



Waterford Institute *of* Technology
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA PHORT LÁIRGE

“Understanding Employee Experiences of the Transition to a HR
Shared Services Centre”

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ABSTRACT

Human resource (HR) shared service centres (SSC's), defined by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) as “providing corporate services that are required across an organisation from a centralised or single unit” (CIPD, 2012), have become increasingly popular in recent times as organisations strive to find new ways to become increasingly lean and efficient across departments. While much of the literature on the subject of HR SSC's focuses on the tangible impact that they have on the organisation (for example, giving the organisation the ability to reduce headcount and to lower costs), there has been a substantial lack of research conducted into how an organisation's transition to a HR SSC impacts on affected employees.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding into the experiences of employees involved in the process of an organisational transition to a HR SSC and subsequently, how their experience of being a member of a HR Service Centre (HRSC) Team working within a HR SSC developed over a six month period. This study focused on the development of the HRSC Team's initial feelings regarding the transition across a number of areas such as role adjustment and potential career advancement, their experiences with management throughout the six month period and also their experience with the new forms of technology used. Furthermore, the study also investigated the HRSC Team's experience with the organisation as a whole throughout the process.

A qualitative research methodology was employed. The case study was chosen to be the appropriate method of research design based on the nature of this study. Two open-ended questionnaires were sent to the HRSC Team in Company X, the first shortly after the HR SSC in Company X had gone 'live' and the second six months later. Open-ended questionnaires were used largely due to logistical reasons. The HRSC Team were based in various parts of Ireland and the United Kingdom and coupled with their work commitments, it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews. It was felt that the open-ended aspect of the questions sent to the HRSC Team would allow them to give interview style responses thus giving greater insight into their experiences, despite an interview not being conducted. In addition, an open-ended questionnaire was also sent to the Head of HR Shared Service Operations (HoHRSSO) in Company X in order to achieve data triangulation.

From the primary research conducted, a large amount of understanding and insight into the HRSC Team's experiences was gained which helped to address the research objectives. The respondents were found to have had a largely negative experience of transition as a whole, in addition to having a frustrating experience with management, with the new technology used and with the organisation. Difficulties around the areas of role adjustment, potential career progression, the capability of the new technology and a lack of communication from management, among other areas, were prevalent.

Interestingly, a number of conflicting views from the Head of HR Shared Service Operations in comparison to those of the HRSC Team were given throughout.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Suzannah.

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There are a number of people I would like to acknowledge that have supported and assisted me in successfully completing this dissertation.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Jennifer Hennessy, not only for her invaluable time, guidance, feedback and constant encouragement, but also for putting me in touch with the relevant contacts in order to get this dissertation started.

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Last but certainly not least, a special thank you to my family, especially my mother. I would not be where I am today without the support and guidance she has provided throughout my life and for that I am eternally grateful, even if I don't always show it.

ETHICAL DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is wholly my own work except where I have made explicit reference to the work of others. I have read the chapter 'Doing a Dissertation at WIT' in the text *Professional and Academic Skills*, and hereby declare that this dissertation is in line with these requirements. I have discussed, agreed and complied with whatever confidentiality or anonymity terms of reference were deemed appropriate by those participating in the research and dealt appropriately with any other ethical matters arising.

I have uploaded the entire dissertation as one file to Turnitin® in Moodle®, examined my 'Originality Report' by viewing the detail behind the overall 'Similarity Index' in the 'Match Overview' listing, and have addressed any matches that exceed 3% in this listing. I have made every effort to minimise my overall 'Similarity Index' score and the number of matches occurring.

22/08/2014

Joseph Hodge

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
HR	Human Resources
HRSC	Human Resource Service Centre
HRSS	Human Resource Shared Services
HR SSC	Human Resource Shared Services Centre
HoHRSSO	Head of HR Shared Service Operations

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with a synopsis of the research embarked upon by the author, which is to gain an understanding into the experiences of employees involved in the process of the transition to a HR Shared Services Centre (HR SSC), and subsequently how their experience of working as a member of the newly-formed HR Service Centre (HRSC) Team in Company X develops over a six month period. This chapter will also outline the rationale for conducting this piece of research along with briefly discussing the research question, research objectives relating to this research question and the research methodology used. Furthermore, the contribution this study aims to provide from both an academic and practical perspective is discussed. To conclude, a summary of the structure for the remainder of the dissertation is provided.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

Organisations in the present day operating under tight financial constraints are constantly searching for new and improved ways to become more lean and efficient across all departments, including their human resource (HR) function. HR has gained a somewhat negative reputation in recent times as a department which does not add sufficient value to the organisation and thus there has been a strategic attempt to ensure that HR increases its strategic value within the organisation. One such way in which firms have attempted to do this is through the use of shared service centres (SSC's).

While the vast majority of the literature regarding HR shared services (HRSS) focuses on the impact it has on an organisation (in areas such as cost reduction, reducing headcount and ensuring HR adds more value to the business) there is a significant gap in the literature in relation to the effect that HRSS has directly on staff (Cooke, 2006). This research gap is evident despite the fact that the available literature outlines that the management of staff is the most important part of the process of transitioning to a HR SSC. The literature also highlights the significance of staff coming on board with the implementation of a HR SSC as they have the ability to "make-or-break" such an initiative for the organisation (Deloitte, 2011). Ulrich et al., (2012) state that HR staff play a "critical role in organisational performance and development" so it is unlikely that any transition to a HR SSC will be successful if employees do not fully engage in the process.

Cooke (2006) outlines areas for further research on the area of HR SSC's and the impact they have on employees involved, stating that while the move to a HR SSC as a delivery model for the HR function may impact employees in a number of ways, studies on this area remain scarce. In order to contribute to the continuing research on this relatively new phenomenon and to address the gap in the literature, this study focuses on the development of the HRSC Team's initial feelings regarding the transition to a HR SSC across a number of areas such as role adjustment and potential career advancement, their experiences with management throughout the six month period and also their experience with the new forms of technology used. Furthermore, the study also investigates the HRSC Team's experience with the organisation as a whole throughout the process.

1.3 Research Question and Research Objectives

With the rationale for the study in mind, the following research question was developed:

How do employees experience the transition to a HR Shared Services Centre?

Deriving from this research question are a number of research objectives:

- To explore the HRSC Team's feelings prior to moving to the HR SSC.
- To discover the Team's experience of the HR SSC transition (from a personal viewpoint and with management).
- To investigate the impact the technology used has on the Team.
- To determine what the Team acknowledged the organisation to have done right or wrong during the overall six month period.

1.4 Methodology

In order to meet and fulfil the research objectives, a case study using qualitative research was deemed to be most appropriate, as the study is of an exploratory nature. Yin (1984) states that the singular case study method can be used to investigate a contemporary issue within its real-life context, when the link between both the issue and how it links to real-life are not

transparent. The author feels this best represents the phenomenon of HR SSC's at present. Two open-ended questionnaires (one in January 2014 and one in July 2014) were sent to the newly-formed HRSC Team within Company X. The use of open-ended questionnaires was deemed to be the most appropriate method of obtaining data from the participants largely due to logistical issues, as all but one of the Team were based in various parts of the United Kingdom. In addition, one open-ended questionnaire was sent to the Head of HR Shared Service Operations (HoHRSSO) in Company X in order to achieve data triangulation.

1.5 Contribution of the Study

This study aims to contribute to filling the literature gap regarding the impact an organisational transition to a HR SSC has on its employees involved in the process. Furthermore, it is hoped that this study will offer a greater understanding to academics and practitioners alike on this subject.

From an academic perspective, this study aims to contribute to the available literature regarding the impact that a transition to a HR SSC has on employees involved throughout the process, of which current research is scarce. Furthermore, it is hoped that this study may encourage an increased focus in research towards the staff involved in such as transition as opposed to mainly the tangible organisational benefits evident in much of the current literature.

From a practical perspective, this study aims to contribute to offering a greater understanding to organisations who may be considering, or who are currently undergoing a transition to a HR SSC, both in terms of what their employees involved in the process may experience and how they may develop during such a transition. In addition, it is hoped that this study will offer a greater understanding of what organisations may need to do to assist in ensuring that such a transition can be as smooth as possible for their staff involved in and throughout the process, which may ultimately help to result in a successful transition for the organisation.

1.6 Structure of the Study

This study comprises of six chapters. This chapter (Chapter One) gives the reader a summary of the study. It also affords a rationale for conducting this dissertation, outlines the research question and research objectives deriving from the research question, along with briefly

discussing the methodology used. Finally, the contributory aims of this study from both an academic and practical perspective are outlined.

Chapter Two provides the relevant literature currently available on the topic of this study. Literature around the area of HRSS as a whole is provided along with their perceived advantages, critical success factors, challenges, HR SSC technology, and the impact a transition to a HR SSC may have on employees involved throughout the process. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates the literature gap that this study aims to fill.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology that was chosen for this dissertation. The research strategy undertaken by the author is presented and the research question plus research objectives are illustrated in fine detail. The method of research design and data collection used is assessed and any relevant ethical considerations are also acknowledged.

Chapter Four outlines the key findings that have arisen from the data collected. As a result of this being a longitudinal study aimed at gaining an understanding of how the HRSC Team's experience of the transition to a HR SSC develops over a six month period, this chapter integrates the findings from both sets of data collected. Furthermore, this chapter also contains findings from the Head of HR Shared Service Operations in Company X.

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings disclosed in Chapter Four in the context of the relevant literature. This chapter also details the main themes that have emerged from the primary research conducted. These themes are evaluated in relation to the available literature previously outlined in Chapter Two.

Finally, Chapter Six presents the conclusions that have been drawn from this study regarding the impact that the transition to a HR SSC has on employees involved in and throughout the process. This chapter also includes a summary of the key findings. In addition, the limitations of the study are highlighted along with a number of recommendations both for further research in this field and for practitioners.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed summary of the study embarked upon by the author. It has also included a rationale for undertaking the study along with detailing the gaps in the

existing literature. Additionally, the research question and subsequent research objectives deriving from the research question have been specified. Moreover, information pertaining to how the dissertation is structured has been provided. Chapter Two will examine the available literature on the subject of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the literature around the area of HRSS, investigating the rationale behind why HRSS are used by organisations, the perceived challenges HRSS appear to have for employees, along with its perceived impact (both for those implementing the approach and working within a HR SSC). Furthermore, the effect that technology has on a HR SSC is examined. It is necessary to review the available literature on these areas as the HRSC Team in Company X are responsible for both implementing the HR SSC approach and subsequently working within a HR SSC environment.

2.2 Defining Shared Services

Shared services can be defined as a:

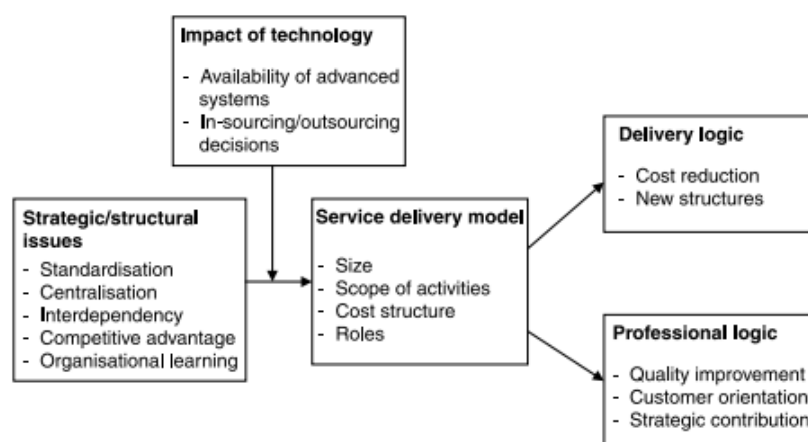
Single, often relatively large unit that handles all the routine ‘transactional’ services across the business, including payroll, absence monitoring, recruitment administration and advice on simpler employee relations issues.

