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Exploring the effectiveness of remote line-management: A case-study at MWH IT

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Abstract

Globalisation of organisations is increasing (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002) and with that, as are the existence of globally distributed teams (Global Workplace Analytics, 2016). The IT department at the engineering firm MWH, now part of Stantec has a number of globally distributed teams which means that the line-manager of each employee is often not based in the same office or even geographical region.

This research uses semi-structured in-depth interviews with members of the IT department at MWH to build a qualitative case-study with an interpretivist phenomenological epistemology and subjectivist ontological paradigm. The research answers the question: 'To what extent can globally remote line-management be as effective as local line-management for IT at MWH?'. The effectiveness of line-management is established by exploring the motivation and engagement of employees through their responses to interview questions.

The findings show that line-managers can be equally effective when either local to their employees or in a different geography, but that there are additional challenges when remote. The research identifies methods to maximise the effectiveness of remote line-management, such as the usage of metrics. Recommendations are made based on the results of the research.

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose. All secondary sources are acknowledged.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The research problem sits within the study and practice of management, and specifically, the practice of managing people remotely. Management has been the focus of countless studies and numerous management theories have been developed throughout modern history (Huczynski, 2006). Through societal progression, older theories have been adapted or replaced to fit the working environment at that time. The water engineering consultancy, MWH, now part of Stantec, is part of the growing number of companies which operate globally (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002) and practice remote line-management (Kelloway, Barling, Kelley, Comtois, & Gatien, 2003). This is particularly true of the IT department.

1.2. Research question

The research problem faced is that there is a growing demand in MWH for teams to operate in a global manner and for managers to manage people, not only in a different office, but geographical region.

The research undertaken answers the question "To what extent can globally remote line-management be as effective as local line-management for IT at MWH?". The research aims are:

- To establish whether employees are equally engaged and motivated having a manager based in a different country to themselves
- To develop good practice from which to maximise the effectiveness of remote line-management.

To achieve these aims, the following objectives have been met:

1) To determine the current management approach at MWH IT
2) To compare employee engagement of employees with a local line-manager to those with a manager based in another geographical region
3) To define what MWH IT employees perceive as an effective line-manager
4) To present ways in which remote line-management can be most effective

1.3. Research rationale

As globalisation continues to grow at a rapid rate (Ritzer, 2012), there is an increased requirement for managers at MWH IT to manage employees in a different location. The author has had both local and remote managers. She currently manages people in India, the US and the UK and her manager is based in the US. The author also aspires to become a Director in a global organisation.

There are limited studies published on remote line-management and little guidance available on researching this area (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). This research therefore contributes to that body of knowledge.

MWH was recently acquired by Stantec (Stantec Inc., 2016) which operated almost solely in North America and uses an international, rather than global approach. Consequently, this research offers contribution to decisions around management structure following the acquisition. Finally, the research has developed the author's understanding of remote management, contributing to performance in her current role and future career.

1.4. Outline methodology

The research epistemology is interpretive and phenomenological and it follows a subjectivist ontological position.

To gain depth, rather than breadth of information, the study takes the form of a qualitative case-study using semi-structured interviews as the primary research method. The interviews were carried out with seven employees, with a representative mix of people with and without remote line-managers and from different geographical regions.

Thematic analysis was done by creating and refining themes from the transcribed interview data, then synthesising findings with the available literature. Details of the selected methodology are provided in Chapter 3.

1.5. Chapter outline

This dissertation is structured as follows:

1. Chapter 1 – Introduction
   - An introduction to the topic, the research setting, research justification, an outline methodology and contextual information.
2. Chapter 2 – Literature Review
   - A review of current literature and pre-performed studies to build knowledge and identify gaps in current theory.
3. Chapter 3 – Methodology
   - The type of research conducted, how the research was conducted and analysed, and why methodological decisions were made.
4. Chapter 4 – Analysis
   - A presentation of the findings from the interviews and analysis of the findings synthesised with the literature.
5. Chapter 5 – Conclusions
   - Conclusions drawn following analysis for each research objective.
6. Chapter 6 – Recommendations
   - Recommendations made to the organisation, researcher, future researchers and management professionals based on the conclusions.

1.6. Definitions

Global – the organisation of a company that operates in different geographies, direction is provided centrally and work packages may be completed by geographically dispersed teams.

International - the organisation of a company that operates in different areas of the globe, each locale has autonomy and primarily completes work affecting that locale.

Region – the regional differentiators used in this research are: EAME (Europe, Africa, Middle East), Asia Pacific and Americas.

Remote Management – Providing line-management services to employees based in another location

Virtual Team – "A team that does much of its work across distances facilitated by technology" (Estes Brewer, 2015, p. 2).

1.7. Summary

This chapter has provided the reader with an understanding of why the subject of remote line-management has been selected for this research and why the research will benefit the researcher, the organisation and other management professionals. An overview of what to expect in the subsequent chapters has been provided.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The review below discusses some key theories on management and their development over time, critical analysis of literature on geographically distributed teams and their management, then more specifically, in an IT context. Section 2.4 then provides a conceptual model developed from the literature review.

2.2. What is Management?

Considered as the first genuine theory of management (Cole & Kelly, 2011), Henri Fayol recognised the need for management education (Huczynski, 2006) and developed fourteen principles of management (Table 1) (Fayol, 1949) (originally published in 1916) from his time as a manager, then later, transformational managing director of an engineering company (Witzel, 2014).

Table 1 - Fayol's Principles of Management

1	The division of labour
2	The establishment of authority
3	The enforcement of discipline
4	Unified command
5	Unity of direction
6	Subordination of individual interests to the interest of the organisation
7	Fair remuneration for all
8	Centralisation of control and authority
9	A scalar hierarchy
10	A sense of order and purpose
11	Equity in dealings between staff and managers
12	Stability of jobs
13	Development of initiative
14	Esprit de corps

(adapted from Fayol (1949))

Fayol's principles were written over 100 years ago, and many are resonant of bureaucracy (at least 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9). Cole and Kelly (2011, p. 24) argue "present day theorists… would not find much of substance in these [principles]", however, it could be argued that some of the principles are concerned with the welfare and motivation of employees and Fayol's principles are still influential today (Witzel, 2014; Huczynski, 2006).

In the 1950's and 60's Frederick Herzberg developed his theory that employees may become dissatisfied if, what he described as hygiene factors (advancement, company policies, salary, working conditions), are not met, but will not truly be satisfied until motivational factors are also met (Huczynski, 2006; Herzberg F. , 1968). Herzberg's motivators are 'Achievement, recognition, work itself and responsibility'. To demonstrate his theory, Herzberg said: "If I get a bonus of $1000 one year and $500 the next, I am getting extra rewards both years, but psychologically, I have taken a $500 salary cut" (Herzberg F. , 1987, p. 118). The theory was developed from a study of engineers and accountants (Herzberg F. , 1968). Despite maintained popularity with managers, Huczynski (2006) claims that initiatives based on this theory have not had significant impact. Though, one could infer that motivation-hygiene theory spawned the development of employee engagement theory, which Mayo (2016) argues shows clear correlation with business benefits.

2.3. Management and leadership

Kotter (2000) states that leadership involves developing strategy for change and inspiring and motivating employees, then managers implement this strategy via planning and organising. Although these qualities may seem at odds with one another, Kotter (2000) also said that companies should equip their top people to provide both leadership and management. This deduces while leadership and management are different, effective managers should hold both qualities. This suggests a compromise to the ongoing debate that management and leadership are either distinguishable or can be used interchangeably (Bârgau, 2015).

The management theorist Peter Drucker developed his theories from time providing management consultancy services whilst embedded in organisations (Chong, 2013). In his book 'The practice of management' (2011), Drucker wrote that there are five basic operations of a manager; objective setting, organising, measuring, but also

communicating and motivating. The first four are typically associated with management, however, *motivation* is usually recognised as a leadership quality. One could therefore infer that although 'The practice of management' was originally published in 1955, even at that time, leadership was integral to management. The reason Drucker recognised this social side of management may stem from his deep concern with morality (Schwartz, 1998; Chong, 2013; Kurzynski, 2012).

2.4. Management of knowledge workers

New social normalities mean that theories once lauded lose their relevance. Management theory has therefore developed alongside societal changes. For example, the industrial revolution saw the rise of Taylor's Scientific Management (Witzel, 2014; Grachev & Rakitsky, 2013) when shop-floor, manual work was common. The development of technology and overseas manufacturing saw a decline in shop-floor work in the west and an increase in knowledge work. Knowledge work is defined as "intellectual in nature… and involves… gathering, creating and dissemination of knowledge" (Edgar, Geare, & O'Kane, 2015, p. 489). Knowledge workers require motivation, rather than mere task-organisation (Edgar, Geare, & O'Kane, 2015) and this change in requirements was recognised by Herzberg (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959) almost sixty years ago with the development of Motivation-Hygiene theory, as discussed in 2.2.

