

# Work and the workplace in the context of contemporary human resource management

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



## Introduction and Aims

In the majority of organisations, including the company in question here, the Co-operative supermarket retail store, the interaction between staff members and the public can be fundamental to the long-term success of the company and the willingness of customers to return on a regular basis. However, when it comes to supermarket trading, consumers can switch relatively easily when they need to make purchases from these types of stores, on an equally regular basis, meaning that the issues of customer service and reliability are often at the forefront of the organisation's mission statement.

The purpose of this paper is to consider key areas of human resource management, namely the integration of part-time workers, in particular students who return during holiday periods to join the store staff to assist with busy periods such as Christmas, as well as the way in which motivation can be achieved by offering career growth. Both of these issues are relevant in this case study, as I was initially a part-time worker covering busy periods and working just 10 hours a week on average. This was increased to 25 hours a week, as well as my role as a team member, before becoming duty manager. Both of these factors fundamentally changed my role within the store and my motivation to perform and will therefore be discussed from a theoretical perspective, before looking at how it has been applied in the current situation.

## Motivation – Theories of Part-Time Workers

Motivating staff to perform in such a way that is going to benefit the organisation is perceived to be a central role for the HR manager, with policies and practices within any given workplace looking towards achieving the best possible end result. In this case, the managers within the Co-operative store were focused on providing excellent customer service and ensuring that there were suitable levels of staff in order to deal with busy periods, most notably around Christmas time. With consumer demand itself being flexible, this requires a high degree of flexibility within the workplace and, as such, the organisation engages extra part-time employees, often students who are actively seeking more hours during peak periods. Essentially, these individuals can therefore be considered as internal, temporary employees, where the organisation adjusts itself to deal with changing demands. Yet, they are still within the traditional employment model and are employed directly by the store (Gallagher, 2002). Gallagher stated that although it is recognised that there is a distinction between internal employees and external employees, i. e. those who are recruited from employment agencies to deal with a particular project or a particular period in time, it is also noted that there is likely to be a distinction between those internal employees who are perceived to be on-call, i. e. operating on zero hours contracts and those who are ongoing, i. e. working regular shorter hours.

In this particular situation, both types of internal employees are engaged and I personally was involved in an ongoing part-time role, whereby I was present within the store for 10 hours a week. Others around me worked more on an

on-call basis and may not have been present for weeks on end and then would obtain more hours during busy periods. This created difficulties within the group, as those who were ongoing internal employees often felt threatened by the presence of the on-call employees, with concerns that these on-call employees would be given hours that could otherwise have been offered to existing part-time staff. Balancing the need to meet customer demands and to maintain flexibility within the workplace with the requirements and demands of the staff themselves is a key role for any HR manager, particularly in customer facing organisations such as the Co-operative.

In October 2012, a meeting was held with the assistant manager to look at my placement programme. During this meeting, it became apparent that changing my working hours and hours a week to 25 had actually changed my ability to be effective within the team. Although I am still considered to be part-time my presence for 25 hours a week allowed the management team to become much more aware of what I am capable of, as well as the managers being able to rely on me to perform certain tasks consistently and on almost a daily basis. As a result of this change, I have become more engaged with activities that would essentially enable me to obtain promotion, in the future; for example, I have spent time in the cash office, as well as performing other management tasks, such as opening and closing the store. In particular, I feel that the management team has changed its attitude towards me, now seeing me more as an integral member of the

team, rather than as an individual who simply covers a few hours on the shop floor, on a weekly basis.

It is therefore suggested that the engagement of employees is more closely linked to their number of hours of employment, on a weekly basis, rather than based on whether or not the individual is an on-call employee or not. This could be seen in the fact that some students would work full-time hours during the holiday period and would often be given substantially more responsibility than staff members working every day of the week, but for more limited hours. This theory was supported further still when, in November 2012, when my working hours were again increased, this time from 25 hours per week to 38 hours a week.

#### Motivation – Career Progression

The rapid career progression was largely influenced by external factors, namely my direct line manager obtaining a role elsewhere, thus creating a vacancy within the chain of command for me to step into. My motivational level, as a result of the potential career progression, increased dramatically and raised questions about whether or not having a clear and realistic progression plan in place was a suitable motivator, regardless of the level of the individual within the organisation.