(Taylor and Woodhams, 2012 p.7).

HRSS were first introduced in the 1990’s as HR managers began to realise that transactional activities could be performed in a centralised, more standard way (Reilly, 2000) therefore allowing HR staff to focus on strategic, value-adding tasks. This coincided with the introduction of Dave Ulrich’s ‘three-legged stool’ model (1997) which provided the ‘blueprint’ at the time for turning HR into a more strategically capable function. Ulrich’s model arrived during a period when “many would argue that HR was struggling to define a role for itself” (Doyle and Holley, 2007) and thus his thinking became popular. Ulrich suggested that value could be added to the business through HR with the adaptation of three ‘stools’ consisting of shared services, HR business partners and centres of excellence. Research around this area conducted by the CIPD (2007) has shown that 81% of organisations restructured their HR function from the period 2002-2007, with 28% of organisations surveyed stating they implemented the shared services ‘stool’ of Ulrich’s model as a result of their restructure (Kenton and Yarnall, 2010). This illustrates that shared services are a contemporary, growing phenomenon.

Organisations use shared services in line with many business functions and not just the HR function (such as finance, for example). With specific regards to HR, shared services are seen as a way of providing a synergistic link between HR strategies and the overall business strategy, in which segments of the HR function are moved to a new, partially self-governed unit (Bergeron, 2003). Farndale et al., (2009) outline a conceptual framework of HR SSC's (Figure 2.1) below:

Figure 2.1 A Conceptual Framework of HR Shared Service Centres



Source: Farndale, E., Paauwe, J., and Hoeksema, L. (2009:546)

Based on the above framework, Farndale et al., (2009) describe the two logics (delivery and professional) as “different perspectives from which we can view the HR function”. Paauwe (2004) suggests that professional logic is associated with the “expectations of line managers, employees, work councils and colleagues of HR departments”. In essence, it refers to how the shared service matches customer needs, how the service can improve quality in the organisation and how the service can enable HR staff to contribute more effectively to the strategy within the organisation. The delivery logic focuses on how the HR SSC achieves cost reduction, for example, through the movement of transactional activities such as payroll and compensation administration away from HR staff and to the shared service centre (Adler, 2003).

The service delivery model aspect contains a number of decisions which organisations adopting a HR SSC must make. For example, the size of the service centre, the activities that will be included (e.g., will the organisation choose to outsource payroll or make it the

responsibility of the HR SSC? Will recruitment and selection fall under the umbrella of the HR SSC or not?) and the roles that staff will take on are all necessary considerations. Reilly and Williams (2003) cited by Farndale et al., (2009, p. 549) suggest three tiers of job roles for staff in a HR SSC. These are: first-tier employees who are “the first point of contact and have direct contact with staff”, second-tier employees (HR advisors) who “provide more detailed help in a particular functional discipline” and third-tier employees (HR experts) who “are called upon to interpret more complex policy issues”.

2.2 Rationale for Using HR Shared Service Centres

It is clear from the literature that the rationale for organisations implementing the transition to a HR SSC is often very similar regardless of size, industry or location.

Reilly and Williams (2003) outline four primary reasons why organisations move to a HR SSC, namely to achieve cost savings, quality improvement, organisational change and technological development. Cost reduction is said to be the most common reason for the move, while these reasons are often seen in combination. Therefore, even if cost is not the primary motivating factor for an organisations transition to a HR SSC, it will often remain a feature.

In a study of Swedish organisations that implemented a HR SSC, Boglind et al., (2011) found that the key motives for each organisation’s transition were; to reduce cost, to add value and to standardise and control process. In addition to Reilly and Williams’ (2003) findings, four of the seven companies studied had also outlined cost reduction targets as the key reason for the move.

A case study provided by Dickens (2010) of Symantec, a multinational technology organisation headquartered in the United States, outlined that this organisation moved to a HR SSC in order to; ensure HR was adding value to the organisation, reduce the amount of time that senior HR employees spent completing administrative tasks, to gain better use of their resources and to reduce time it took to answer employee queries.

Further to these findings, Farndale et al., (2009) surveyed 15 Dutch companies who had already implemented or were considering the transition to a HR SSC. Respondents were asked to state their three primary goals for the change, with the most popular goals relating to

improved professionalism, reorganising the HR function to be more customer focused, reducing costs and allowing the organisation to better control HR processes, as outlined in Figure 2.2 below:

Figure 2.2 The Strategic Reasons Behind the Implementation of HR Shared Service Centres

<i>The strategic reasons behind the implementation of HR SSCs</i>	<i>% of firms</i>
Improve professionalisation – customer orientation	52
Reorganisation of HR function to be more customer focused	48
Improve quality, flow and management of work processes	32
Reduce costs	32
Better control of quality of HR processes	28
More uniformity of HR processes	28
Increase the scope of the SSC	20
Create synergy	12
Increase productivity	12

Source: Farndale, E., Paauwe, J. and Hoeksema, L. (2009:551)

It is evident from the literature based on organisations that have implemented a HR SSC or from those that are considering doing so, that the most common reasons for this are to reduce costs, improve the quality of service offered by the organisation and to increase the strategic value of the HR function.

2.3 Critical Success Factors

There are a number of critical success factors outlined in the literature that can assist the implementation of a HR SSC in becoming a successful endeavour, hence delivering upon the goals organisations set out when moving to, or considering moving to a HR SSC as outlined in Chapter 2.2.

Bergeron and Begin (1989) cited by Borman and Janssen (2013, p. 392) ascertain that critical success factors gained validity among practitioners and academics in a number of industries as a way of ensuring that projects had an improved chance of succeeding, as a result of seeing very high failure rates on projects and “the desire to understand how the chances of success can be improved”.

Olvai-Bangemann (2005) and Miskon et al., (2011) cite a number of what they consider to be the critical success factors for any HR SSC initiative. These factors include top management support, appropriate change management, communicating effectively and the implementation of standardisation. Furthermore, strong project management practices and strong IT capabilities are also highlighted as fundamental.

2.4 Challenges in a HR Shared Services Environment

The literature suggests that there a number of challenges that employees working within a HR SSC (such as a HRSC Team) may encounter.

Sivagananathan (2011) notes that the biggest challenge to the successful transition to a HR SSC is the management of all the people within the organisation who will be directly impacted by the move. This is because “the change in mind-set is significant, due to the differentiation in the way in which they will work”. For example, Younger et al., (2008) outline that relationships and relationship building still offer the best long-term approach and also state that relationship HR is vital. However, face-to-face contact is much less frequent for those working in a HR SSC environment which can prove to be a significant challenge.

It is evident from the literature that communication towards those in a HR SSC must be extensive. An AON Hewitt report (2009) suggests that it is vital to constantly communicate to affected employees about how the transition to a HR SSC will impact upon them and how they can realise the value of this new approach. This report also states that these employees require extensive communication of both the ‘big picture’ during the transition as well as of details behind specific decisions especially, because those working within HR are often very resistant to change. Therefore, this can become a large challenge if communication is not extensive. Moreover, Ulrich (2007) states that both during and after the transition to a HR SSC, HR managers should communicate extensively the benefits of the HR SSC to employees involved and how it will benefit them. Thus, if communication is sufficiently thorough, the HRSC Team in any organisation should be aware of these potential advantages from either (or both) the organisation and the managers in charge of the transition and they should also be aware of any possible negative issues that may arise. This may assist in creating a more engaged and dedicated workforce before and after the transition to a HR SSC.

Retaining motivation is said to be another notable challenge for employees in a HR SSC. Hunter (2006) states that working as part of a HRSC Team “often involves mundane activities” which can “lead to employees becoming bored and making errors”. He states that one way to prevent this is for organisations to include “job rotation and clear progression through the career structure....and giving employees exposure to end users is also a great way to give people job satisfaction”.

Despite Hunter (2006) noting that clear progression through the career structure can alleviate demotivation, issues relating to career advancement can also prove to be a challenge. Orhan (2011) states that “it is believed that shared service centres are still dealing with the brutal issues under the domain of human resources and fail to create future career paths for employees”. However, there are some conflicting views to those of Orhan (2011) in the available literature. Pickard (2008), cited by Cummins (2010) and Beaman (2007) both disagree with Orhan (2011). They emphasize that employees working within a HR SSC environment strengthen their employability, specifically as they gain a wider view of the business as a whole and need to constantly acquire new skills as part of their role in the HR SSC.

A further challenge for HRSC Teams to overcome is the considerable possibility that the benefits of the HR SSC may not become apparent to them for some time. Ozenne (2008) cited by Speedy (2008) suggests that the benefits of a HR SSC are often not evident until after year one of the initiative and therefore Team members may feel the change was unnecessary or that their work efforts are futile during this period.

From reviewing the literature, it is evident that there are a number of challenges that HR SSC employees (such as a HRSC Team) can face as a result of the organisational transition to a HR SSC. A lack of face-to-face contact in comparison to what they were previously accustomed to, feeling resistant to the transition, experiencing difficulty in staying motivated and the potential for the transition to have a negative impact on their career are all factors which may prove to be difficult for HRSC Team members.

2.5 Impact of the Transition to a HR Shared Services Centre

The available literature shows that the switch to a HR SSC can have a significant impact across the whole organisation, especially for staff directly impacted by this change.

Wenderoth (2008) infers that given the significant nature of change involved when switching to a HR SSC, Kotter's 8 step change model can be applied. This can assist in not only helping HR SSC employees to adjust, but also assist in ensuring that the transition is as successful as possible for the organisation. The 8 steps of Kotter's model (as seen in Figure 2.3 below) are to; establish a sense of urgency, create a guiding coalition, develop a vision and a strategy, communicate the vision, empower people to act on the vision, create short-term wins, consolidate, and build on the gains and institutionalise the change.

Figure 2.3 Kotter's 8-Step Change Model



Source: Strom and Smaros (2013) adapted from Kotter (1995)

In line with this model, Kotter and Cohen (2002) ascertain that:

The central challenge is changing people's behaviour – what people do and the need for significant shifts in what people do. Changing behaviour is less a matter of giving people analysis to influence their thoughts than helping them to see a truth to influence their feelings.

Kotter and Cohen (2002:2)

A further, less considered impact on employees working within a HR SSC is highlighted by Accenture (2009, p. 22) who state that “shared service organisations frequently experience

high turnover”. Otter (2003, p.2) cited by Orhan (2011) agrees with this observation, outlining that “shared service centres are.....often blighted by high employee turnover” while Koenen (2006) also suggests that employee turnover rates in shared service centres are often far beyond the expected figures. Applying this to HRSC Teams, the literature suggests that changes in Team member’s behaviour and the way they do things will be necessary for the organisational transition to a HR SSC to not only be successful, but also to avoid high turnover rates in the process.