In 1985, Drucker (1985) identified a 'managerial' to 'entrepreneurial' societal shift and in 1994, acknowledged that knowledge workers differ from other social groups gone before (Drucker, 1994) and consequently, require a different set of management rules (Turriago-Hoyos, Thoene, & Arjoon, 2016). Drucker argues successful knowledge workers should; define their own tasks, have autonomy on productivity, carry out continually innovative work, be continually learning and teaching, quality should be considered as important as quantity, and, workers should be considered an asset rather than a cost (Drucker, 1999).

Turriago-Hoyos et al. argue that although Drucker "identified some outstanding principles… [he had a] lack of a holistic systemic vision" (2016, p. 4). One could contend though, that the principles above are a 'holistic systemic vision'. Drucker's time as a management consultant provided opportunity to see the principles in action and he reported many examples of success following implementation (Drucker, 1999). All the respondents involved in this dissertation research can be

classified as knowledge workers using the above definitions, and the research demonstrates the applicability of Drucker's requirements to the IT employees at MWH.

2.5. Employee engagement

The effectiveness of management is often measured by evaluating and attempting to improve the performance of employees via the practice of Performance Management (Gruman & Saks, 2011). Gruman and Saks (2011) argue that that performance should be facilitated through employee engagement, rather than managed. Based on the empirical studies of others, Gruman and Saks make the case that the degree to which employees feel engaged will impact the bottom line of an organisation. They present a model to help managers and organisations understand how enhancing engagement can improve performance. The model (Figure 1) states that expected performance should be agreed, engagement should be facilitated then performance and engagement should be appraised and feedback provided to the employee. These elements influence engagement of the employee and subsequently performance levels.

Figure 1 - Gruman and Saks' Engagement Management Model
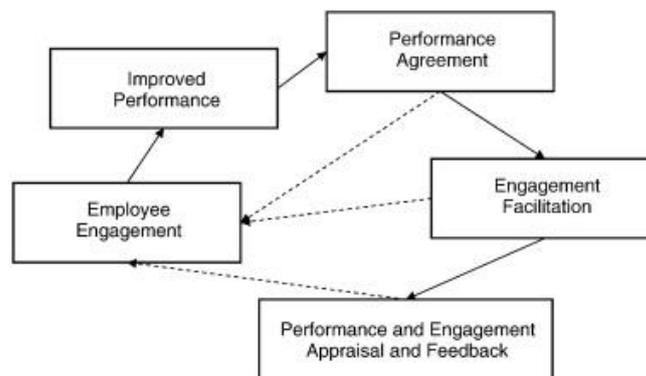
(Gruman & Saks, 2011, p. 128)

In critique of the model, although the authors have taken the time to provide ways in which each of the elements of the model can be implemented, they have not provided any real-life examples of how the model has or might be used in practice. Managers might therefore find difficulty implementing the model within the constricts of their nuanced organisation. Similarly, no evidence is presented which suggests that organisational or employee performance has improved following implementation of the model.

Nevertheless, Gruman and Saks have taken influence from many different theorists to build a well-rounded view of employee engagement theory. They have also acknowledged the ever-changing nature of work and have ensured their model is relevant by referencing modern theory.

Guaspari (2015) cites Forbes and the Association of Talent Development in declaring that most employees are not engaged, he then suggests reasons for this. In contrast to Gruman and Saks, Guaspari states that successful companies create engaged employees and not the other way around. He proposes that employee engagement is low because of this 'misinterpretation' of the relationship between company performance and employee engagement. Further to this, Guaspari thinks that effort to improve engagement is focussed on the 'interaction/connection' definition of engagement, rather than the 'effort/energy' definition. The third reason Guaspari cites, is that managers approach engagement from a controlling perspective. Although there is clearly a need to find out why employee engagement is low, Guaspari presents no evidence to suggest that his reasons are true, nor is any of his theory backed by other literature, however, the findings of this study may provide backing for Guaspari's view.

2.6. Virtual teams

Virtual teams are defined as functioning work teams (with a common deliverable) who are geographically dispersed and who primarily communicate using technology, rather than face-to-face interaction (Gibson & Cohen, 2003). Research on virtual teams has grown over the past 20 years and the common setting for research has more recently switched from universities to industry (Han & Beyerlein, 2016), following growth in the use of virtual teams over the past few decades (Dulebohna & Hoch, 2017) . This growth is predicted to continue to increase (Dulebohna & Hoch, 2017).

Through challenges experienced managing a team dispersed across the UK, Rona Blair (2015) documented techniques for managing a dispersed team. She notes that although it may not be possible for regular face-to-face meetings, those occasions should be well organised so that no time is wasted and a team building activity should be built-in. Blair also advocates weekly team calls, but also monthly meetings/calls dedicated to objective progress to remain on-track. A key theme in Blair's theory is the significance of trust in such teams. She elaborates that although

trust is just as important in co-located teams, it is not as simple to form in geographically dispersed teams due to the reduced social interaction. Blair argues that ability-based trust is acquired amongst team members through demonstration of work-ethic and integrity.

Unique to the literature is Blair's suggestion of networking. She recommends that networking through attendance at professional events, particularly for those who work alone, can prevent isolation. The setting upon which Blair bases her theory is somewhat comparable to that of many employees at MWH in that some team members are based in offices with other team members (or at least people in the same department) but some are surrounded by people of a different profession. The opening that Blair leaves however, is that her work is based on a team distributed across the same country, she does not discuss techniques for teams with different time-zones and cultures.

By researching high-performing virtual teams, Derven (2016) recently constructed a theoretical framework to address the challenges and enhance the effectiveness of global teams. The framework consists of four facets;

Diversity and Inclusion – Diversity should be embraced to harvest the best ideas, but team members should be aware of their sub-conscious biases and cultural differences to ensure inclusion for all members.

Purpose – Emphasising purpose keeps team members motivated provides focus on progress. One could argue that co-located teams also require emphasis on purpose, however Derven highlights that this is particularly applicable to virtual teams as they have a higher likelihood of involvement with other teams or projects.

People – People selection should be based on the team's purpose, however, once selected, a foundation of trust should first be built (by keeping commitments, listening to others and sharing concerns), the team leader should be inclusive of all members, and the team should be periodically recognised and rewarded.

Process – Virtual teams need executive sponsorship, governance, carefully selected use of technology, a process for conflict management, and a process for decision making.

When reflecting on past and present experience of working in virtual teams, there are many elements of Derven's model that ring-true and hold value. There are similar themes in her theory to Blair's, such as; selection of the right people, using the right technology, having clear objectives, building trust and having clear processes, however, Derven particularly references embracing cultural differences. Perhaps this is because she has experience working with globally dispersed teams compared to Blair's UK-based team. Many of these points are also identified as requirements for virtual team success by Ferazzi (2014), however, much of the framework (people, governance and decision making processes, purpose, recognition, selection of the right technology) can also been found in literature on general team performance, rather than that specific to virtual teams. For example, Mathieu and Rapp (2009) state that successful teams should have a charter which governs the team and has processes for conflict management and decision making. It should also be noted that although Derven's model is based on previous consultancy experience, it references no empirical evidence.

2.6.1. Country culture

Much of the literature on virtual or dispersed teams focuses on the geographical distance between team members and the team's reliance on technology (Blair, 2015; Neufeld, Wan, & Fang, 2010; Watson, 2007), however, Han and Beyerlein (2016) postulate that multinational culture is a highly influential element of virtual teams and demands equal focus. In contrast to Derven, they suggest that homogenous teams perform better than diverse teams and consequently, their research aims to overcome the boundaries of cultural diversity. Han and Beyerlein's (2016) study was an in-depth literature review and proposed eight process factors for virtual teams. These are; task process, task-related communicating, coordinating, establishing expectations, knowledge sharing, socioemotional processes (relationships amongst team members), overcoming biases, relationship building, developing trust, and intercultural learning.

Again, there are strong similarities between Han and Beyerlein's findings and those of the other literature discussed, but there are two notable factors. Firstly, regarding socioemotional processes, in contrast to Blair, Han and Beyerlein conclude the same interpersonal relationships can develop using technology as with face-to-face communication. Secondly, attention is paid to 'intercultural

learning', they found that cultural understanding can reduce confusion and "overcome… stereotypical expectations" (Han & Beyerlein, 2016, p. 371).

Although the factors Han and Beyerlein have produced are resultant of other theorists' literature, the literature reviewed comprised of empirical studies and success of their model can therefore be evidenced.

One limitation with their research, is that the studies it draws conclusions from are from many different industries, countries and settings and used different methodologies. Although one could argue that this has allowed Han and Beyerlein to present a well-rounded picture of the subject of virtual teams, one could suggest that there cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach for every company, in every industry, in every geography. This dissertation therefore presents findings of specific value to MWH IT.

2.7. Managing geographically dispersed teams

The 2008 study by Neufeld, Wan and Fang (2010) examined the relationship between perceived leader performance and three factors; leadership style, physical distance and communication effectiveness. Although the authors state the study was of 'leaders' the survey carried out was actually of line-managers and their direct reports and therefore serves as a relevant start-point for this research. The study found that physical distance had no impact on perceived leader performance, nor on communication effectiveness. It suggests this may be because performance and communication effectiveness are affected only by "deep relational familiarity" (Neufeld, Wan, & Fang, 2010, p. 240) developed from tenure, experience with that leader and high interaction frequency.

