource activities. Speaking in more general terms, these include for example:

- Developing and establishing appropriate, explicit but flexible role/job descriptions, which assist with ensuring that role vacancies are appropriately filled and the psychological contract is considered
- Developing and establishing appropriate and explicit units of performance criteria and developing high-performance systems, which is essential if adaptable training programmes are going to be developed and established, and other development opportunities are going to be created
- Developing and establishing flexible reward incentives, developing information communication technologies, and developing and establishing appropriate and flexible HRM policies and procedures in order to contribute towards building a supportive environment in which FTMs genuinely feel motivated and committed to their HRM role, and the organisation as a whole.

Consequently, the findings point to the fact that human resource functions wishing to devolve aspects of their activities to FTMs need to think through carefully how this can be done in a way, which is compatible with the wider corporate, business, cultural, structural and operational features of the organisational environment. In other words to ensure that any such change is pursued in an integrated rather than 'isolated', narrowly functional-based, manner. That is, from a perspective which encompasses corporate, business and functional strategies.

#### *Limitations and Areas for Further Research*

Overall, the FTM Four Factor Interrelationship Framework provides a checklist for organisations eager to manage FTMs in a strategic way, so that FTMs can take on and cope with their devolved HRM responsibilities or otherwise feel genuinely committed and motivated in this regard. However, it must be stated that whilst the literature survey was not entirely industry specific, the sample was restricted to one sector, and one case study organisation. Therefore, the analysis applies to the aerospace manufacturing/engineering sector. In addition, whilst the study presents the views of primary stakeholders of the FTM's role (and indirectly the views of the FTM's staff), the views of FTMs staff are not directly represented as the study did not attempt to interview them in order to examine the differences of views at a more sub-organisational level. Although the main strengths

of the adopted methodology are placed in the data analysis, which is extensive and in-depth, it would have been beneficial to augment the in-depth semi-structured interviews with quantitative statistical data. Therefore, future research should consider an approach, which can be more generalised to a wider external environment. A framework relative to a broader range of sectors would be of immense value to managers involved in HRM strategy and decision-making at the FTM's level.

*For more information on the study please contact Lola-Peach Martins via email: [Lola2@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:Lola2@mdx.ac.uk)*

## REFERENCES

- Armstrong, Michael, 2001, A Handbook of Human Resource Management, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, London: Kogan Page Limited
- Allen, N.J., & Meyer, J.P. , The Measurement and Antecedents of Affective, Continuance and Normative Commitment to the Organisation, Journal of Occupational Psychology, Vol.63, No.1, 1-18, (1990)
- Bevan, S., & Hayday, S., 1994, Helping Managers to Manage People, Institute of Manpower Studies, London: BEBC Ltd.
- Boyd, K. B. & B. Scalon., Developing tomorrow's foremen, Training Directors Journal, 1: (1965)
- Boyd, K. B., Dess, G.G., & Rasheed, A.M.A., Divergence Between Perceptual and Archival Measures of the Environment: Causes and Consequences, Academy of Management Review, Vol.18, 204-26, (1993)
- Bowey, A. M., The Changing Status of Supervisors, British Journal of Industrial Managers, Vol. XI, No. 3, (1973)
- Budwar, Pawan. S., Evaluating Levels of Strategic Integration and Development of Human Resource Management in the UK, Personnel Review, Vol.29, No.2, 141-161, (November 1998)
- Buchanan, David. & Huczynski., 2004, Organisational Behaviour..., London: Prentice Hall International
- CBI, 1992, Focus On The Line - The Role Of The Supervisor, CBI: London
- Child, John & Partridge, Alan., 1975, The Industrial Supervisor', (cited in Esland, G., et al People and Work, Edingbrugh: Holms McDougall).
- Child, John & Partridge, Alan. 1982, Lost Managers , London: Cambridge University Press
- Cooper, C., Win by a Canvas, People Management, 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2001
- Cunningham, I., James, P, & Dibben, P, Absence Management ... British Journal of Management, Vol.15, No.3, 273-290, (September 2004)
- Dawson, Patrick. The Historical Emergence & Changing Role of Supervisors, Asia Pacific HRM, (Winter 1991)
- Dickson, W. J., 1975, Management and the Worker, London: Harvard University Press
- Edgar, Fiona., & Geare, Alan., HRM Practice and Employee Attitudes: Different Measures – Different Results, Personnel Review, Vol.34, No.5, 534-549, (2005)