Furthermore, as HRSC Teams will often have high turnover rates, this may cause members to be directly or indirectly affected by survivor syndrome which can have a significant impact on their performance. Survivor syndrome has been defined as:

A set of shared reactions and the emotional, psychological and organisation effects experienced by those who remain employed or survive the job loss process.

(Brockner, 1992).

A survey carried out by the IRS Employment Review (cited by Williams, 2009), showed that job turnover and the subsequent effects of survivor syndrome result in 67% of employers seeing lower morale and commitment among staff members. Moreover, 53% of employees show reduced motivation and 16% perform poorer than previously. This highlights the impact that job losses, which the available literature suggests are frequent when implementing a HR SSC, can potentially have on HRSC Teams.

2.6 Managing Employee’s Expectations

The expectations of any HRSC Team members working within a HR SSC environment must be managed sufficiently in order to ensure that they ‘buy in’ to the move and continue to do so once the transitional process has been completed.

Taras (2006) cited by Colman (2006) infers that managing expectations is a serious concern, stating that the “consolidation and standardization process integral to the development and implementation” of a HR SSC means that there are, ultimately, both “winners and losers in the end”.

Bergeron (2003) suggests that one way to manage these expectations is to “over-communicate plans and expectations, thereby alleviating fear of the unknown”. This is due to the fact that most people would rather deal with a known negative than to simply wait in fear or for it to come as a surprise to them. An “imagined negative consequence is inevitably worse than reality” (Bergeron, 2003). With specific reference to a HRSC Team, this can be done through the use of extensive communication which can be achieved in various ways, such as sending newsletters, sending memos, holding regular meetings to provide updates or by simply communicating to each Team member individually. The extensive communication necessary can be made easier through the use of technology.

2.7 Shared Service Technology

Hirschfield and Currie (1997) state that the “effective functioning of a shared service centre is dependent upon technology”. They state that many companies are now using automated workflow to gain as much efficiency as possible, and if an organisation goes down this route they need to have the requisite technology in place.

A Deloitte report (2011) outlines that technology “plays a critical role” in HR SSC’s. 52% of respondents to their survey which asked the question “how would you have improved your shared services journey?” replied that more effective technology would have helped. The report also says that the “ineffective use of technology cannot hamper only current shared service centre operations, but also stand in the way of the continuous improvement that most businesses expect from a shared service centre” (Deloitte, 2011, p. 1). In relation to a HRSC Team, if the correct technology is in place and working sufficiently, this would likely help the Team to complete their tasks to the required standard. This literature is especially relevant as HRSC Team’s need systems to link correctly in order to complete the tasks required of them and for this, sufficient technology is key.

In agreement with Deloitte’s findings on the “critical role” technology plays in SSC’s are Mercer (2008, pp.3-4) who say “technology continues to play an increasingly critical role in managing HR business process and delivering services”. In addition, Mercer note that “poorly deployed technology has been detrimental to many HR SSC’s, in particular a failure to establish high-quality data undermines the ability to use the system and trust it as a reliable system of record”.

Cornetto and Doucette (2007) state that “adaptive technologies that support the shared service centre” are one of the key criteria that allow a HR SSC transition to be successful. They outline four types of technology that drive successful HR SSC’s, one of which is especially prevalent to this study. This is technology pertaining to ‘knowledge management’, which refers to, for example, SharePoint software as hosted by companies such as BT and Microsoft. SharePoint organises HR information content, procedures and policies into easily accessible segments for users and has system integration, process integration and workflow automation capabilities (Microsoft, 2010).

It is clear from the existing literature that technology plays a vital role in the success of any HR SSC. If the requisite technology is not in place, HRSC Team members may not be able to complete the tasks required of them, thus possibly escalating the challenges highlighted in Chapter 2.4.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature available on the subject of HRSS. Furthermore, it has analysed some key areas around HRSS including; the rationale for why HR SSC’s are implemented, their critical success factors, the perceived challenges employees in a HR SSC environment may experience and the importance competent technology plays in the success of any HR SSC. It is evident that there is a gap in the literature regarding the impact that the transition to a HR SSC has on the employees involved in the process and a further gap in relation to how an employees experience of being a member of a HRSC Team working within a HR SSC develops over a specific period of time. Therefore, the aim of this study is to contribute to filling this gap in the research. Chapter Three details the methodology that will be used.

METHODOLOGY

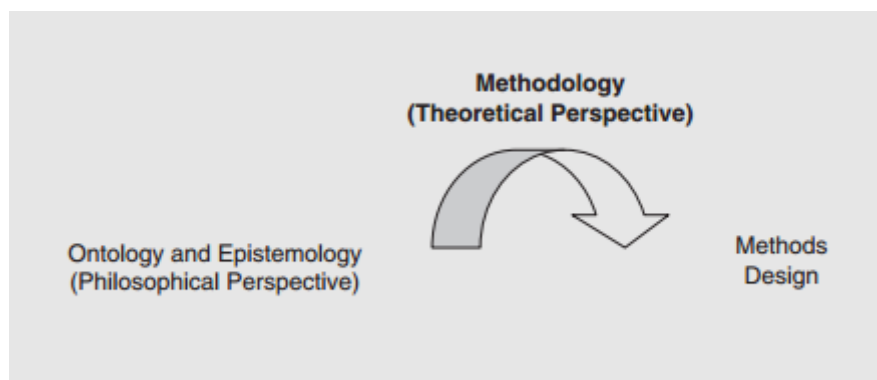
3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodological approach undertaken for this research and to provide reasoning for the research methodology that the author has chosen to implement. As the case study method has been employed, critique on this research method including both its strengths and weaknesses and justification for its selection, is offered. This chapter also details the research problem, question and objectives and concludes by exploring any ethical considerations and limitations that may occur as a result of using the selected methodology.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) acknowledge that there are a number of dimensions to research, specifically; ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods design. Ontology is defined by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p.4) as “a philosophical belief system about reality – what can be known and how”, whilst Guba and Lincoln (1998) define epistemology to be “a philosophical belief system about who can be a knower”. Combined, these perspectives form the basis of any study. This is outlined in Figure 3.1 below:

Figure 3.1 A Bridge Between Philosophical Framework and Methods Design



Source: Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:7)

Rubin and Rubin (2012) outline two different types of research paradigms. These are the positivist paradigm and the constructionist paradigm. They state that if using the positivist paradigm, one would judge the success of his or her work by examining how closely their

results match with those of different researchers, while for those using the constructionist paradigm, the “fact that interviewers or observers reach different conclusions is not considered problematic, since meaning is always contextual and always interpreted” (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 16). Essentially, positivists believe there is a “single, objective reality that can be observed and measured”, whilst naturalists (especially interpretive constructionists) “accept that there is a reality but argue that it cannot be measured directly”, instead only perceived through the views of others’ experiences (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 15). Furthermore, Lafrance (2009, p.55) infers that “researchers using a constructionist paradigm try to elicit the interviewees’ views of their worlds, their work and the events they have experienced or observed”.

As this study is focused on the experiences of the HRSC Team within Company X, it cannot and should not be presumed that all HRSC Team members will have the same experiences. Therefore, a social-constructionist ontological perspective has been selected for the purpose of this study. A social-constructionist approach is “principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (Gergen, 1985, p.266). In addition, an interpretivist epistemology has been adopted. Creswell highlights that “qualitative research is interpretive” (2009, p.177), whilst Raddon (2010) states that interpretivism “allows the researcher to be alive to changes which occur”. This is particularly relevant to this study as changes may occur during the six month duration.

3.3 Research Problem and Question

Labaree (2013) defines a research problem as:

A statement about an area of concern, a condition to be improved, a difficulty to be eliminated, or a troubling question that exists in scholarly literature, in theory, or in practice, that points to the need for meaningful understanding and deliberate investigation.

Labaree (2013)

Additionally, Strauss and Corbin (1998) define a research question as:

The specific question to be addressed by the research, that sets the parameters of the project and suggests the methods to be used for data gathering and analysis.

(Strauss and Corbin, 1998:35)

Further highlighting the importance of the research question are Bordage and Dawson (2003, p.378) who note that the “single most important component of a study is the research question. It is the keystone of the entire exercise”.

While a number of comprehensive studies have been conducted on HRSS, the vast majority of these studies focus on the impact that any transition to a HR SSC has on the organisation itself, often detailing aspects such as perceived organisational advantages including cost reductions and the ability to reduce headcount. Despite the fact that the literature acknowledges that the management of employees impacted during the transition to a HR SSC is one of the most important aspects of the transitional process due to their potential ability to ‘make-or-break’ such an initiative, studies on how the transition to a HR SSC impacts on those involved in the process and subsequently, how their experience of working within the HR SSC develops over a period of time are rare.

Therefore, the author has proposed the following research question:

How do employees experience the transition to a HR Shared Services Centre?

3.4 Research Objectives

Polonsky and Waller (2010) infer that research objectives assist in guiding the research project. They also outline the importance of ensuring that research objectives are clear and achievable and directly assist in answering the research question.

For the purpose of this study, four research objectives have been identified. These are:

- To explore the HRSC Team's feelings prior to moving to the HR SSC.
- To discover the Team's experience of the HR SSC transition (from a personal viewpoint and with management).
- To investigate the impact the technology used has on the Team.
- To determine what the Team acknowledged the organisation to have done right or wrong during the overall six month period.

3.5 Research Design

Labaree (2013) asserts that the research design refers to the overall strategy that one chooses “to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way”; thereby assuring one will effectively address the research problem. For the purpose of this study, a case study design has been chosen. Yin (1984, p.23) cited by Schell (1992) defines a case study as “the most flexible of all research designs, allowing the researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events, while investigating empirical events”. A case study is said to help to “investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1984).

The subject of this case study is Company X, a multinational organisation headquartered in the United States with operations all around the world, including Ireland and the United Kingdom. Company X employees around 12,000 people worldwide, with over 450 of these employees based in Ireland. The author was given access to members of the newly formed HRSC Team at Company X for six months by the Gatekeeper, on the proviso that any information received (including the email addresses of the Team) would be held in the strictest confidence.

The author feels that there are a number of strengths to using the case study method of research design for this study. Donohue et al., (2007) infer that a case study should be used in situations where the researcher wants to investigate events involving change and time, events where processes unfold and events involving large-scale changes, such as the implementation

of new methods or techniques. Furthermore, Hartley (1994) cited by Meyer (2001) asserts that case studies are “tailor-made for....exploring new processes”. Howard et al., (2003) cited by Dawidowicz (2011) outline that case studies “yield thick, rich descriptions of the phenomena being researched, highlighting in the process the many complexities of a situation and the factors that contribute to these complexities”. As the area of HRSS is a relatively new phenomenon in HR and this study is focusing on the impact that a move to a HR SSC has on employees involved in the transitional process, along with investigating how their experiences develop over a period of time, it is felt this justifies the selection of the case study method of research design.

A singular case study design has been selected. Yin (2014) outlines five instances in which a singular case study is an appropriate form of case study design. The fifth rationale Yin (2014) discusses is that of the longitudinal case; “studying the same single case at two or more different points in time”. As this is precisely the objective of this study, the author has deemed a singular case study to be appropriate.

3.6 Research Methods

Frey et al., (1991) define research methods to be “particular strategies that researchers use for collecting the evidence necessary for building and testing theories”. Kothari (2004) asserts that quantitative and qualitative methods are two of the basic types of research methods used.