The research was quantitative and performed using an online survey. The survey was distributed to managers who were alumni from a Canadian business school (and their reports) and while there is no information about the location of the people surveyed, it would be reasonable to assume (especially of the managers) that proportionately more were based in Canada and the research should therefore not be used to generalise across other regions or countries. The type of industry the respondents worked in was also not captured, and while the job type was recorded, additional insight might have been provided if the results could be dissected by industry. For example, it would have been of interest to the study in this dissertation

to see how the results differed for the IT or engineering industries compared to other trades.

Watson (2007) carried out a study on remote management at a global IT company. The study aimed to establish whether traditional leadership behaviours are as effective when managing employees from a distance and to find how employee satisfaction is impacted by the geographical dispersion of teams and managers. The study found that there was no positive correlation between the number of face-to-face hours between a manager and employee and employee satisfaction, but did find that employees felt career advancement was reduced when based in a different geographical location to their manager.

It may be insightful to find whether these results are reflected in the present-day at MWH IT, Watson's results have therefore influenced the interview questions in this research. The employees surveyed were mostly engineering or support staff rather than sales which allows for closer comparison to the IT employees at MWH than if sales staff were included. All participants were based in the US "to control cultural variation" (Watson, 2007, p. 35) and while the results may have been influenced by different country cultures if expanded outside of the US, this may also have provided insight into the relationship between employee perception of remote management effectiveness and the geographic location of those employees.

A further limitation of the study was that face-to-face and telephone communication were measured, but other forms of communication, such as e-mail or instant messaging were not. It may therefore appear that some managers communicated with their employees less than others, when they may just have been using different communication methods.

Watson's research was carried out ten years ago, and although this would be viewed as 'recent' in relation to management theory, remote working and virtual teams have increased significantly since then – more than doubling in the US between 2005 and 2014 (Global Workplace Analytics, 2016).

Although the subject matter of Watson's study was like that of this dissertation, the methodology used was deductive and based on quantitative survey results. It could be argued that this approach would not yield personal insight and has influenced the choice to carry out interviews to gain qualitative, perceptive information.

2.8. Conceptual model

Based on a review of the literature, and consideration of the different arguments made by theorists and researchers, this study is approached using the following conceptual model.

Figure 2 - Conceptual Model
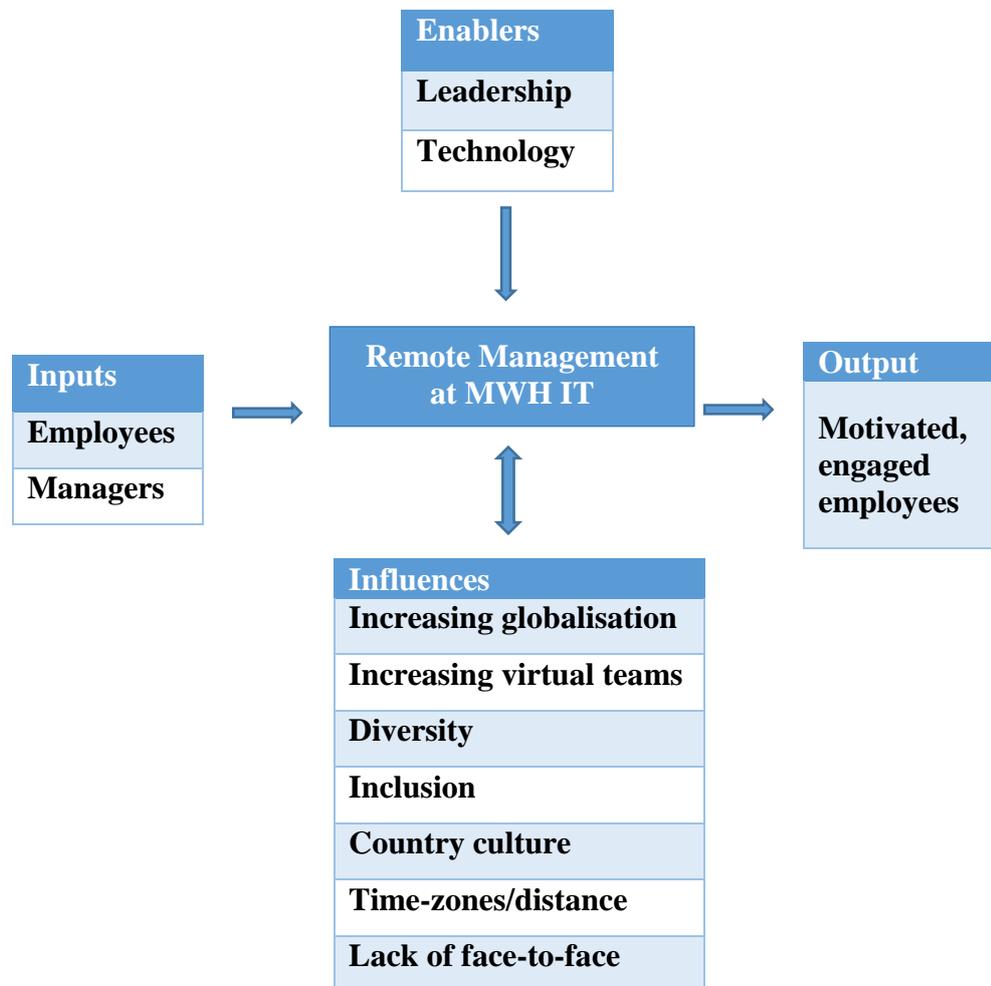
Figure 2 demonstrates that the output of effective line-management at MWH IT is viewed as motivated employees as per Herzberg's (1968) theory and in relation, should contribute towards the engagement of employees. Use of technology is considered as an enabler (Han & Beyerlein, 2016), and leadership is suggested as an integral part of line-management. There are many factors that should be considered when managing geographically dispersed teams; Derven's (2016) factors of Diversity, Inclusion, Purpose, People, Process, but also, time-zone difference, culture and other factors that may be specific to MWH IT and discovered during this study.

2.9. Summary

This chapter outlines key discussions on management, analyses the development of management theory following societal changes, then examines the influence of more recent societal changes (global organisations, use of technology) on management. The conceptual model in 2.9 shows how the elements of the literature reviewed above, have informed the perspective of the author and influenced the research undertaken.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses methodological paradigms considered, with justification for the selected methodology and rejected methodologies. The research design and methods are presented alongside ethical considerations made in the research design and methodology selection.

3.2. Methodological considerations

The study of business and management emerged from business practice and a wide variety of academic subjects (applied, social and natural sciences, humanities) (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). This has resulted in several philosophies and methodologies being used by business researchers (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). Although this array of approaches may initially be considered confusing, it will not only provide the reader with a better understanding of how the research was carried out, but also why it was carried out in such a way and what the researcher is truly trying to achieve.

This research focuses on multiple realities, not one and therefore takes an interpretivist phenomenological epistemology with a subjectivist ontological position. This approach has been chosen rather than a positivist one because the research question is answered via the subjective interpretations of the research participants and unlike the studies discussed in Chapter 2, is concerned with the conversation and human interaction. In this research project, the reality of one participant is no more valid than another and the research therefore sits within a constructivist framework (Quinlan, Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2015).

3.3. Justification for the selected paradigm and methodology

As discussed above, previous studies identified in the literature on remote line-management have used quantitative research methods (Watson, 2007; Neufeld, Wan, & Fang, 2010). While the results of those studies are useful within their defined scope, this dissertation studies the effectiveness of remote line-management and as 'effectiveness' is subjective and differs depending on the opinions of the employees being managed, using quantitative methods would not elicit those key opinions. A further influencing factor is the proximity and access the researcher has into not only the organisation, but the specific department of this case-study, this has

allowed the researcher to draw insight that would not be possible as an outsider, as suggested by Yin (2015).

3.4. Rejected methodologies and methods

As above, a quantitative methodology was rejected due to the lack of insight that can be drawn from quantifying results. Although using a mixed methodology may have provided a more comprehensive set of conclusions, this was also rejected due to the time-scale and word-limit restrictions of this research project and the risk of losing focus on the specific research questions.

Both structured and unstructured interviews were considered but rejected. Structured interviews were rejected due to the reduced possibility of gaining unexpected information, and as the research had specific areas of intended investigation, unstructured interviews would have been inappropriate due the risk of going off-topic.

3.5. Research design

The research that has taken place forms a case-study which generates knowledge of the particular phenomenon (Yin, 2015) by exploring the opinions and attitudes towards remote and local line-management. As with most case-studies, generalisations should not be made (Jackson, 2015).

3.6. Research methods

The primary research method is semi-structured interviews. Jackson notes that "nonverbal responses may give… greater insight into the respondents' true opinions and beliefs" (2015, p. 107), and therefore interviews with those in other locations were primarily conducted via video. A familiar tool was chosen for these to maximise interviewee comfort. To allow for high sound quality as prioritised by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), all interviews were carried out in meeting rooms.