- Edwards, Richard. 1979, Contested Terrain..., London: Heinemann
- George, Claud, S., 1972, The History of Management Thought, Hemel Hempstead: Prentice-Hall
- Gennard, J., & Kelly, J., The Importance of Labels: The Diffusion of the Personnel/HRM Function, Industrial Relations Journal, Vo.28, No.1, 27-42, (1997)
- Gibb, Stephen., Line Manager Involvement in Learning and Development..., Employee Relations, Vol.25, No.3, 281-293, (2003)
- Ghobadian, A., Gallear, D., Woo, H., & Liu, J., 1998, Total Quality Management: Impact, Introduction and Integration Strategies, London: CIMA
- Goodman, J. F. B. et al., 1977, Rule-making & Industrial Peace: Industrial Relations in the Footwear Industry, London: Croom Helm
- Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P., & Truss, P. (1999), Strategic Human Resource Management, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Guest, D. E., Human Resource Management & Industrial Relations', Journal of Management Studies, Vol.24, No.5, 503-521, (1987)
- GWENT TEC, March 1999/2000, Team Leader Research, Final Report
- Hales, Colin., Rooted in Supervision, Branching into Management: Continuity and Change in the Role of First Line Managers, Journal of Management Studies, Vol. 42, No. 3, 471-506, (May 2005)
- Hartog, Den., & Deanne, N., High Performance Work Systems, Organisational Culture and Firm Effectiveness, Human Resource Management Journal, Vol.14, No. 1, 55-78, (2004)
- Hutchinson, S., & Purcell, J., 2003, Bringing Policies to Life: The Vital Role of Front-Line-Managers in People Management, London: CIPD
- IDS Study, May 1987, Supervising Changes, Study 386, Incomes Data Services Ltd
- IDS Study, April 1990, Supervisors of Manual Workers, Study 479, Incomes Data Services Ltd
- IDS Study, April 1991, A Leading Role in Managing Change, Study 479, Incomes Data Services Ltd
- IRS Employment Review, 2004, Welcome the New Multitasking All-Purpose Management Expert, Industrial Relations Services
- Karami, Azhdar et al., Strategic Human Resource Management and Resource-Based Approach: The Evidence form the British Manufacturing Industry, Management Research News, Vol.27, No.6, 50-68, (2004)
- Kraut et al, The Role of the Manager: What's really Important in Different Management Jobs, Academy of Management Executive, Vol.19, No. 4, 122-129, (November 2005)
- Larsen Holt, H. & Brewster, C., Line Management Responsibility for HRM..., Employee Relations, Vol.25 No.3, 228-244, (January 2003)
- Lowe, James., 1995, Supervisors in the automobile industry, Ph.D thesis, 46-3753, Cardiff
- Lowe, James. 1992, Locating The Line..., in Blyton, P. and Turnbull, P. (eds.), Reassessing Human Resource Management, London: Sage