Quantitative research is defined by Aliaga and Gunderson (2000) as “explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)”. Kothari (2004, p.3) is in agreement, stating that “quantitative research is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. It is applicable to phenomena that can be expressed in terms of quantity”. Furthermore, Muijs (2010, p.6) states that “numerical change can only be studied using quantitative methods”.

Types of quantitative research include polls and surveys (Labaree, 2013).

Bricki (2007, p.2) defines qualitative research as being “characterised by aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis”. Hogan et al., (2009, p.3) infer that qualitative research “is a multifaceted approach that investigates culture, society and behaviour through an analysis

and synthesis of people's words and actions. Unlike quantitative approaches, it does not try to transform words into numbers". Kothari (2004, p.3) states that qualitative research is appropriate when aiming to determine "how people feel or what they think about a particular subject". Types of qualitative research include interviews, focus groups and open-ended questionnaires (McLeod, 2008).

Qualitative research methods in the form of open-ended questionnaires will be used for this study, the rationale of which will be discussed below. The reasoning and intended result of this is so that members of the HRSC Team in Company X can answer questions in a way that reflects their own perceptions rather than those of the researcher (Frey, 2004), along with allowing the respondents to have the ability to detail and discuss exactly how they feel as opposed to being limited to a specific structure. This is important in order to meet the research objectives of this study, which focus on the impact that the transition to a HR SSC has on the HRSC Team members in Company X and how their experiences develop over a six month period.

3.7 Population of Interest and Sampling

Donnelly (2005, p.382-383) defines a population of interest as "all possible measurements or outcomes that are of interest in a particular study", whilst he defines a sample as "a portion of the population that is representative of the population from which it was selected". In other words, a sample is a subset of the population.

As the research question indicates, the aim of this study is to investigate the impact that moving to a HR SSC has on the employees who now form part of the HRSC Team within Company X (and the development of their experience over a six month period). Therefore, the population of interest for this study are employees within Company X and the sample consists of those working as part of the HRSC Team in Company X.

Convenience sampling, which Schensul et al., (1999) define as "any group readily accessible to the researcher that reasonably might be assumed to possess characteristics relevant to the study", was chosen. This was due to the relatively small amount of Team members available to participate in the study.

3.8 Data Collection

3.8.1 Open-Ended Questionnaires

In addition to choosing the qualitative research method for this study, open-ended questionnaires were deemed to be the most appropriate form of data collection. This is because Schensul et al., (1999) state that open-ended questions leave responses open to the discretion of the respondents and ensures they are not bound by alternatives provided or constraints on the length of their responses, which are commonalities of some other forms of qualitative research such as structured interviews. Furthermore, Frey (2004) outlines that open-ended questions allow respondents to provide answers on their own terms or in a manner which reflects their own perceptions as opposed to those of the researcher. The author felt that this method of data collection would allow the HRSC Team to provide extensive information about their experiences, thus resulting in richer data.

Further to the use of open-ended questionnaires in order to allow respondents to provide as much information about their own experiences as possible, another reason for choosing this method of data collection was due to logistical issues. As all but one member of the newly formed HRSC Team in Company X is based in the United Kingdom, it was not possible for the author to interview the HRSC Team members face-to-face. The open-ended nature of the questions provided was aimed at allowing respondents to give interview style responses to the questions that were posed without actually conducting a traditional interview.

Additionally, the author used an open-ended questionnaire to secure views from the Head of HR Service Centre Operations in Company X in order to achieve data triangulation (as detailed in Chapter 3.11).

3.9 Operational Details

Two open-ended questionnaires were sent, via email, to the HRSC Team within Company X. The first questionnaire was sent a short time after the HR SSC in Company X began operation on the week commencing January 20th 2014, with the second questionnaire sent six months later on the week commencing July 14th 2014. The first set of responses the author received from the respondents were analysed prior to completing and sending the second questionnaire. The rationale for doing this was to use the responses to the first questionnaire to assist in identifying any emerging themes or experiences which required further probing in

the second questionnaire. The author also sent an open-ended questionnaire to the HoHRSSO in Company X at the same time the second questionnaire was sent to the HRSC Team.

3.10 Questionnaire Design

The two open-ended questionnaires were designed with the research objectives for this study in mind. They were broken down into four categories (personal experience, experience with management, experience with technology and experience with the organisation) with each category containing a number of questions aimed at assisting the author in meeting the research objectives. In the first questionnaire, the HRSC Team were asked to detail areas such as; how they were feeling prior to the transition, what differences they had found in their role now that they were a HRSC Team member, how they had found their experience to be with management and how they how found their experience to be with the differing technology (in terms of the training provided, capability and effectiveness). The second questionnaire was centred upon how the HRSC Team's experience in relation to these areas had developed in the subsequent six month period. Additionally, at this stage the Team were asked to detail what they had experienced the organisation to have done well or not so during the six month period, along with their overall comments on the transition as a whole.

The open-ended questionnaire sent to the HoHRSSO in Company X was similar in design. The questions were designed in order to gain insight into areas such as how the HoHRSSO felt the level of communication afforded to the HRSC Team had been, how effective the training in relation to the use of the new technology was, in addition to receiving information regarding what management and the organisation had done well and not so well throughout the process.

3.11 Data Triangulation

Bryman (2004) defines data triangulation to be “the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings”. Guion et al., (2002) infer that “data triangulation involves using different sources of information in order to increase the validity of a study”. To achieve data triangulation and enhance the validity of this study, the author used the views collected from the HoHRSSO in Company X.

3.12 Data Analysis

Research conducted by Reja et al., (2003) indicates that open-ended questions sent via the web produce more missing data than their closed-ended counterparts. Furthermore, these authors also detail that open-ended questions have the advantage of producing a much more diverse set of answers. However, it must also be noted that Reja et al., (2003) state that this method of data collection requires extensive data analysis.

Therefore, the data analysis undertaken for this study was a rigorous, iterative process. Basset (2010) defines an iterative process as a “systematic, repetitive and recursive process in qualitative data analysis. An iterative approach involves a sequence of tasks carried out in exactly the same manner each time and executed multiple times”. Srivastava and Hopwood (2009, p.77) state that “the role of iteration, not as a repetitive mechanical task but as a deeply reflexive process, is key to sparking insight and developing meaning. Reflexive iteration is at the heart of revisiting the data and connecting them with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined focus and understanding”.

In order to analyse the data, the author followed a six-step process as championed by Creswell (2009) below:

Table 3.1 The Data Analysis Process

Step	Description
Step 1	Organise and prepare the data for analysis
Step 2	Read through all of the data to obtain a general sense of the information
Step 3	Begin detailed analysis with a coding process
Step 4	Use the coding process to generate themes for the analysis
Step 5	Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative
Step 6	Make an interpretation or meaning of the data

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2009:185)

Once the participants in the study had sent their responses back to the author, the data analysis process began. The transcripts were uploaded to the word processing software, Microsoft Word and were read extensively in order to gain a general sense of the information received in terms of what the respondents were portraying, the usefulness of the responses and also the credibility of the responses.

The next phase of the data analysis process undertaken was coding. The coding process is defined by Lockyer (2004) as “a systematic way in which to condense extensive data sets into smaller analyzable units through the creation of categories and concepts derived from the data”. The transcripts were read and a tentative set of coding categories were created, before the coding process was repeated and the initial coding categories were subjected to increased rigour.

The data was then analysed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) define thematic analysis to be “a qualitative analytical method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail”. However, they also outline that thematic analysis “frequently goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic”. In order to do this, the author analysed each coded transcript which subsequently allowed themes to evolve and develop. Braun and Clarke (2006) infer that a theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question”. Furthermore, they also acknowledge that there is “no hard or fast answer to the question of what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme”, and thus the author used his own judgement to determine what actually constitutes as a theme in this study.

This process was undertaken three times. Initially, to analyse the participants’ responses to the first questionnaire. Secondly, to analyse the participants’ responses to the second questionnaire, and thirdly to analyse the views of the HoHRSSO. Justification for the use of this form of data analysis arises from Hughes and Silver (2010) who state that “another....method of developing coding themes from the content of the texts themselves is for the researcher to read the texts systematically, noting ideas that appear to be important or relevant and then creating codes to represent those ideas”. Furthermore, they assert that “there is no reason why open-ended....questions should not be analysed with this frequently used qualitative approach”. However, they also note that if there is a large volume of

responses and/or lots of repetition among respondents, that this approach may be unnecessarily time-consuming. As this study does not contain a large amount of responses nor does it contain excessive repetition among responses received from the participants, the author feels this justifies his use of this data analysis approach.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

There were a number of ethical considerations that needed to be adhered to in this study.

As the author was given access to members of the HR SSC Team at Company X for six months on the proviso that any information received (including email addresses of the team) would be held in the strictest confidence, it was imperative to ensure that confidentiality be maintained. In order to meet the confidentiality arrangements requested by the Gatekeeper at Company X, each respondent was given an alias in the form of a letter of the alphabet (e.g. Respondent A) as opposed to using their real name.

The Gatekeeper in Company X asked the HRSC Team members if they would be willing to participate in this study before allowing the author to proceed. However, as consent from the HRSC Team was not written, the author was unable to know for sure if the respondents felt under pressure to participate. Therefore, it was disclosed to the HRSC Team during the authors' first correspondence with them exactly what the study entailed and what the data received would be used for, along with stating that participation at any stage was entirely at their own discretion. It was felt that this would assist in ensuring that the Team members were given full disclosure regarding the study and also to ensure that they would not feel under pressure to participate in the study if they did not wish to do so.

The author took care to ensure his email account was secure, that all anti-virus software was updated and account security such as passwords were changed to a suitable security level in order to handle the sensitive, confidential information received via email in an ethical manner. The data collected was housed securely by the author and was accessed only by the author.

3.14 Limitations

The author would have found access to more members of the HRSC to be preferable, however, due to work and time constraints upon the HRSC Team as a result of the transitional process this was not possible.

In relation to the use of a case study, Hakim (2000) notes that the findings of a case study can be shaped by the authors own biases, perspectives or interests. This limitation is also referenced by Guba and Lincoln (1981, p. 378) who assert that “an unethical case writer could so select from available data virtually anything he wished to be illustrated”. Therefore, if the author had any preconceived thoughts or opinions regarding the impact a transition to a HR SSC would have on the HRSC Team, he was mindful to ensure that he did not to allow these opinions to cloud his judgement.

With specific regards to the use of a longitudinal case study, the length of the study can prove to be a limitation. This is because “participants sometimes drop out of the study, shrinking the sample size and decreasing the amount of data collected” (Cherry, 2014). Mangione (1995, pp.60-61) notes that response rates “in the 60%-70% range are considered acceptable” for a study. Mangione’s research is particularly relevant as only 60% of the HRSC Team members participated in the entire duration of this study.

Logistically, it was not possible to conduct any field work for this case study. While Duxbury (2001, p.9) outlines that field work is not necessary to the completion of a case study, the author feels that the study may have been of better value if he had been able to gain access to the HR SSC to conduct direct observation of the HRSC Team members.

3.15 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the research philosophy adopted by the author for this study, the research question and the research objectives deriving from this research question. The rationale for choosing the case study method for this study has been explained, along with discussing the population of interest involved, the data collection and data analysis process. Furthermore, any perceived ethical considerations and limitations have been disclosed. The following chapter details the findings that arose from the primary research conducted.