3.6.1. Cultural consideration

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) note that it is important that the interviewer understands the culture of those being interviewed. The questions or delivery of questions can be therefore tailored if needed and misinterpretation of questions or responses can be minimised. Working in MWH IT for several years has exposed the researcher to the different country cultures of the

participants. For example, it is common in India to shake one's head from side-to-side during a conversation to indicate attention paid to the other person. However, as this gesture is very close to the 'shake-of-the-head' often used in western culture to mean 'no' or disagreement, this could potentially have caused vast misinterpretation with a fundamental impact on findings.

3.6.2. Data handling and integrity

Following each interview, the recordings were transcribed, as described in 3.3.6. The recordings, transcriptions, data sets and all other files relating to the research were stored on Google Drive and synchronised with the researcher's computer. This meant if the computer was unavailable or broken, the files were accessible from any device with an internet connection.

3.6.3. Question construction

As recommended by Jackson (2015) and Adams, Khan and Raeside (2014), the order of the research questions has been designed to put the respondent at ease before eliciting more sensitive information. The plan was:

1) **Opening**

   Thank respondent for participating, explain the research purpose, explain their selection (sampling criteria), explain the scope of the questions (i.e. they only relate to MWH IT, not Stantec IT or any previous employer), reiterate their anonymity and give the opportunity to seek clarification or ask questions.

2) **Warm-up**

   Questions 1 and 2 (see Appendix A) - designed to be answered without much thought, are not sensitive and should therefore put the respondent at ease.

3) **Main body**

   Main questions, more probing.

4) **Wind-down**

   Indicate interview is coming to an end. Ask if they have anything else to add.

5) Closure

Thank respondent for participation again, explain when they will be able to review the relevant section of the dissertation.

The questions were developed with the research question in mind and were reviewed by asking the question, 'which objective does this contribute to?'. If a question was deemed not to contribute to an objective, it was removed or altered until it did. As the interviews intended to explore employee engagement, some questions took influence from Gallup Q12 (Gallup Inc, 2016), as it is considered the world's leading employee engagement tool (Gallup Inc, 2017) and is currently used by MWH so employees may therefore feel comfortable with the type of questions. The research questions were specifically influenced by those statements pertaining to line-management as the research only intends to investigate the relationship between employee engagement and line-management. The Gallup statements are closed and intended for quantitative analysis, the wording was therefore amended to draw qualitative responses.

During question construction, it was found that some questions warranted follow-up questions. For example, one question initially followed the format 'Have you received praise about your work in the last seven days, and was this from your manager?', but was later broken into two separate questions following advice from Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), that 'double-barrel' questions should be avoided if a response to both parts of the question is desired.

The questions, alongside their ordering, justification, references and related objectives can be found in Appendix A.

3.6.4. Pilot interviews

As suggested by Adams, Khan and Raeside (2014), an initial 'pre-test' interview was performed with a family member. Although she does not work in MWH IT, it allowed for the researcher to feel comfortable with the questions and to recognise a couple of gaps and opportunities for misinterpretation of question wording before the pilot interviews. Because the practice interview was with a family member, the feedback on the questions and approach was more honest than was likely with the participants of the pilot interviews, especially as the researcher is a manager and the pilot interview respondents were not. This

highlighted that the interviews might not last as long as desired, and that opportunities were missed to elicit information on opinions on the types of role and types of employee personality, and how that might influence the effectiveness of remote line-management. Two questions were therefore added after this practice interview which both elongated the interview but also filled those gaps identified. These questions were 'Do you believe remote line-management works better for some roles than others?' and 'Do you believe remote line-management works better for some employee personalities than others?'.

The interviewees for the pilot interviews were purposely selected from different country cultures (India and the UK) to demonstrate how the questions may be interpreted from different cultures and to allow for additions and amendments based on that, as discussed in 3.6.1. The pilot interviews were recorded and transcribed as with the other interviews so that they could be analysed with the view of answering the research objectives. The pilot interviews provided reassurance that the questions asked could elicit responses relevant to the research objectives, and that they were appropriate for the length of time desired for each interview.

An observation made was that the researcher should organise the timing of each interview so that there is time to continue, if needed, after the allotted time. During the first pilot interview, the interviewee had a lot more to say than expected. The researcher had a scheduled meeting immediately after the allotted interview time, and therefore had to draw the interview to a close by not asking for any elaboration on the last few questions. This meant that valuable information could potentially have been missed. All interviews following that were therefore scheduled with an additional 30 minutes to allow for interviews to continue if they are providing useful information, and to ensure there is some time following the interview for the researcher to make initial observations.

Another reflection was that the interview carried out over video call felt uncomfortable and less like a natural conversation than the face-to-face one. Some small-talk was made at the beginning to put the participant at ease, however, this was done before video and recording was switched on. Following that interview, all subsequent video interviews had recording and video enabled

before any small- talk took place, this did seem to get both parties more comfortable with being on a video call but the video interviews remained less natural than the face-to-face ones throughout the process.

3.6.5. Sampling strategy

The original dataset used was a list of all employees, job title, manager's name, alongside their base office, country and region and consisted of 134 people. All employees whom the researcher managed were removed to minimise bias. Each name was marked as either having a local (same office) or remote line-manager, then, if remote, whether the line-manager was based in the same geographical region. All employees who were remotely managed but by managers in the same geographical region were removed. Because of time-zone and cultural similarities, it was felt doing this would provide a higher contrast. The study population then comprised two lists, one of truly remotely managed employees, and one of truly local (same office) managed employees.

The strategy was to select two participants from each region, one with a local line-manager and one with a remote. MWH includes India in the Asia-Pacific region; however, an additional employee was interviewed from India as it is the only country in the Eastern Hemisphere in which several IT employees are based and it was felt may provide an additional perspective. These people were randomly selected, however, there were some cases in which the participant selection was forced. For example, most employees based in the Americas region with a remote line-manager report directly to the researcher, they were therefore removed from the list and the possible respondents with remote line-managers in that region were reduced to just three. It should also be noted that although no effort was made to ensure the people interviewed did not have the same line-manager as each other, this turned out to be the case and all interviewees had unique line-managers.

Each of the two lists mentioned above was broken down by region and Microsoft Excel's random number generator was used to select one person from each region in each list category.

There was one occasion where a person was willing to take part but there was no mutually available time in schedules, and one occasion where a respondent

declined to take part. Those respondents were therefore removed from the list and the random number generator used again to select two replacement respondents.

3.6.6. Interview analysis

Very brief notes were made during each interview to capture the interviewee's tone, physical situation/location (i.e. at home or in the office) and any other factors that may help understand possible bias and therefore contribute to the analysis. This was also done to demonstrate that the interviewer was interested in what the interviewee was saying (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). Immediately following each interview, more detailed notes were made to enable the interview to continue smoothly, without distraction but to also capture the researcher's thoughts at the time, losing as little of the interview experience as possible (Wengraf, 2001).

Each interview was transcribed in full. The transcriptions do not include all pauses or other non-verbal points as the focus is the content of what was said, not how it was said, however, significant points have been recorded such as very long pauses or when statements were made in jest. Like the suggestion by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill to mark "questions in italics and responses in normal font" (2016, p. 486), responses in each transcription have been indented to provide quick and easy distinguishability of questions and responses.

During and following transcription, an open coding approach was taken by simply creating categories based on what was said in each interview (and taking influence from the literature), rather than trying to fit responses or parts of responses into pre-existing categories. This process also allowed for the identification of patterns as well as exceptions in the data.

Coding of the transcriptions was done by using the NVivo software application as this enabled the researcher to easily identify where the same or a similar code had been identified in multiple places and therefore allowed for a more comprehensive analysis to be carried out in the given timeframe than if a manual approach had been used.

Prior to any analysis, each interview transcription was reviewed and typing, spelling and formatting mistakes were corrected so that the files could be imported into NVivo and analysis take place without distraction of such mistakes.

An inductive approach was taken for this thematic analysis by reading through each interview transcription and creating a code (category) for each new point made by the interviewees. Some codes were identified in later interviews that were relevant to earlier interviews and an iterative process was therefore followed to code the earlier interviews using the newly identified codes. Following this, some codes were discarded, renamed or moved into other existing codes. These codes were then refined and grouped into broader themes to enable easier identification of data that fell into themes relevant to the research question.

Upon first review, it was not clear that all themes identified held relevance to the research objectives and therefore a second review of the data took place where statements were categorised using codes and themes that would specifically help answer each research objective. The previous codes and themes identified were not removed as they provided points of additional interest or background information.

As suggested by Adams, Khan and Raeside (2014), following the coding process, groups were identified to find if there were similar responses from different groups of people (similar job roles, same region, gender etc.).