Cheng et al., 2001 suggested that when an organisation introduces an employee development scheme with an obvious promotion path, motivation among staff members at all levels would become considerably higher. This is something which is certainly supported in my case, once it became apparent

to me that the management team was looking to promote me to duty manager. I actively took on board several new aspects of my work and felt particularly enthused to learn new skills (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007).

However, opening up the opportunity to progress towards my goal of duty manager, also raised several issues which took place over the coming months and which potentially reduced my confidence to undertake the role and the period of adjustment, in terms of what was expected of me on a day-to-day basis, and making the progression considerably harder than first anticipated. For instance, it soon became apparent that whilst having a clear career progression in place offers substantial motivation, this needs to be supported with the appropriate training and planning. In this particular case, promotion happened as a result of a few staff members leaving the store and a requirement opening up for me. Whilst this was a golden opportunity and one which I have on balance fully embraced, being promoted simply because there was a need within the team has resulted in certain areas of difficulty, most notably when the area manager visited the store during my first time as a duty manager. This first visit did not go particularly well and I was offered the opportunity to recover the situation in a later, second visit. This did, however, raise questions about how motivation can potentially be reduced, if the process of career progression is not managed or an individual feels out of their depth (Engelland, 2005).

When looking more generally and the theories of motivation, it can be seen that an individual's performance is likely to be a factor of two issues; namely ability and their motivation to perform to this ability. This makes sense, as a

capable individual who is highly motivated is still likely to perform to the required level, whereas a very capable individual who has no motivation is equally likely to fall short. In my case, the management team appeared to recognise that I have both the ability and the motivation and, as such, was the obvious choice to be promoted and fast-tracked when the vacancies became available.

One particular issue which arises with this type of placement is how motivation can be maintained where an individual is on a short-term or temporary contract (Latham, Pinder, 2005). Many of the staff within the store either working reduced hours, doing so as students on vacation, or covering a particularly busy period of time; therefore, motivating these individuals through the use of potential career progression is unlikely to be as successful as it was with myself who viewed this role as a long-term career. As a manager, therefore, I now need to consider that the staff members with whom I work are not all going to have the same motivational factors as myself. For example, students who return during the Christmas period are likely to be motivated almost exclusively by financial reward and this is going to be different from other individuals who may value the flexibility of the role, over the years, as a means of allowing them to achieve the required work life balance (Lawler, 2005).

Applying these underlying theories relating to motivation (applied both in relation to my own motivation and my requirement to motivate others as a new manager), several themes have arisen. My own motivation provided me with an interesting understanding of how I could potentially motivate other

employees within my team. Although this was just a one-year placement, I viewed my opportunities within the Co-operative store as being long-term and this was supported by the fact that in my final month, the manager made it clear that they would look to recruit me as an assistant manager, in the future (Manning and Petrongolo, 2005).

My own willingness to take on board additional responsibilities gave me an understanding that all team members need to have progression opportunities in place, regardless of the level at which they are currently working and regardless of whether or not they are part-time or full-time employees. Certain concerns have arisen in relation to the use of temporary staff during busy periods, particularly where there is a concern that these temporary staff are taking hours that regular part-time staff would welcome. Consideration should, therefore, be given to ensuring greater care in the allocation of these additional hours and to ensure that the underlying career progression for part-time staff is not overlooked, simply because they are part-time. It was not until I moved from 10 hours a week to 25 and then later to 38 hours that I felt that I was able to fully achieve my potential. My ability was not any different; however, I was able to become much more involved in the day-to-day working of the store and able to gain considerably more experience than was ever going to be possible working part-time (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004).

## Conclusions



During my one-year placement period which proved to be a rapid climb-up the career ladder within the retail store, several underlying human resource issues and policies were highlighted. Most notably were those associated with the difficulties faced by part-time employees and atypical workers, as well as motivational issues and managing progression in such a way that motivation is retained and that individuals have a clear idea of what their future holds, thus encouraging each individual to continue to perform in a way that supports the overall business strategy (Steers et al., 2004).

In my own placement, I felt that I was given ample opportunity to progress and this motivated me to continue to perform strongly, despite the fact that at times the progression happened because of an internal need within the store, rather than because I had undergone suitable training. This resulted in me being out of my depth, on occasions, and consequently my skills needed to be reviewed. On the whole, however, this made me more motivated to learn, but care needs to be taken with other individuals who may have lost their confidence in a similar situation. More specifically, care needs to be taken to ensure that part-time employees are not overlooked purely due to their reduced hours, as these individuals can be as able and motivated as full-time employees.

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