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the research findings obtained from the primary research conducted. The findings were generated from the data produced as a result of distributing two detailed, open-ended questionnaires to five members of the newly-formed HRSC Team within Company X and one open-ended questionnaire to the HoHRSSO in Company X. The findings are produced in conjunction with the research objectives previously outlined.

After discussions with the HoHRSSO in the lead up to the distribution of the second questionnaire to the HRSC Team, it was disclosed to the author that the HRSC Team had changed quite significantly in the six months since the first questionnaire had been distributed. Two of the original five Team members had left their role and moved on, one was in the process of leaving and two were still part of the Team. In order to maintain the necessary ethical standards and ensure that no respondents were forced into participating in the second part of the study, the author distributed the second questionnaire to all five of the original Team members in good faith and in addition to this further follow up contact was made once more. Responses for the second part of this study were received from 60% of participants and this set of participants included a mix of those who had left the Team (Respondent B, who left at the end of June 2014), those were in the process of leaving the Team (Respondent A) and those who remained part of the Team (Respondent D).

4.2 Overview of the Organisation

Company X is a multinational organisation operating in the pharmaceutical industry since the 1980's. Its headquarters are based in the United States of America, with operations located all over the world including North America, South America, the Middle East and Europe. Company X employs c.12,000 people globally, including c.500 people in Ireland.

4.3. Individual Experiences

A number of questions were posed to the HRSC Team in order to gain an understanding of how they were initially feeling about Company X's proposed move to a HR SSC, the differences in their roles as a result of becoming a member of the HRSC Team, the impact the transition has had on their motivation, and whether or not they viewed this move as a positive

step for their own career progression. Six months later, respondents were asked about how their experiences in relation to these areas had developed.

4.3.1 Individual Feelings

During the course of the process, it quickly became apparent that concern about the move to a HR SSC was a feeling initially shared among a number of the respondents. Respondent A stated *“I was concerned about moving towards a less personal service for employees and also about there being less variety in my job”*, while Respondent D added; *“I was concerned that the role would become like a call centre role”*. What also became apparent was that a need for understanding to be portrayed from the organisation to the Team members regarding the rationale for moving to a HR SSC was required, with Respondent B inferring: *“I wanted to know more about what a service centre is and why the business thought this was the correct model to follow”*. However, in contrast, Respondent C displayed initial joy at the proposed move; *“I saw immediately the benefits for the employee population for the UK and Ireland and excitement at the prospect of a change in personal role”*. It was evident six months later that the initial feelings the vast majority of the Team had portrayed regarding the transition to the HR SSC had not developed positively. This clearly had a profound impact on Respondent B especially who acknowledged the lack of change meant; *“I decided I needed to look for a new position”*, while Respondent A felt the experience had *“got increasingly difficult”*.

The HoHRSSO disclosed that the HRSC Team had support mechanisms in place such as regular contact with the Vice-President of HR in order to assist in alleviating their concerns, but admitted that this *“could not remove the concern created by the unknown of moving into a new paradigm within such a tight timeframe”*. Furthermore, the HoHRSSO added that the Team would have liked a lot of up-front answers but the *“reality was these concerns could only be addressed as the company changed and grew into the new model”*.

4.3.2 Adjustment to New Role

Each of the respondents stated that they had been working in some form of HR administration role prior to a HR SSC being implemented. These administration roles also incorporated many HR generalist activities such as providing support on areas including recruitment, time and attendance and maternity. In relation to their new roles as members of the HRSC Team, it was evident that a number of respondents were initially unhappy with the

change, with Respondent D expressing substantial dissatisfaction; *“I feel my role has become more basic, I am no longer able to make the same decisions and it has become more repetitive. I feel the nice part of the job has gone”*. The more basic nature of the ‘new role’ in comparison to the ‘old role’ was also highlighted by a number of other respondents.

A theme which emerged over the six months was that all respondents to the second part of the study had found the overall adjustment to their new role as a member of the HRSC Team to be a particularly challenging experience, with stress and a lack of face-to-face contact two of the key contributory causes. Respondent A highlighted this by saying the overall adjustment to the new role was *“not very good as it has become increasingly stressful”*, while also acknowledging that the lack of face-to-face contact in the ‘new role’ was one of the major difficulties experienced. Respondent D had a similar experience; *“my role has become more mundane but the stress levels have increased”*. Additionally, Respondent D also hinted at a lack of face-to-face contact proving to be particularly challenging by saying; *“the most difficult aspect of adjusting to the role has been telling other HR Team members....that I am no longer able to support them like I had previously.....this includes telling them that they should not come direct to me...”*.

4.3.3 Motivation

When initially questioned on whether or not the transition to a HR SSC and subsequently becoming a member of the HRSC Team had any impact on motivation, all but one respondent outlined that their motivation had been impacted negatively as a result. Respondent D outlined that she now felt demotivated as; *“I was a senior HR administrator, I have now lost the senior status and I am now a HR administrator. I feel that I have been demotivated through no fault of my own”*. It became apparent that a perceived lack of planning on behalf of the organisation was a significant contributing factor in causing demotivation among the HRSC Team. Respondent B stated; *“I am finding the travel, learning all the new policies, systems, payroll and lack of planning and processes very stressful”*, while Respondent E outlined; *“Yes [the transition has impacted motivation], but unfortunately in a negative way due to a lack of project planning and support to highlight just a couple of headings”*. However, in contrast, Respondent C found that there was no negative impact on her motivation because *“I work hard as it is and care about the quality of my work”*.

It was clear throughout the process that the Team had struggled to become motivated over the duration of the study. Six months later, Respondent A outlined an increasing difficulty in becoming motivated *“as the role has become more and more busy”*. Respondent B, who left the HRSC Team at the end of June 2014, did offer a differing opinion but this was because; *“[I am] much happier now that I am not in the HR Service Centre”*.

4.3.4 Career Progression

The question of whether respondents saw the opportunity to work as part of a HRSC Team having any advantage to them in their career was met initially with an almost unified negative response. Respondent C did outline that *“I would expect it to strengthen my organisational, administration, multitasking, team-playing skills and also create knowledge of UK legislation.”* However, it must be noted that Respondent C specifically stated that *“I am not looking to move into a leadership role, so the experience of the HR Service Centre I would expect will present me as a very good candidate for not specific roles, but more project/administration type roles.”* Other respondents were far more disapproving in their opinions on whether the experience would have career advantages, with Respondent B stating that *“I feel it is to the detriment of my career as I am unable due to time constraints to get involved in site projects.”* This was a view which was supported by Respondent D; *“I cannot see any advantages, I can only see that future employers will question my CV with what looks like a backward move”* and Respondent A; *“I don’t think there will be any advantage because there will be less responsibility than I had before.”*

This was a view echoed once again six months later. When the HRSC Team were asked if their thoughts regarding career progression had changed, it was evident that the experience of working as part of a HRSC Team was not perceived to have had any career advantages. Respondent D offered an almost identical opinion to all of the respondents partaking in the second part of the study, saying; *“I [still] don’t believe there are any career advantages. I believe I am probably stuck in a role and cannot move on to anything else”*.

4.3.5 Achievements

A more positive aspect for the Team was that each respondent to the second set of questions felt they had achieved something by working as a member of the HRSC Team. A common theme which emerged was that it appeared there was a great sense of achievement among the Team as a result of what they had achieved together. Respondent D felt *“the team*

successfully went live in what were very difficult circumstances. I have also learnt to adjust to different ways of working and different views of the team.” Respondent B cited working “*as part of a virtual team*” as an achievement whilst Respondent A highlighted a different achievement, stating; “*I have achieved various project work but it has been difficult to do alongside a very busy role.*”

4.4 Experiences with Management

4.4.1 Initial Experiences with Management

A theme which emerged throughout the process was that the HRSC Team largely had a poor experience with management, with specific regards to communication, prior to the transition phase and a mixed experience following the transition.

Respondent A described the level of communication from management leading up to the transition to the HR SSC as “*not great*”, adding; “*.....some employees got more than necessary and some none at all*”. Respondent E disclosed that the communication was elongated, “*leading to speculation around the company and a lack of structure/support which had a negative impact on work and home life*”. Keeping with this theme, Respondent B found the communication to be poor, stating; “*HR people do not understand who does what and the sites have been kept very much in the dark. I do not fully understand my own role*”. However, the HoHRSSO appeared to disagree and felt that the level of communication afforded to the HRSC Team from management leading up to the transition was good, inferring; “*there was a lot of communication to the HR organisation as a whole leading up to the start of the project*”. This communication from management consisted of weekly all HR meetings and webinars along with some face-to-face meetings. In addition, the HoHRSSO did accept that there was (forcibly) some ambiguity, specifically around what the new job roles would entail because this had not been completely determined at this stage. This gives further weight to Respondent B’s experience of not fully understanding the role.

It was interesting to note that there was a difference in opinion between some members of the HRSC Team when questioned as to how they had experienced the communication from management to be after the HR SSC had actually gone ‘live’. Respondent C felt communication with management since the transition was “*good to very good*”, which was a similar view to Respondent B who outlined that “*communication from our direct manager*

[is] good". However, contrasting views were expressed by both Respondent A, who detailed that the communication *"has been difficult"* and Respondent D who referred to the communication following the transition as *"poor to average"*.

4.4.2 Development of Experiences with Management

Perhaps surprisingly, despite some positive comments from the HRSC Team regarding the level of communication afforded to them from management after the HR SSC had gone 'live', the Team were almost unanimous in being unhappy at how their experience with management had developed throughout the following six months. Communication was described as poor and lacking, which caused stressed and demotivation amongst the Team. The Team felt they were left to get on with things with only occasional input from management whenever there was a problem to resolve. Combined, this was cited by one Team member as being a possible reason for the significant changes to the make-up of the Team between January 2014 and July 2014; *"I...feel that this has contributed to team members leaving and applying for other internal roles"*. Despite this, Respondent D experienced some good communication directly from the HRSC manager, but noted; *"this can be sporadic as he has been pulled in many directions"*.

4.4.3 Positives and Negatives

When respondents to the second part of the study were questioned on what their positive experiences of management had been throughout the six months, opinions were mixed. Respondent D found that the trip to Dublin which management had arranged to view how the HR SSC in 02 was set up was good, but this notwithstanding it was mentioned that there was a lot of time wasted in trying to find a hotel in Dublin for the meeting room which *"could have been used more wisely"*. Respondent B found that management had been helpful in allowing a move to a new role out of the HRSC Team which was a positive experience. However, Respondent A could not think of anything positive.

Regarding the HRSC Team's negative experiences with management throughout the process, it was evident that the Team felt communication could have been much better. In addition, the Team felt management *"should have spent a lot more time with the HRSC in getting processes and streamlined and approved before going 'live'"*. Moreover, Respondent A stated that management *"could have improved their knowledge of how HRSC's work, the systems and processes needed"*.

The HoHRSSO endorsed that management had supported and positively represented and recognised the Team at site and department leadership level as something management had done positively, but did acknowledge that they could have spent *“more time in the detail driving the key workstreams and initiatives that would have made the start-up and subsequent operation of the HRSC smoother and less stressful”* if time had allowed, along with having a clearer definition of the processes, which were evidently issues that caused some of the Team’s negative experiences with management.