3.7. Ethical considerations

3.7.1. Position of the researcher

It should be recognised that the researcher holds somewhat of a dual-role in this study. Alongside the role of researcher, she also is a Manager in the organisation for which management is being studied. Despite the effort to avoid researcher bias, the researcher inevitably has opinions on the effectiveness of remote line-management at MWH IT (she interacts with managers and employees in the organisation, she is a remote line-manager herself, and has a line-manager in a different geographical region).

A further consideration is that although the researcher's direct-reports were removed from the sample, those taking part in each interview inevitably recognise the researcher as a manager and an employee with inside knowledge and personal alliances that an external researcher would not have. It is therefore possible that the honesty of responses may have been adjusted to fit the comfort level of the respondent.

3.7.2. Identification of the employees

As many of the interview responses were about the interviewees line-manager, it is important that the findings are written so that the employees cannot be identified. All names and other identifying data have therefore been removed from the transcriptions and the people interviewed are labelled as 'Interviewees 1-7'. The interviewees were given a copy of Chapter 4 (where some quotes are provided) so that they had the opportunity to request amendments to the content before submission. This was explained in the Participant Information Document (Appendix B).

3.7.3. Informed consent

As recommended by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), a Participant Information Document (Appendix B) was provided to each interviewee prior to scheduling the interviews so that they had a chance to review the purpose of the research and understand how the information they provided will be used and recorded. Because of the remote nature of most of the interviews, verbal consent was recorded prior to each interview starting.

3.8. Summary

The primary research method is that of in-depth, semi-structured interviews which form a case-study with an interpretivist phenomenological epistemology. The interview questions were constructed referencing the available literature and by ensuring all contribute to the research objectives. Both random and selective sampling were used. Thematic analysis was done by transcribing the interviews, creating codes from the content and grouping those codes into themes. The findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

4. Case-study Findings, Analysis and Interpretation

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the interviews with seven IT employees from around the globe at MWH. The codes (categories) that emerged from initial analysis are shown with the themes they were grouped into (Table 2). For each research objective, details and employee opinions from the interviews are then presented. Following that is an analysis of the findings in line with the literature discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter forms the basis of the conclusions drawn in Chapter 5.

4.2. Research Findings

When analysing the research data, many codes (categories) emerged. Most were grouped into larger themes in relation to each research objective and can be seen in Table 2 below, although there are some such as 'agile teams', that do not directly relate to a specific research objective but do provide some additional context that are discussed in the findings and analysis below.

Table 2 - Themes and Codes

Current Management Approach	Engagement	Definition of effective manager	Methods to make remote management more effective
Variety of management styles	Positive	Two-way responsibility	Manager training
Flexibility	Negative	Communication skills	Time to manage
Laid-back		Emotional support	Metrics
Manager availability		Mentoring	Communication • Face-to-face • Regular/recurring meetings • Phone • Video call • Ad-hoc • Instant Message • E-mail • Informal
Traditional management		Organisation skills	Technology • Shared Working Document
Autonomy		Tailor approach	
Reactive		Trust	
		Relationships • Personal	
		Development • Goals-Targets • Performance review • Training	

The first two interview questions intended to ease the interviewee into the interview and to provide some contextual information which may provide further insight during analysis (tenure and whether the employee considers their role technical). All but one of the employees interviewed had been with the company for over five years. Four of those interviewed considered their role technical and three non-technical.

The findings and codes that provided significant insight are presented in relation to each research objective below.

4.2.1. To determine the current management approach at MWH IT:

Most interviewees made some reference to there being a variety of management styles and approaches currently in use in MWH IT.

Two respondents identified the possible cause of this as the promotion of people from non-management roles and with no management training or guidance. One interviewee commented:

> *"I think it's different based on the person that's managing you, it's not like 'here's a guidebook you need to follow this', no-one's actually training them up or teaching them things so they probably learn from just working"* Employee 3.

One employee, previously holding a management role, identified that managers promoted from within are expected to continue with their individual contributor role. This results in reactive, rather than proactive management.

All interviewees stated that they are currently given autonomy in terms of how they complete their work. One respondent stated:

> *"the direction that I have received from [my manager] and [his manager] and [his director] is all been very much, 'here's the end game, get us there'… I don't have people questioning me on a daily or weekly basis"* Employee 5.

Another respondent commented:

> *"the role that he's in and the role that I'm in, there's a sense of your own accountability and your own responsibility, that you need to be able to handle things. It's not that I don't go to [my manager] for assistance… but the smaller things are things that I should be able to handle within my role"* Employee 6.

The employee who made the latter comment was the only person interviewed who is also a manager of people and whose line-manager is a Vice President and therefore provided a unique perspective. She gave the opinion that her manager adopted a certain approach with her because of her seniority and because her manager's directorial position does not require him to have a close understanding of the work she does and how she does it.

There was no suggestion that different styles were adopted for managing remote employees or local ones, and some even stated they have received and observed different styles of management both with local and remote line-managers. One commented:

> *"You see [one of the IT managers in the UK] interacting with his team, he has regular catch ups, he's asking how they're doing and making sure they're on top of things.*
>
> *I think it depends on the person, not necessarily where they are. I don't think I feel any less motivated working for [my manager] because he's overseas, I think it's his personality…, you could get managers that are more proactive like [another US-based manager], I know she has weekly one-to-ones and so people [in her team] probably felt more in touch with their manager because… there's a weekly opportunity to catch up with your manager"* Employee 2.

Two interviewees expressed that their manager followed a 'laid-back' approach, one of which observed that other managers he had worked with also adopted a 'laid-back' manner.

One employee had previously had managers in three different geographical regions and noted that there were regional differences:

> *"if I'm working with somebody in the UK, they are much more professional and to the point, Asia Pacific is a bit laid back, US is like 'we just need to get this done'"* Employee 1

Most participants felt their manager made themselves available to them, again, this was without prompting or a direct question. Half of the people who made this comment were managed remotely and half locally.

4.2.2. To compare employee engagement of employees with a local line-manager to those with a manager based in another geographical region

The analysis of responses relating to this objective was initiated by categorising answers primarily to questions 3-12 (mostly derived from Gallup survey questions – see Appendix A) as either 'negative' or 'positive' engagement. The core questions divide the following section but responses to the other questions (see Appendix A) which indicated levels of employee engagement were also coded as either positive or negative and are included in the section below.

4.2.2.1. Do you know what your manager expects of you?

Out of the seven people interviewed, four (two local and two remote) said that they know what their manager expects of them. Two of the people who answered 'no' alluded to the acquisition of the company and the transition period the department is in as the cause, as reflected in this quote:

> *"I don't think my line-manager knows what's expected of her, so I'm going to say at this moment in time, no"* Employee 4

4.2.2.2. Do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?

Five of the interviewees answered this question in a positive manner, there is no common denominator between these people.

One of the employees with a remote line-manager had received praise from their manager in the previous seven days, however, only one employee with a local line-manager had too. It is also worth noting that two employees with a remote manager and two with a local manager expressed that praise from customers/end-users means more to them than from their manager. Some mentioned that praise from their manager is not expected due to autonomous roles and it can therefore be argued that praise from line-managers is not an indicator of employee engagement within the context of IT at MWH. An example of such opinion is below:

> *"Knowing that I'm helping them deliver on our commitments to our paying customers perhaps means even more to me than a manager complimenting something about the work"* Employee 5

4.2.2.4.   Do you feel your manager cares about you as a person?
None of the interviewees said that they did not feel like their manager cared about them as a person, however, two answered with non-definitive responses:

> *"Yes and no. I was quite touched where after the Manchester bombing, he actually called me up to make sure I was alright and nobody I knew was affected, so that was nice"* Employee 2

> *"I think he does, he just doesn't necessarily express that"* Employee 6

These employees are not both locally or remotely managed, but they both carry out non-technical roles and are both female.

4.2.2.5. Does your manager encourage your development?

Most responses to this question were positive, although most people said they were the ones to initiate any developmental opportunities. As an example:

> *"I've come forward and asked to attend different classes, he's supportive of that but it's usually been my initiative"* Employee 6

Only three of the interviewees suggested that their manager was proactively supporting their professional development and one employee even said:

> *"even in my performance review, he didn't really ask what my aspirations were or what you wanted to do or where you wanted to go. In fact, the only thing he really said is that he'd probably encourage us to look for another job"* Employee 2

Again, with these responses, there is no clear correlation between distance from manager (or any other distinguishing feature) and type of response.

4.2.2.6. Do you think your manager values your opinions?

All but one of the respondents felt that their manager values their opinions. The people in more technical roles suggested that their manager was more likely to value their opinions on topics that the employee had better technical expertise in:

> *"I'll say 'we should do it this way' and…if it's about Skype [which the employee has expertise in but manager does not], he'll just be like 'ok whatever you say'"* Employee 3

The non-technical employees (two remote, one local) suggested that their manager valued their opinions on matters regarding people they had more experience dealing with or if they were in a room during a meeting with somebody but their manager was joined to the meeting via telephone. The only person who had a significantly negative response to this question is currently managed remotely.