- Maclaran, Pauline., & Catterall, Miriam, Analysing Qualitative Data: Computer Software and the Market Research Practitioner, Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, Vol.5, No.1, 28-39, (2002)
- MacNeil, Christina, M., Line Managers: Facilitators of Knowledge Sharing in Teams, Employee Relations, Vol.25, No.3, 294-307, (2003)
- McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Haley, V., Stiles, P., & Truss, C., 'Human Resource Management on the Line' Human Resource Management, Vol.7 No.4., 12-29, (1997)
- Meshoulam, Iian, & Baird, Lloyd, Proactive Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management, Vol.26, No.4, 483-502, (Winter 1987)
- Millward, Neil., 2000, All Change at Work: British Employment Relations..., London, Routeledge
- Millward, N., Stevens, M., Smart, D., Hawes, W., 1992, The Workplace Industrial Relations Survey, The ED/ESRC/PSI/ACAS Surveys, Aldershot, Dartmouth
- Millward, N. et al, 1992, Workplace Industrial Relations in Transition..., Aldershot, Dartmouth
- Myland, Lesley., 1996, The Devolution of Managing Human Resources, Croners Employer's Briefing, No. 109
- NEDC, 1991, What Make A Supervisor World Class, NEDC Report, NEDC.
- O'Regan, Nicholas., Sims., Martin, and Ghobadian, Abby., High Performance: Ownership and Decision-Making in SMEs, Management Decision, Vol.43, No.3, 382-396, (2005)
- O'Regan, Nicholas., and Ghobadian, Abby., Short- and Long-Term Performance in Manufacturing SMEs: Different Targets, Different Drivers, International Journal of Productivity, Vol.53, No.5, 405-424, (2004)
- O'Regan, Nicholas., and Ghobadian, Abby., Formal Strategic Planning: The Key to Effective Business Process Management? Business Process Management Journal, Vol.8, No.5, 416-429, (2002)
- Owen, J. G., 1994, Managers in UK Steel, 1870-1960: A Sociological Study of Their Early Backgrounds and Careers, PhD: Aston - 438794
- Priestland, A., & Hanig, R., Developing First-Level Leaders, Harvard Business Review, Vol. 83, No. 6, 112-120, June (2005)
- Purcell, J., 2001, The Meaning of Strategy in Human Resource Management (cited in Storey, J., Human Resource Management: A Critical Text, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), London: Thomson Learning
- Purcell, J., 2004, Older and Wiser? Reflections on the Search for the HRM Holy Grail
- Renwick, D, Line Manager Involvement in HRM: An Inside View, Employee Relations, Vol. 25 No.3, 262-280, (2003)
- Santos, A., and Stewart, M., Human Resource Management Journal, Vol.13, No.1, 27-41,( 2003)
- Senge, P. M., 1992, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation, London: Century Business
- Storey, J., Human Resource Management: A Critical Text, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Thomson Learning
- Thurley, K., & Wirdenius., 1973, Supervision: A Reappraisal: London: Heinemann
- Thurley, K. E. & Hamblin, A. C.1963, The Supervisor and His Job, Problems of Progress in Industry, No13, DSIR, London: HMSO

- Thurley, Keith., Change & The Role of the Supervisor, Personnel Management, Vol.14 No.10, (October 1972)
- Roffey Park, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, Management Agenda, Roffey Park Institute
- Saka, Ayse., Internal Change Agents' View of the Management of Change, Journal of Organisational Change, Vol.16, No.5, 480-496, (2003)
- Terry, Michael. "How Do We Know If Shop Stewards Are Getting Weaker", British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.24, (1986)
- Willemyns et al, Trust Me, I'm Your Boss: Trust Power in Supervisor-Supervisee Communication; The International Journal of Human Resource Management, Vol.14, No.1, 117-127, (February 2003)
- Wilson, J. G., Holistic Management Systems, Management Services, Vol.38, No.7, 12-14, (July 1994)
- Whittaker, Susan., & Marchington, Mick., Devolving HR Responsibility to the line. Threat, Opportunity or Partnership?, Employee Relations, Vol.25, No.3, 245-261, (2003)
- Wren, Daniel., 1979, The Evolution of Management Thought, New York: Wiley
- White, C. G., 1983, Redesign of work organization Its Impact on Supervisors, WRU, Occasional