4.5 Experiences with Technology

4.5.1 Difference in Technology Used

The HRSC Team were in agreement that the new types of technology used were technologies aimed at assisting them in working as a virtual team. Respondent A commented; *“we are slowly bringing on board more technology which is necessary to be able to work as a virtual team, i.e. SharePoint, BT Cloud and e-filing.”* These same technologies were also cited by all of the other Team members, along with the addition of a central mailbox system.

Experiences among the team were mixed when asked if they had been able to adapt to the new technology they were using over the six month period. Respondent D had been able to adapt. Respondent B agreed, but added; *“better systems and training would have been helpful.”* The theme of systems proving to be problematic was further highlighted by Respondent A who felt the technology had been *“a large downfall”* because *“there are too many complexities between the sites”*.

4.5.2 Training for New Technology

It was found that the majority of respondents did not experience the training on the use of the new technology to be sufficient. Respondent B outlined that training consisted of *“learning on the job and reading out of date workbooks. One of my peers is now giving us regular overviews of how to do things. We had a one day training session that was not dedicated to the HRSC and was not at all structured”*. Respondent A also acknowledged the learning on the job aspect, stating that the training provided was *“very little...more self-learnt”*, while Respondent E discussed that there was a *“very poor training session at the outset and I was then left to pick things up on my own.”* However, it must be noted that Respondent C described the initial training as *“so far so good”*. Despite the negative reaction amongst the

Team in relation to the training, the HoHRSSO felt that it was *“effective at doing what it needed to”*, but did go on to say it was *“not complete”*.

4.5.3 Difficulties with Technology

A number of difficulties that the HRSC Team experienced with the new technology throughout the process were identified. Respondent B stated difficulties arose such as having to; *“learn a new HR database which is not being invested in to work properly due to a move to a new system in 18 months’ time, systems not syncing, and different sites using different fields in different ways”*. The themes that appeared regarding a lack of investment in the current technology and the non-standardisation of processes in different areas from Respondent B were also highlighted by Respondent E, who cited a *“....lack of investment in technology due to a planned technology switch at an unknown future date and technology/processes not being standardised across sites”*. Of all the Team members, only Respondent C offered a differing opinion, stating that there had been no difficulties.

The HRSC Team continued to have palpable difficulties with the technology as the study developed. The main difficulty cited was that the BT system that had been adopted did not link to emails properly, which eventually culminated in causing problems regarding the fair and even distribution of work amongst the Team.

4.5.4 Resolutions to Difficulties with Technology

It is evident from the findings that the HRSC Team did not find Company X to have been sufficient in helping to solve the difficulties that they had experienced throughout the process. Respondent A commented *“....no I wouldn’t say so [that Company X solved difficulties regarding the technology sufficiently], we have to push for any change”*. Respondent B offered a similar view; *“no, we are very much on our own and have to solve the problems amongst ourselves”*, while Respondent E bluntly replied; *“no”*.

4.6 Experiences with the Organisation

4.6.1. What the Organisation Could Have Done Better

Themes regarding a lack of resources and support from Company X, a lack of harmonised process and systems and Team members having to do the ‘new’ and ‘old’ role at the same

time emerged when the HRSC Team were asked what, from their experience, the organisation could have done better throughout the overall six month period.

Respondent D outlined that the most difficult aspects of being a member of the HRSC Team were; *“not having any budget to be able to get the correct tools that we need for the job and not getting sufficient support from HR and the management team to understand the difficulties in the job”*. Respondent A suggested that affording *“limited support and resources”* to the HRSC Team was something that the organisation had done poorly, which was also highlighted by Respondent B. It is apparent that there may have been a breakdown in communication between management and the HRSC Team in relation to what the necessary resources needed are, as the HoHRSS felt that the organisation ensured *“the basic resources were in place”* in order for the Team to be able to do their job and cited this as one of the things done well.

In relation to being tasked with completing their ‘new’ role as a member of the HRSC Team and ‘old’ role at the same, it was evident that this was testing for the Team members and a decision which they ultimately felt the organisation had got wrong. In a similar vein, the Team also felt that not having the project manager be completely dedicated to just the HR SSC was a mistake. Respondent D suggested the organisation *“should have provided a more dedicated project manager. Leaving this to [the HRSC manager] to do on top of all the project work was stupid”*, while also suggesting that the project manager should have been accountable in tracking changes and ensuring those responsible for completing tasks get them done.

Not having harmonised processes and systems was also highlighted, with Respondent B and Respondent D outlining that the majority of processes, systems and policies should have been harmonised before making the transition. In addition, the Team felt that the timescale for the transition was too short; *“however long you think the project should be, at least double it”*. The HoHRSSO agreed with this, saying; *“in an ideal world, more time [would have been] spent preparing for the change”*.

4.6.2 What the Organisation Did Well

It was clear that the HRSC Team members who participated in the entire study did not feel they had experienced Company X doing anything particularly well throughout the six month

period. Respondent D couldn't think of anything the organisation had done well, whilst Respondent A replied that there was nothing in particular that came to mind. However, the HoHRSSO in Company X did highlight a number of areas that the organisation did well in, such as developing the HRSC Team members and managing the Team to a different, stronger structure.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has identified and detailed the findings that have been obtained from the primary research conducted. These findings were produced in line with the literature identified in Chapter Two, the research objectives outlined in Chapter One and with the answering of the research question identified in Chapter One also in mind. Chapter Five goes on to discuss these findings in the context of the literature.

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the findings detailed in Chapter Four in the context of the literature presented in Chapter Two. The objective of this is to ensure that both the reader and author can fully understand how the findings generated from the primary research obtained for this study relate to the work already conducted on this area and in addition, how these findings assist in answering the research question and objectives posed in Chapter One.

5.2 Structure

The discussion is structured in line with the research objectives outlined in Chapter One:

- To explore the HRSC Team's feelings prior to moving to the HR SSC.
- To discover the Team's experience of the HR SSC transition (from a personal viewpoint and with management).
- To investigate the impact the technology used has on the Team.
- To determine what the Team acknowledged the organisation to have done right or wrong during the overall six month period.

The research question posed for this study was:

How do employees experience the transition to a HR Shared Services Centre?

5.3 The HRSC Team's Feelings Prior to the Transition

5.3.1 Initial Feelings

The primary research conducted for this study found that concern and inquisitiveness were feelings held by the vast majority of HRSC Team members when they were initially questioned regarding how they felt about Company X's transition to a HR SSC.

Ulrich (2007) infers that before a move to HR SSC, managers should communicate extensively the benefits of the HR SSC and how it will benefit the relevant employees. Furthermore, Bergeron (2003) states that one way in which an organisation can alleviate fear of the unknown is by over-communicating plans and expectations. This would appear to be especially necessary considering work from Ozenne (2008) has shown that the benefits of a HR SSC may not become apparent to employees for quite some time, which can potentially leave them feeling like their work efforts are frivolous.

A key finding from this study is that, due to the initial feelings of vast concern and inquisitiveness amongst the HRSC Team, it appears that the explanation of the benefits of the transition to a HR SSC, along with the over-communication of plans and expectations (as recommended in the available literature) may not have been done sufficiently by Company X. However, it is prudent to note that the HoHRSSO felt that there was a lot of communication to the HRSC Team leading up to the start of the project about what was coming. What is evident from this is that the Team held differences in opinion with management from the outset which may explain some of the difficulties the Team experienced with management throughout the study, as discussed in Chapter 5.4.4 below.

5.4 The HRSC Team's Experience of the Transition

5.4.1 Role Adjustment

Each employee within Company X who became a member of the HRSC Team was previously working in some form of HR administration role, some in a more senior form than others. All members of the Team who participated in the second part of this study found the overall adjustment to their new role as a HRSC Team member to be a difficult experience, with a lack of face-to-face contact cited as the most difficult thing to adjust to.

This research finding is consistent with work conducted by Younger et al., (2008) who note that face-to-face contact is much less frequent in a shared services environment which can prove to be a significant challenge for employees to adjust to.

5.4.2 Motivation

Hunter (2009) notes that retaining motivation can be a significant challenge for employees who transition to a HR SSC. He adds that this is largely because working in a HR SSC

environment can lead to employees having to complete mundane work which can potentially cause these employees to become bored and make errors.

The research findings suggest that the HRSC Team in Company X found retaining motivating to be particularly challenging experience. A number of reasons such as travelling (due to the HRSC Team being a virtual team), not being able to build up relationships with others, the role being too busy, a lack of support and a lack of project planning were cited as contributory causes to the Team's motivation issues. However, it must be noted that not all Team members found retaining motivation to be a challenge as one particular Team member said; *"I work hard as it is and care about the quality of my work"*.

Hunter (2009) suggests that one way in which organisations can alleviate issues around motivation for those working in a HR SSC is to afford them clear progression through the career structure. The HRSC Team's views in relation to career progression are discussed below.

5.4.3 Career Advancement

There are conflicting opinions in the literature regarding the impact that working in a HR SSC environment has on career opportunities for those concerned. Pickard (2008) asserts that employees working in a HR SSC get a wider view of the business as a whole and strong line manager experience, therefore strengthening their career prospects. This is a similar view to that of Beaman (2007) who argues that staff working within a HR SSC environment constantly acquire new skills, thus increasing their employability. However, Orhan (2011) disagrees, stating that due to shared service centres often still dealing with the "brutal issues" under the domain of HR, they fail to create future career paths for employees.

A key finding from this study is that the HRSC Team's views regarding career advancement are in line with those of Orhan (2011). The vast majority of the Team felt that the experience of working as member of the HRSC Team would prove to be detrimental to their career, with the one differing opinion coming from a member who was not looking to move into a leadership role. This view was further evidenced in the second set of responses six months later, when each respondent who participated acknowledged that their opinion regarding career advancement as a result of being a HRSC Team had not changed or developed in any way.

5.4.4 Experiences with Management

It is widely acknowledged in the available literature that extensive communication from management prior to, during and after the transition to a HR SSC is necessary in order to ensure that employees fully engage. This is because without employee 'buy-in', the transition is likely to be unsuccessful. Furthermore, it is noted that HR employees in particular (e.g. the HRSC Team) have the ability to make-or-break organisational initiatives, due to the critical role they play in both organisational performance and development (Ulrich, 2007 and Ulrich et al., 2012). Thus, communication towards the HRSC Team should have been one of management's key considerations throughout the process. What has emerged as a key finding in this study is that the HRSC Team found the level of communication from management to be poor throughout, which culminated in the HRSC Team having a testing experience with management over the duration of the study.

Communication in the lead up to the transition was *"not great"* and *"some employees got more than necessary and some none at all."* The perceived insufficient level of communication provided by management towards the HRSC Team at this time also led to some unwanted speculation around Company X and the Team, which negatively impacted on one particular Team member's work and home life. Only one participant in this study found the level of communication from management to be acceptable in the lead up to the transition. Opinions amongst the Team did not change during the preceding 6 months. Team members that partook in the second part of this study felt that communication remained *"lacking"*, with one outlining that the HRSC Team have been *"left to get on with it with occasional input from the management team when there has been an issue to resolve."* Additionally, it has been claimed that the lack of communication has contributed to Team members leaving and applying for other internal roles in addition to causing stress amongst the Team.

There is evidently large dissatisfaction amongst the HRSC Team regarding the level of communication afforded to them from management throughout the process, despite the HoHRSSO outlining that communication levels were good leading up to the start of the transition and remain strong today. This appears to have put a strain on the overall feeling from the HRSC Team towards management. It can also be speculated that this perceived lack of communication has indeed been a contributory cause to some of the original HRSC Team members leaving the Team.