Most interviewees expressed that although the company has a compulsory progress review in December, and an optional one in June, they did not complete the one in June. For some, this appeared to be manager initiated, some it was employee initiated as per this comment:

> *"I did not have a mid-year review in June, it was my conscious choice not to have one I guess but she certainly didn't follow up with me"*
> Employee 3

It was proposed that this is because it is difficult to manage progression due to long-term role uncertainty while the two companies integrate:

> *"I feel there's things we could be doing but there's no point spending time on stuff if it's not going to be worthwhile if Stantec are going to change everything so I think [my manager] is just wanting us to do the basics and then see what happens with Stantec because in a way, there isn't any point in us developing"* Employee 2

Despite the lack of formal progress meetings, two people mentioned that they did discuss progress, just not in a formal setting. One person said this was done on a regular basis:

> *"I'd say mainly our one to ones consist of 'what are you working on', 'do you need any help with anything', 'is there anything you want to do?', and to me that's enough. Then I'd say probably every other week its 'okay, you've done this, this is good' or 'you need to focus on this more'."* Employee 7

Three of the four people interviewed who have a remote line-manager would prefer to discuss their progress more often:

> *"I wish there was the luxury of time to do that because I always feel like there's significant personal benefit to having those kinds of conversations".* Employee 5

"I'm quite a different personality, I tend to focus on something, I like to see results. For that to happen, I like to be pushed, so I guess, no, it's probably not happening enough for my liking". Employee 4

"maybe every couple of months it would be good to have a catch up and just see where things are". Employee 2

Regarding regularity of communication, one person commented:

"I think it's probably more important with a remote manager to have regular catch-ups because they don't see what you're doing on a day-to-day basis. If someone's in the office, they can, [my previous local manager] could see how many people came up to your desk, she could see just by your physical demeanour how things were going, you lose all that with a remote manager because they don't see you. They have no idea whether you're sat back in your chair doing nothing all day, whether you've got your nose to the ground, they have no idea what you're doing" Employee 2

4.2.3. To define what MWH IT employees perceive as an effective line-manager

Five of the seven people interviewed expressed that they think a line-manager should tailor their approach depending on the situation or employee they are managing. Influencing factors mentioned are; the topic being discussed, the preference and comfort levels of each employee, whether the employee is introverted or extroverted, the regional culture of the employee, the tenure and experience of the employee, whether the employee is remote and the role the employee carries out. Examples of such quotes are:

"If we are discussing something serious, it would be better to do it on a video call than on a voice call because you get to see the expression the person is putting on at the time to know whether the person is understanding what you are saying or not" Employee 1.

"I guess it's the same thing as coming in as a new person, for new things, you need direction, when it's something you should already know, you don't" Employee 7

Two employees felt that managers should provide emotional support. These were from the US and New Zealand, one with a local manager and one with a remote manager. One commented:

> *"everybody has life events that happen to them and you just want somebody to be kind and caring about it, and for the most part, [my manager] has been supportive, it's not always fun crying in your boss's office but things like that happen and it's nice to know there's a safe place to be able to share things like that"* Employee 6.

Some respondents spoke of the importance of manager organisational skills, regular communication, and communication skills of both the manager and employee. Most commented that these were of more importance when managing people remotely as demonstrated in 4.2.4.

Five of the seven interviewees, on multiple occasions, pointed out that the effectiveness of a line-manager is dependent on the behaviour of the employee and is therefore a two-way responsibility. One commented:

> *"It should be the employees' responsibility as well as the manager's responsibility to talk to each other. If I'm having any trouble, I should go ahead and talk to my manager, rather than waiting for our scheduled call"* Employee 1.

Regarding goals:

> *"that's a two-way negotiation of course, I wouldn't expect the employee to set all their own goals and me to just accept them, and likewise I don't think a manager should just define and push goals down to their employees, unless it's a very junior employee, very new to their role"* Employee 5

Another remarked:

> *"If I go to them for direction, then I expect a response but if they come to me, I would be giving the same back to them as well."* Employee 4

4.2.4. To present ways in which remote line-management can be most effective

Throughout the interviews, techniques and methods that are currently in use and deemed effective were mentioned, as well as suggestions for improvement. 4.2.3 discusses those elements of line-management that MWH IT employees expect and find effective regardless of whether employees are managed remotely or not. However, some of those elements mentioned become more difficult when managers are not co-located with their employees and those are the things discussed here.

Most interviewees felt that trust was an integral part of being an effective line-manager and some expressed that the building of trust was of more importance when managing employees remotely. As per this comment:

> *"I'd say with remote management, there's a bigger trust factor in it because you don't really have any control of what the person is really doing"* Employee 7

One employee did say that there would be no difference building trust with a local manager than a remote manager, although that employee has had multiple remote line-managers but never a local one. Another commented:

> *"I speak from experience as someone who's been a manager of people who were remote and co-located, it's more comfortable managing someone who's co-located to you because you see what they're doing on a daily basis, whereas if you don't have that luxury, you wonder how much of their work day is productive… we're really talking about trust here"* Employee 5

It was clear from the interviews that the employees feel that communication is a fundamental part of being a manager but that communication is even more critical and challenging when a manager is remote from their employee(s). One employee who has had multiple managers in various regions stated:

> "*I've got a lot of experience working with a remote manager and my general observations are; it takes a lot more effort to be in sync with your manager, to understand what your manager needs from you, to help your manager understand you, your strengths and weaknesses and what you're doing on a regular basis, so that does require more communication, and certainly the farther away they are, that's more challenging*". Employee 5

Employees suggested a preference to converse with their manager on personal topics. One employee stated:

> "*If we had overlapping work schedules, certainly I would prefer to get to know each other at a personal level and build that rapport*". Employee 5

Another commented:

> "*personally, I like having a relationship with the person. A sense of maybe, that you like sports or that you like something else*" Employee 6

Two remotely managed employees suggested that these conversations come more naturally when working in the same office:

> "*I think it's only natural you would have [a different relationship] … I think you'd lose the personal side of it. I think it's important to have that social as well as formal interaction, because quite often you feel frustrated, like rather than sit and have a formal call to discuss it, let's just grab a cup of tea and have a chat*" Employee 2

> "*the subjects we spoke about would be more relevant, because, for instance, if she had to work here…, we'd be able to talk about earthquake damage, things that relate to us, how the All Blacks are doing, what's in the local news, that type of thing*" Employee 4.

Most of the employees suggested a desire for at least an initial face-to-face meeting. One commented:

> *"[other UK employees], I'd never speak to them, but once I'd met them in person, I'd just ping them to say hello and talk to them. For me, I have to meet the person. I talk to people that I haven't met, but it won't be at the same level".* Employee 3

Another stated:

> *"it would have made a difference [to have met my manager earlier]. We had been working together before but the comfort levels do change after meeting each other…I think the first one is the most important…it really breaks the ice".* Employee 1

4.2.5. Additional observations

4.2.5.1.   Agile Teams

On the subject of the future of remote management one interviewee stated that he has observed a trend towards using 'Agile teams' and that:

> *"agile is of course more effective with co-location… people sitting around a big table working on a project together"* Employee 5

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. Introduction

This section analyses the findings that were presented in 4.2 by drawing meaning from patterns in the responses and by synthesising the results with the theories and findings of the authors and researchers in Chapter 2. The structure of this section follows each of the research objectives followed by a discussion on the additional observations made.

4.3.2. To determine the current management approach at MWH IT

The broad difference in experiences the interviewees have had demonstrates that there is no overall management approach at MWH IT. It is possible, however, that country culture plays a part in this as those with a manager based in the UK or New Zealand referred to them as 'laid-back', but none of the managers based in the US were deemed 'laid-back'.

The two common experiences identified are; manager availability and employee autonomy. The findings suggest that currently, MWH IT Managers make themselves available to be contacted by their employees and that this does not change regardless of whether they are in the same geographical region as those employees or not.

All the employees mentioned they are given autonomy with their work in different sections of the interview without being directly asked about autonomy. This provides confidence that in the statement that managers generally provide their employees autonomy in their roles. This reflects that managers of those interviewed are all providing the 'responsibility' motivating factor suggested by Herzberg (1968), but adds that 'responsibility' is given in the sense that employees decide how they carry out their work.

During the research process, each of Drucker's (1985) five basic operations of a manager (as referenced in 2.2) were mentioned as currently taking place at MWH IT, however, none of the interviewees said that all five operations were performed by their manager. This suggests that Drucker's theory is not as relevant today as when it was written in 1955, or that Drucker's later theory on knowledge workers is more applicable to this context as the interviewees are all knowledge workers. Of Drucker's six principles for the management of knowledge workers, the research findings show that; defining own tasks, autonomy or productivity, continuous innovation and learning are present in management at MWH IT, some of those elements that aren't currently present were desired by employees and this is discussed in 4.2.3 and 4.2.4.

Upon review, the research results reinforce Cole and Kelly's (2011) view that there is little value in Fayol's fourteen management principles (1949) in the modern day. Although some of those principles might be present in the organisation, almost none were mentioned by any of the interviewees except order and purpose which is discussed in 4.3.3. It could however be argued that this may be because the interviewees were knowledge workers and that present-day shop-floor employees may provide contrary results.