5.5 The Impact Technology has on the HRSC Team

According to Hirschfield and Curry (2007), the ability for HR SSC's to perform effectively is dependent upon technology. This view is backed up by Deloitte (2011), who highlight the critical role that technology plays in shared service centres and Mercer (2008), who assert that poor technology has been detrimental to many HR SSC's.

A key finding from this study is that the technology, including the training provided by the organisation in relation to the use of said technology, was not sufficient in helping the HRSC Team to perform effectively. The initial training provided was destitute, consisting of a one day training session that was not dedicated to the HRSC and not structured. Additional training involved learning on the job and "*reading out of date workbooks*", with all but one participant in this study stating that they found this training to be insufficient. In contrast, the HoHRSSC felt the training was effective at doing what it needed to, but also acknowledged that it was not complete due to timescale issues.

Furthermore, numerous difficulties such as systems not syncing and those in different sites using different systems were highlighted by the Team. The primary research has also found that the HRSC Team did not feel that these problems with the technology were resolved. The Team felt that they were on their own and had to solve any problems they encountered amongst themselves. In the cases in which the organisation did intervene, it was after the HRSC Team had pushed for change. The Team's experiences with the technology did not improve as the study progressed. All participants in the second part of this study agreed that the technology was still insufficient six months later, with the BT system not linking to emails the main concern. This difficulty led to an uneven distribution of work amongst the Team, with one member of the Team even describing the technology as being "*a large downfall.*"

It is clear that the Team's experience with technology has had a negative impact. These research findings are conclusive with the aforementioned literature (Hirschfield and Curry, 2007, Deloitte 2011 and Mercer 2008) as it is evident that, despite playing a critical role in the success of any HR SSC, the technology and support for the technology deployed by Company X appears to be lacking.

5.6 What the HRSC Team Felt the Organisation Did Right and Wrong

A number of key findings emerged in relation to what the HRSC Team felt the organisation had done right and wrong during the duration of this study.

It became clear that the HRSC Team were responsible for playing a key part in the set up for Company X's transition to the HR SSC model at the initial transition phase, but were also tasked with continuing with their old role at the same time. This put a lot of pressure on the team with numerous HRSC Team members citing having to do the 'new' and 'old' role at the same time, along with a lack of preparation time for setting up, as the most difficult things faced during the transition. Furthermore, it was apparent that in line with the Team also having to do their 'new' and 'old' roles at the same time, this was also true of the project manager for this project. The HRSC Team felt that the project manager should have been dedicated specifically to the HRSC, with one Team member in particular branding the decision not to have a dedicated project manager as "*stupid.*" While this did seem to result in some hostility towards the project manager, with one respondent describing a good project manager as essential when asked how they would improve upon how Company X handled the transition, the author feels this has more to do with the organisational decision not to have dedicated roles as opposed to incompetence on the part of the project managers. This feeling was enhanced in the primary research when a member of the HRSC Team acknowledged that communication from the project manager can be good but also "*can be sporadic, as he has been pulled in many directions.*"

The consensus amongst the Team is that they were not provided with the requisite resources they deemed necessary to do their job. A member of the Team detailed "*not having any budget to be able to get the correct tools that we need for the job*" which was a view also echoed by others. However, the HoHRSSO felt that something the organisation did well was to ensure that the basic resources needed were in place for the Team which again indicates a difference in opinion and a possible breakdown between the HRSC Team and the organisation in terms of what resources were necessary.

Further evidence of the HRSC Team being unhappy with the organisation was highlighted when it was revealed a member of the HRSC Team left a seven year role in HR at Company X due to becoming so unhappy as a result of the negative experiences throughout the process. Another also looked for a new position. This is consistent with the available literature,

specifically that of Otter (2003) and Accenture (2011), who note that HR SSC's are often blighted by high turnover rates.

In fact, the HRSC Team struggled to identify anything that they felt the organisation had done well during the six month period. A number of Team members cited that they couldn't think of anything the organisation had done particularly well, but the HoHRSSO did highlight a number of areas that the organisation performed well in, such as developing the HRSC Team members and managing the Team to a different, stronger structure.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the key findings from the primary research in the context of the available literature outlined in Chapter Two. The following chapter will conclude the dissertation. It will also detail the limitations of the study and the recommendations for both practitioners and for further research that have evolved as a result of the study.

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The objective of the final chapter of this study is to conclude the dissertation, making reference to the key research findings in relation to the research question and objectives. Furthermore, the limitations of the study are disclosed and the author offers recommendations for future research on this subject in addition to offering recommendations to practitioners in the field.

6.2 Objectives of the Study

For the purpose of this study, the following research question was developed:

How do employees experience the transition to a HR Shared Services Centre?

Deriving from this research question were a number of research objectives:

- To explore the HRSC Team's feelings prior to moving to the HR SSC.
- To discover the Team's experience of the HR SSC transition (from a personal viewpoint and with management).
- To investigate the impact the technology used has on the Team.
- To determine what the Team acknowledged the organisation to have done right or wrong during the overall six month period.

6.3 Summary of Key Findings

The findings revealed that prior to transitioning to the HR SSC, there was a large amount of concern amongst HRSC Team for a number of reasons. The Team felt that the transition would cause their role to become less personal, contain less variety and transform into a call centre type role. In addition, the Team were keen to understand why Company X felt transitioning to a HR SSC was the correct thing to do. The available literature emphasises that organisations need to over-communicate at the transition phase to ensure that employees understand how the move to a HR SSC will benefit them. Furthermore, over-communication

at this phase can assist in alleviating worries that may arise due to fear of the unknown. It is evident that Company X may not have communicated sufficiently at this phase due to the level of concern and uncertainty portrayed by the HRSC Team. However, an interesting finding was that the HoHRSSO felt that there was a lot of communication afforded to the HRSC Team leading up to the start of the project about what was coming, highlighting a difference in opinion between management and the Team that was consistent throughout the study.

Another key finding which emerged was that the HRSC Team largely had a difficult experience with the transition. The Team found the overall adjustment to their new role to be tough, citing a lack of face-to-face contact and no longer being able to offer support like they had done in the past as being particularly challenging. This is consistent with the available literature. The Team also felt that the transition had a negative impact on their motivation, specifically due to the travelling, not being able to build relationships in a way which they had become accustomed to doing in the past and feeling unsupported in their new role. The consensus amongst the Team was that working as a member of the HRSC Team in Company X would have a negative impact on their career prospects, with concerns over the role being a backwards step and one that would be tough to become unstuck from in the future outlined. More positively, the HRSC Team were unanimous in agreeing that they had achieved something during the process, with the ability to work as part of a virtual team the most common achievement noted.

An additional key finding that emerged from the primary research was that HRSC Team had a testing experience with management throughout the process. The Team felt that they were on their own, with management only getting involved to assist them occasionally when there were issues to resolve. In addition, communication from management was described as poor and lacking, although it must be noted that the HoHRSSO felt communication was and remains detailed and strong. One Team member also felt that there was some good communication from the direct HRSC manager. However, this communication was said to be limited due to the manager in question being pulled in many directions, perhaps emphasising the problems highlighted regarding the Team and project manager not having specific, dedicated roles.

What is also evident is that the HRSC Team did not have a positive experience with the technology they used. Whilst most of the technology was aimed at assisting the Team to work as part of a virtual team, there were problems regarding the capability of this technology. Problems such as systems not syncing properly and the BT system not linking to the central mailbox which caused an uneven distribution of work amongst the Team, were evident. Training on the use of the new technology was found to be insufficient, as was the amount of help the HRSC Team got from Company X regarding the resolution of any problems they were experienced. The HoHRSSO felt that the training provided to the Team was effective at doing what it needed to, but did concede that it was not complete.

An additional key finding that emerged from the primary research was that the HRSC Team felt that the organisation did far more wrong than right throughout the duration of the study, with the Team struggling to name anything positive when questioned. It was found that the team had to do their 'old role' alongside the 'new role', which caused them great difficulty. The timescale afforded to the HRSC Team for the set-up of the transition was insufficient and the Team claimed they did not have a budget necessary to ensure they were able to secure the correct tools to do their job, despite the HoHRSSO indicating that the organisation ensured the necessary basic resources were in place. Moreover, the Team felt the lack of a dedicated project manager had also been a mistake.

Overall, the HRSC Team's evidently testing experience of the transition to a HR SSC can perhaps be attributed in some way to the shift in the make-up of the Team during the six month period of this study. One member left their role in HR of seven years in Company X because the transition had a negative impact to such an extent that it caused significant unhappiness. Another also revealed they had looked for a new role as their initial concerns had not subsided over the duration of this study.

6.4 Limitations

The author acknowledges that there are limitations to this study, namely:

- Due to logistical reasons (the HRSC Team being a virtual team based throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom), in addition to work commitments on the part of the HRSC Team due to partaking in the busy transitional phase, it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews with, or any direct observation of, the participants in this study.
- Additionally, the study contained initial responses from five HRSC Team members in Company X, with just 60% of the Team participating in the second part of the study, thus the scale of the findings is limited.

6.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, a number of recommendations have been outlined both for organisations and for further research.

6.5.1 Recommendations for Organisations

The author notes the following recommendations for organisations:

6.5.1.1 Extensive Communication

It is essential there is extensive communication from both the organisation and from management to employees who will be impacted by the transition to a HR SSC. This communication should take place before, during and after the transition and the communication should be excessive. Detail should be provided on a wide-range of areas such as the reasoning for the transition, the benefits of the transition, problems that may arise as a result and the level of resources that will be available. HRSC Team members should also have multiple opportunities throughout the process to meet with the organisation and with management to express and have addressed any questions or concerns they have. This may assist in easing concerns on the part of the Team and minimising unwanted and possibly damaging speculation around the company, though it also has to be accepted that there may be some necessary ambiguity as the organisation grows into the transition.

6.5.1.2 Dedicated Roles

The HRSC Team should be dedicated to their specific role as opposed to having to do both their 'new role' and 'old role' at the same time. Being responsible for two roles, especially during the transitional period, is too much to take on and as was seen in Company X this has the potential to impact negatively on employees experiences. Any project manager should also be dedicated specifically to his or her role. This may assist in alleviating some issues as the project manager will have increased time to focus on the HRSC Team and the HR SSC as a whole, as opposed to being pulled in different directions.

6.5.1.3 Formation of a HRSC Team

It is recommended that any HRSC team should not be a virtual team and instead should be based all in one location. Working as part of a virtual team can cause numerous difficulties such as those in different sites having to use different systems to one another, problems if systems malfunction and issues regarding travelling if face-to-face meetings or training days together are needed. If the Team is based in one place, issues which were cited in this study as the more difficult aspects of working as part of a HRSC Team such as different people in different places using different processes and systems, along with the complexities between sites, would be mitigated.

6.5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

The author notes the following recommendations for future research:

- It is recommended that future research includes more than one case in order to gain a more extensive insight into how the transition to a HR SSC impacts on a HRSC Team in more than one organisation. This would add to the authenticity and depth of the research.
- It is recommended that future research includes face-to-face interviews and/or direct observation of participants. Moreover, an increased number of participants along with increased participation from management and/or the organisation would enable improved data triangulation.
- The author also proposes that future research includes a longitudinal study greater than a duration of six months. A longitudinal study focusing on more than one

organisation over the course of at least one year would afford respondents a greater length of time for their experiences to develop. Therefore, it is likely that an extended study would provide unique insight and information.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the research question and objectives of the study. Furthermore, the key findings brought to light during the study have been highlighted. In conclusion, recommendations to both organisations and for further research have been discussed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Personal Reflection

Prior to registering for the MBS in HRM course in Waterford Institute of Technology, the prospect of having to complete a dissertation caused me to question whether partaking in this course would actually be the right move for me. I was extremely anxious and apprehensive about the dissertation process as I was never required to complete a dissertation for my undergraduate degree and thus had no inclination of what would be expected of me or how I would cope with the pressures and demands involved. I eventually decided I would give it a shot and here I am today!

I first started generating ideas for the topic of my dissertation during the second full week of classes in semester one. As part of one of my modules, I had to complete a HR Consultancy project for a multinational organisation which centred on their transition to a shared services model. Prior to partaking in the HR Consultancy module I was not familiar with the shared services phenomenon, but as we heard more from our colleague in the multinational organisation I became fascinated and eager to learn more. I soon realised this would be a very interesting subject to compile a dissertation on and felt it would be beneficial not only to me, but the organisation too. I made contact with the gatekeeper in Company X through my HR Consultancy lecturer and after numerous phone calls, emails and meetings detailing the particulars of the study; agreement was made between myself and the organisation to proceed.

I felt the research proposal I had to submit for my research methods module in semester one was extremely beneficial. I based my research proposal on my actual dissertation and thus it helped me to become accustomed to critically analysing the available literature on the subject, along with providing a solid base for the literature review and methodology chapters of this study. I feel that this was a key reason why I found the aforementioned chapters relatively simplistic to complete. It was at this point that my apprehension regarding the dissertation process really started to ease and I realised it may have been misplaced.

As my study was a longitudinal study over a six month period, I began to gather and analyse data from the relevant employees within Company X a few weeks into the second semester.

At the initial stage, the data collection phase was largely a pleasurable experience with swift response times from the HRSC Team and I managed to receive all the necessary data within about 10 days. However, when it was time to gather data for the second part of the study I began to run into difficulties. When I sent the second set of questions to the gatekeeper in Company X for review, it was revealed that he was on holidays with no access to emails for two weeks. Furthermore, it took an additional week (and a number of phone calls) upon the gatekeeper returning from holidays to approve the questions for sending. Moreover, it took a further two weeks for the relevant employees to return any data to me. This caused me to become agitated and I began to panic slightly that I may not be able to meet the dissertation deadline as I was two weeks over the allotted schedule I had created for myself. However, upon reflection I do feel that this forced me to focus completely on the task at hand, rejecting any distractions, and improved my ability to work under pressure which will be beneficial in my future career. I also feel that this improved my professionalism as I had to act in a professional manner during all communication with the gatekeeper and the participants in the study despite being under pressure against a deadline and at times feeling like I was being ‘brushed off’.

I enjoyed completing the findings chapter as it was interesting to compare and contrast the experiences of each respondent and how their experience developed over a six month period. As there is very little research done on this subject, especially in relation to a longitudinal study, it was during the completion of the findings chapter when it really hit me that the research I was conducting could have an impact both from an academic and practical viewpoint and saying so wouldn’t just be paying lip service to the requirements of the study, which afforded me a great deal of pride in my work.

I found the discussion chapter to be the most challenging of all. I felt that reviewing the findings in the context of the literature was slightly intimidating. As a student, it seemed off-putting to be comparing my findings with the work of highly-respected people in HR such as Dave Ulrich. However, as the weeks progressed this became less of an issue for me and I was able to complete the chapter.

If I was to go back in time and start the dissertation process all over again, there is one main thing I would do differently. I would avoid trying to receive data during the summer months. Instead, I would aim to get the second set of data during the last week in May/first week in

June, before people traditionally break for holidays. During the summer period, the vast majority of staff go on holidays intermittently and it is difficult to gain contact. After all, it is understandable that after a busy year, the last thing that staff want to think about whilst on the beach is completing a questionnaire or interview for a student!

Overall, I have found the dissertation process to be a difficult, challenging, yet extremely rewarding experience. I envisage that the skills I have gained and made reference to throughout this personal reflection will be helpful during my career and the subject of my dissertation will be of interest to potential employers, especially those who have adopted or plan to adopt the growing phenomenon of shared services in the future.

It has been great to see my hard work ultimately come to fruition, especially when the initial thought of having to complete a dissertation almost caused me not to register for the MBS course.

Appendix B – Case Study of Company X

Company X is a multinational organisation that has been operating in the pharmaceutical industry since the 1980's. Its headquarters are based in the United States of America, with operations located all over the world including North America, South America, the Middle East and Europe. Company X employs c.12,000 people globally, including c.450 people in Ireland and c.500 people in the United Kingdom.

The rationale for Company X moving to a HR SSC was provided by the Head of HR Shared Service Operations, who detailed that as the organisation had grown significantly over the past number of years through a mixture of mergers and acquisitions and the creation of new facilities, this meant that there were many different entities with stand-alone HR structures supported by legacy HR systems and structures. Moving to a HR SSC was seen as part of a larger project to move to regional HR organisations in order to synergise resources while introducing consistency to approaches in all aspects of HR management.

The Head of HR Shared Service Operations felt that the most difficult aspects of the transition would be the amount of change, both for the HR organisation and the business. This was because changes of this magnitude require a large amount of harmonisation and standardisation which the HoHRSSO felt can be difficult to achieve across a multinational organisation.

Appendix C – Question Lists

Questionnaire 1 – HR Service Centre Team.

This questionnaire is being conducted as part of a Masters of Business dissertation aimed at investigating the experiences of a HR Service Centre Team when moving to a shared service centre and subsequently how this experience develops over a 6 month period.

Your participation in this study is greatly valued. All information received in this questionnaire will be treated as strictly confidential.

Please fill out your answers in as much detail as possible in the designated ‘answer’ section below each question. This will ensure the collection of as much information about your experiences as possible.

Individual Experience

- 1) What were your initial feelings about moving to a shared service centre?
- 2) What were your main tasks/duties in your role prior to becoming a member of the HR Service Centre Team?
- 3) What are the differences in your tasks/duties now as a member of the HR Service Centre Team?
- 4) Has the move to a shared service centre had any impact on your motivation?
- 5) Do you feel working as part of a HR Service Centre Team will have any advantage to you in your career? If so, how?

Experiences with Management

- 6) How did you find the level of communication from management leading up to the move to the shared service centre?
- 7) How would you rate the level of communication from management since you have become a member of the HR Service Centre Team?
- 8) Do you feel you have had more or less interaction with management since you have become a member of the HR Service Centre Team?

Experiences with Technology

- 9) What change has there been in the type(s) of technology you are using now as a member of the HR Service Centre Team compared to your previous role?
- 10) What training (if any) was provided by the organisation in relation to the use of this new technology?
- 11) If training was provided by the organisation, have you found the training to be sufficient?
- 12) Have you experienced any difficulties with the new technology? If so, please expand.
- 13) If your answer to question 13 is yes, did you find the organisation to be sufficiently helpful in solving your difficulties?

Transitional Experience

- 14) Is there anything you feel the organisation could have changed during the initial move to the shared service centre?
- 15) If you had an opportunity to change one thing about the process of moving to the shared service centre, is there anything you would change?

Questionnaire 2 – HR Service Centre Team

Individual Experience

- 1) Have your initial feelings about moving to a shared service centre model changed over the last six months? If so, please explain how.
- 2) How have you found the overall adjustment to your new role?
- 3) Has your level of motivation altered since completing the first questionnaire? If so, please explain how.
- 4) Has your opinion on whether being a member of a HR Service Centre Team will have any career advantages changed over the past six months? If so, please explain how.
- 5) Do you feel you have achieved anything since becoming a member of the HR Service Centre Team? If so, please explain.
- 6) What have you found to be the most difficult aspect(s) of being a member of the HR Service Centre Team (e.g. areas you may have struggled in)?
- 7) Please give a brief summary of what you personally feel the organisation has done well during the last six months.
- 8) Please give a brief summary of what you personally feel the organisation has done poorly during the last six months.

Experiences with Management

- 9) How would you rate the level of communication from management towards you over the past six months?
- 10) How has the level of communication from management (as outlined in question 9 above) made you feel?

11) Is there anything you feel that management have done particularly well during the past six months? If so, please explain.

12) Do you feel that management could have done anything better during the past six months? If so, please explain.

13) Could you please describe your relationship with management at present and how this has developed over the last six months?

Experiences with Technology

14) Have you been able to adapt to the new forms of technology that come with being a member of the HR Service Centre Team?

15) Have you experienced any difficulties with the use of the technology since completing the first questionnaire in January?

16) If the answer to question 15 above is yes, how were these difficulties resolved?

Transitional Experience

17) What was the most difficult thing to adapt to during the transition to a shared services model?

18) If you had the opportunity to go back in time and were put in control of the transition to a shared services model for the organisation, based on your experience, what would you do differently to the organisation, from the beginning to the present day?

Any Other Comments:

19) If there are any other thoughts/feelings you have that you wish to be documented, please feel free to discuss below.

Questionnaire – Head of HR Shared Service Operations

Initial Feelings/Experiences:

- 1) Could you please give some insight into why the organisation initially wanted to move to a HR shared services model and why this model was deemed to be appropriate?
- 2) What concerns, if any, did the organisation and management have about switching to a HR shared services model?
- 3) How would you rate the level of communication afforded to the HR Service Centre Team from management leading up to the move to the shared service centre?
- 4) Could you please describe what this communication involved (e.g., was it regular meetings? How often? etc).
- 5) Could you please describe the training given to the HR Service Centre Team prior to transitioning to the shared service centre?
- 6) How effective do you think this training was?
- 7) What support mechanisms, if any, were in place for the HR Service Centre Team members during the transition? If support mechanisms were in place, could you describe them and how would you rate their effectiveness?
- 8) Do you feel the organisation and management addressed any possible concerns that the HR Service Centre Team may have had?
- 9) With regards to the HR Service Centre Team, what do you feel management did well during the initial move to the shared service centre?
- 10) With regards to the HR Service Centre Team, is there anything you feel could have been done better during the initial move to the shared service centre? If so, please explain.

11) If you had the opportunity to change anything about the initial transitional process, what would you change?

Current Feelings/Experiences:

12) Have things changed in terms of the HR Service Centre Team since January 2014? If so, please explain what has changed.

13) Have the HR Service Centre Team had opportunities to provide feedback to management over the past six months? If so, what impact has this feedback had?

14) What, if anything, is management doing differently today in comparison to when the first questionnaire was distributed to the Team in January 2014?

15) Do you feel the training and communication afforded to the HR Service Centre Team has improved or weakened over the last six months? Please explain how.

16) Could you describe management's relationship with the HR Service Centre Team at present and how this relationship has developed over the past six months?

17) Please give a brief summary of what you feel management has done well over the past six months.

18) Please give a summary of what you feel management could have done better over the past six months.

19) What lessons do you feel have been learned regarding transitioning to a HR shared services centre?

Any Other Comments:

20) If there is anything else that you wish to be documented, please feel free to discuss it in below.