4.3.3. To compare employee engagement of employees with a local line-manager to those with a manager based in another geographical region

All participants provided some responses indicative of positive employee engagement and some of negative engagement. Generally, there were more statements reflective of negative employee engagement than positive. Guaspari's (2015) suggestion that most employees are not engaged, is therefore true of this organisation.

Although the findings are not supportive or unsupportive of a particular theory, one interviewee pointed out that he 'buys-in' to the company vision of 'Building a Better World'. He stated he should be able to motivate himself because he feels good that the organisation helps 'provide clean water to our communities'. Consequently, perhaps it is not the success of a company that engages employees as Guaspari (2015) suggests, but more the company's vision and mission.

The findings show no correlation between manager-employee distance and employee engagement, with the exception that employees felt progress discussions were not frequent enough. This holds similarity to Watson's (2007) findings, however engagement was evaluated rather than satisfaction, and frequency of progress discussions is used to represent perception of career advancement.

4.3.4. To define what MWH IT employees perceive as an effective line-manager

In what initially seems in contrast to Edgar, Geare and O'Kane (2015) who proposed that knowledge workers require motivation, rather than task-organisation, some interviewees suggested they did not require motivation from their manager with one saying:

"I don't expect my manager to be a cheerleader" Employee 5

However, the findings suggest a desire for Herzberg's Motivators (Herzberg F. , 1968) as each motivator was demonstrated by more than one employee, suggesting that employees do find value in motivation, but might not associate Herzberg's factors with motivation. Regarding having a sense of achievement, two employees expressed gratification after resolving a tough issue.

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The findings support Fayol (1949) and Derven's (2016) belief that reinforcing purpose is an integral part of being a manager, as suggested by this employee:

"for me, all I need is that clear sense of purpose, understanding the goals and how the goals support the vision and mission" Employee 5

The findings in 4.2.3, support the suggestion by Neufeld, Wan and Fang (2010) that the effectiveness of communication is based on high interaction frequency. They also demonstrate how, contrary to more recent theories (Herzberg F. , 1968; Drucker, 1994; Derven, 2016), the MWH IT employees echo Drucker's 1955 work (The practice of management, 2011) by naming communication as requirement of effective line-management. It is conceivable, that the importance of communication is exaggerated in global organisations. This was reflected by one employee who stated that people who are not based in the corporate office "don't know what's going on" (Employee 6).

4.3.5. To present ways in which remote line-management can be most effective

The findings show a desire for increased progress discussions for employees remote from their managers. Although this is somewhat supportive of Blair (2015), employees expressed that these discussions should not necessarily be monthly (as Blair suggests), but the frequency and formality of them should be tailored to meet the employees' preference.

Blair's (2015) theory that there is reduced social interaction in virtual teams is echoed at MWH IT. One employee stated there are cultural boundaries to those conversations which may be a driver to employ 'intercultural learning' as suggested by Han and Beyerlein's (2016).

On building trust, in agreement with one of Derven's (2016) suggested methods, one employee stated that both manager and employee should 'keep their word'. Blair (2015) recommended demonstration of work-ethic and integrity builds trust, but this research has been able to suggest how this might be done with little overlap in time-zones. Two interviewees proposed that the reliance on trust might be reduced or trust might be easier to build, if metrics were applied to the work undertaken so that managers could easily see how employees were performing without the need for close observation.

The results of this research contradict Han and Beyerlein (2016). For these IT employees, technology cannot replace face-to-face communication and at the least, an initial face-to-face meeting is essential to 'break-the-ice' and form relationships. Blair's (2015) recommendation to hold a team-building event may expedite 'breaking-the-ice'.

While the findings are in support of using technology like Blair (2015) and Derven (2016), they suggest the use of a variety of tools to suit different people and needs, and also make some software package recommendations. When discussing communication and collaboration in geographically dispersed teams, some of the people interviewed expressed that having a variety of technologies is beneficial as different people have different technology preferences and different types of communication are suited to delivery methods. For example, it was suggested that a serious discussion should be done via video-call rather than telephone as facial expressions can be seen.

One of the primary pieces of communication technology used by the organisation is Skype for Business. The company uses this for instant messaging, video calls, conference calls and one-to-one audio calls (including telephone calls to external people). There are other packages available for these types of communication, however, some of the comments received suggest that continued use of Skype for Business would be beneficial in the management of geographically dispersed teams. One commented that Skype enables meeting attendees to see who is speaking and another suggested that the company could enable 'presence detection' to show when employees were working outside of the office.

One employee spoke of using Microsoft OneNote to create a shared document. This is more of a collaboration, than a communication technology. It was suggested by an employee with 12.5 hours' difference with his manager so one can infer that this is particularly useful in teams spread across different time zones. Employees would be able to see the notes others had made on a piece of work without having to speak to that person outside of their working hours.

4.4. Summary

This chapter presented the findings most pertinent to the research objectives, then analysed those by identifying implications and possible causality, often through synthesis with the literature in Chapter 2.

Some observations were made by only single employees and some by multiple. For most group observations, manager locale was not a commonality.

Many of the findings reflected theories discussed in Chapter 2, however some gaps were filled and contrasting observations were made. Chapter 5 draws conclusions from this analysis.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an evaluation of the methodology and research methods used and recommends changes to those in the event of future research. Conclusions are then drawn from the analysis for each of the four research objectives, demonstrating the value to the business and how the research has filled gaps identified in the literature. Further conclusions of how, and how well the research has answered the research question are made, followed by details of limitations of this study and the opportunities left open for further research. The conclusions in this chapter have been used to build recommendations in Chapter 6.

5.2. Critical evaluation of adopted methodology

As intended, addressing this research project from an interpretivist phenomenological position did enable the elicitation of in-depth opinionated data from interviewees. Being able to support some of the findings with comparative data from managers may have provided more holistic findings upon which to draw conclusions. It should also be acknowledged though, that interviewing employees' managers would present ethical challenges.

Interviewee reluctance to participate in a video interviews was not anticipated. For those who were reluctant, the decision was made to continue with interviews via telephone. Although non-verbal cues were missed in those two telephone interviews and new participants could have been selected, it seemed the interviewees were more forthcoming having been accommodated in this way.

Five of the interviewees had a previous relationship with the researcher and although this meant rapport was built quickly, it could also be argued that employees may not have been as honest as if they did not know the researcher at all, or if the research was carried out using anonymous surveys so that the responses could not be attributed to an individual by the researcher.

5.3. Conclusions about each research objective

5.3.1. To determine the current management approach at MWH IT

To answer the research question 'To what extent can globally remote line-management be as effective as local line-management for IT at MWH?', it was first necessary to understand the current management approach at MWH IT.

The findings show that there is no overarching management approach. One reason for that is people are promoted to management roles with no management training or guidance. Country culture is also identified as an influencing factor for this as per 4.3.2. It is suggested that managers based in the UK and New Zealand have a more laid-back approach than those in the US, however, further research into this is recommended in 5.7.

One common management trait at MWH IT that is not discussed in the literature, is that managers make themselves available to be contacted by employees regardless of whether they're in the same locale as the employee.

The findings demonstrate that Fayol's (1949) principles are not representative of management at MWH IT, but Drucker's more recent work on knowledge-workers (Knowledge-worker productivity: The biggest challenge, 1999), particularly that of 'autonomy on productivity', is reflected. This confirms that for the employees interviewed, leadership is indeed integral to management, as inferred by Drucker (2011) and Kotter (2000).

5.3.2. To compare employee engagement of employees with a local line-manager to those with a manager based in another geographical region

Although the research results are unique to the IT department at MWH, and are qualitative, they support of the quantitative findings of Watson (2007) in that they show no noticeable difference in engagement of employees managed remotely.

The findings are also supportive of Neufield, Wan and Fang's (2010) theory that distance has no impact on perceived leader performance and that high interaction frequency is crucial as described in the comments in 4.2.3.

All who did not know their manager's expectations of them are based in different regions, but had non-technical roles. This implies that technical roles are easily transferable in acquisition situations and perhaps, given the current transitory state of the department, effort should be increased to clarify expectations to those with non-technical roles.

While the research does not prove nor disprove Gruman and Saks (2011) and Guaspari's (2015) contrasting views on employee engagement, they add that a contributing factor to engagement is employees' buy-in to the organisation's vision and mission.

5.3.3. To define what MWH IT employees perceive as an effective line-manager

MWH IT employees feel that an effective line-manager should tailor their approach depending on the context or employee being managed. A gap that was arguably left in the literature because the empirical studies carried out previously (Han & Beyerlein, 2016; Watson, 2007), followed a quantitative methodology so didn't elicit opinion.

Employees also acknowledged that successful line-management has a dependency on the employee. It is therefore inferred that for a line manager to be effective, they should make is clear to the employee what their responsibilities in the manager-employee relationship are.

The analysis shows that employees value motivation in the form of Herzberg's Motivating factors (1968). Although the findings support Edgar, Geare and O'Kane's (2015) suggestion that knowledge workers require motivation rather than task-organisation, the analysis concludes that these employees can be motivated by things such as the company vision or recognition from clients, factors which are not under line-manager control. Managers should therefore focus on motivational areas they have direct control over, such as assigning responsibility to employees.

The most prominent expectation from the employees interviewed is that their manager communicates regularly. The analysis suggests this is of particular importance to global organisations, explaining why communication is not reflected in some recent literature.

5.3.4. To present ways in which remote line-management can be most effective

The findings show that managers should provide more regular communication when their employees are remote. This may appear contradictory to Neufeld, Wan and Fang (2010) who found that manager location did not impact

effectiveness of communication, however, the findings suggest that extra effort should be made, not that communication is less effective.

In addition to increased communication, employees felt that managers should hold more regular progress discussions with those based remotely, as per 4.3.5, Blair (2015), and Watson (2007) who found that employees in her study felt career advancement was reduced when they had a remote manager.

In conformance with Derven (2016) and Blair's (2015) recommendation of carefully selected technology, but actually suggesting a specific tool, the research concludes that managers in MWH IT should continue to use and advocate the use of Skype for Business. The finding showed clear value to employees and provides one tool for telephone calls, video calls, conference calls and instant messaging.

The findings suggest that conversations on personal topics are valuable, but that those come more naturally when working in the same office (refer to 4.3.5). The research therefore concludes that additional effort should be made to have these conversations and this can assist and be assisted through 'intercultural learning' as proposed by Han and Beyerlein (2016).

Han and Beyerlein (2016) suggested manager-employee relationships could be built using technology, conversely, the employees felt that at least initial face-to-face meetings are essential for relationship development.

This study emphasises the findings of Han and Beyerlein (2016), Derven (2016) and Blair (2015) in that trust is vital in all teams but is more difficult to build in geographically dispersed teams.

The final management method drawn from the findings is that where possible, managers should employ metrics as a solution to Blair's (2015) suggestion of demonstrating employee work-ethic and integrity where they are not able to physically observe.

5.4. Research question conclusions

As stated in 5.6, the research is not generalizable, nor was it intended to be. Although the setting and methodology was different to those studies discussed in Chapter 2 however, many of the findings of those studies are reflected in the results of this research. This is demonstrated in 4.3 and 5.3. The primary exception to this is that employees at MWH IT felt that technology cannot replace face-to-face communication when building relationships, in contrast to Han and Beyerlein's (2016) theory.

The analysis created some additional conclusions such as technology recommendations and show that although there are many principles of older theories (Drucker, 2011; Fayol, 1949; Taylor, 1911) are no longer considered an integral part of being a manager, some are still used and valued by employees such as Fayol's principle of 'order and purpose' (1949).

One finding that was not related to any of the objectives and not found in any of the literature, yet may have significant implications for the research area, is that one employee spoke of movement towards using agile teams. It was stated that these usually require co-location of employees due to the on-demand organisation and communication of such teams. The extent of this implication should be established through further research on the likelihood of MWH IT to adopt this method.

5.5. Conclusions Summary

The most pertinent conclusions that have been drawn from the research are summarised here. For some of these, it has been possible to provide actionable recommendations in Chapter 6.

There was a variety of management approaches observed in MWH IT due to the lack of training provided to managers, most of whom are promoted from within.

Emphasising Watson's (2007) and Neufeld, Wan and Fang's (2010) findings, there was no link between having a remote manager and positive or negative employee engagement for those interviewed.

Regular communication is deemed an essential part of management. Although communicating via technology is essential when working in virtual teams, face-to-

face meetings were viewed as invaluable to the employees and cannot be replaced by communication technology as proposed by Han and Beyerlein (2016).

5.6. Research Limitations

The phenomenological epistemology of this research means that it is not generalizable, it is intended to provide insight into one department in one organisation. The research also took place over a certain period and current contextual influences may mean that the result of the same research if done in five years' time are completely different and therefore the findings, conclusions drawn and recommendations may only have a limited time-frame for which they are useful and actionable.

As this study was qualitative and the case-study was built on in-depth interviews, the sample size was small and although effort was made to have a diverse selection of people, a larger sample size may have been more representative of the department. This may have been possible given a higher word-limit or research time-frame.

5.7. Opportunities for further research

Although the IT department likely has the highest use of globally remote line-management, this is practiced in other areas. Widening this research to other departments will show whether there are differences in the perceived effectiveness of remote line-management across different departments.

As mentioned in 5.5, a larger sample size may have allowed for a more representative sample. A further quantitative study would show whether the findings of this research are more universal.

Country culture was deemed impactful by some interviewees and considered significant by Han and Beyerlein (2016). There is an opportunity to discover the specific differences in culture in the countries MWH IT has employees, and the impacts of those differences.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Management training programme

It is recommended that IT at MWH or the parent organisation of Stantec implements a management training programme with the aim of reducing inconsistencies in management experience across the IT department and to educate managers in some of the methods they could use when managing people remotely. In particular, managers of employees in different regions should be advised to hold regular progress discussions with their employees.

6.1.1. Implementation plan

To keep costs low, this could be in the form of management guidelines developed by the Senior Management Team and disseminated through discussions between each manager and their manager or a representative of the senior management team. The costs to implement would therefore only consist of 5-10 hours from the members of the Senior Management Team and 1-2 hours from each manager for the discussion.

6.2. Face-to-face meetings

A further recommendation is that face-to-face meetings should be conducted when an employee or manager is new to a team to form initial relationships and trust.

6.2.1. Implementation Plan

Depending on expected staff turnover, budget should be allocated to each team to allow at least one person to travel to one location annually. If there are no employee changes that year, the opportunity to have a face-to-face meeting between the manager and employees should still be taken.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview questions

Q N	Question	Prompts	Literature/Justification	Objective
1	How long have you been with the company?		Ease respondant in, may demonstrate effect of length of tenure on perceptions	Background
2	Do you consider your role mostly technical or non-technical?	Primarily	Ease respondant in, may demonstrate effect of role type on perceptions	Background
3	Do you know what your manager expects of you?	How have they made that clear?	Gallup Inc (2017) - Engagement	2
4	Do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?	Most days?	Gallup Inc (2017) - Engagement	2
5	Have you received praise from anybody about your work in the last 7 days?		Gallup Inc (2017) - Engagement	2
6	- Was this from your manager?		Establish whether manager praise is worth more than praise from others	2
7	- Is praise from your manager more important to you than praise from somebody else?	If it was a colleague? Somebody in a different department? Somebody higher-up than your manager?	Establish whether manager praise is worth more than praise from others	2/3/4
8	Do you feel your manager cares about you as a person?	What makes you think that?	Gallup Inc (2017) - Engagement	2
9	Does your manager encourage your development?	How?	Gallup Inc (2017) - Engagement	2
10	Do you think your manager values your opinions?	Why do you feel like that?	Gallup Inc (2017) -	2
11	Has your manager discussed your progress with you recently?	Not necessarliy in a formal Performance review meeting	Gallup Inc (2017) - Engagement	2
12	- Do you feel the frequency with which it's discussed is enough?	Do you feel it should be more if they are remote?	Establish the importance of progress discussions (when remote vs. local manager)	2/3/4
13	What do you expect from a line manager?	Objective setting, organising, measuring, motivating and communicating. Emotional support?	Drucker (2011) Effective line manager qualities	3
14	- How are you currently provided with those things?	Meetings, e-mails, tasks/objectives in a system? Availability of manager?	Manager methods/techniques	3/4
15	What do you believe the general approach to management is at MWH IT?	Laid-back, dictatorial, etc. No general approach? What do you mean by…?	Establish percieved comparisons	1
16	Do you believe you would feel more motivated if your line manager was in the same office?	Why?	Herzberg	3
17	Do you believe you would feel less motivated if your line manager was in a different region?	Why?	Herzberg	3
18	Do you expect a different relationship with your manager because they're remote?	Why?		3
19	Would you expect a different relationship with your manager oif they were in a different region?	Why?		3
20	Do you believe remote line management works better for some roles than others?	Why? Can you provide examples of where you think it works? Example of where it's employed but doesn't?		3
21	Do you believe remote line mangement works better for some employee personalities than others?	Why? Culture?		3/4
22	What techniques/methods could be used to maximise the effectiveness of line management when done from another region?	Video meetings, physical meetings, 'virtual water cooler chats', different techniques for managing different roles, tailor for personalities?	Manager methods/techniques	4
23	Any other comments that you feel would help in answering any of the research objectives?	Reminder of objectives	Questions might not have thought of, can tailor future interviews if needed	1,2,3,4

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Participant Information Document

Exploring Remote Line-management

You are invited to take part in a research study. The information below explains the purpose of the study and what it will involve to help you decide whether or not to participate. Please take the time to read this information and do not hesitate to ask if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like further information. Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of this study is to explore remote line-management within the IT department at MWH.

The study aims to identify whether somebody feels more or less satisfied and motivated with a local line-manager than a remote one. It also aims to discover best practice methods in order to maximise the effectiveness of remote line-management.

This study forms part of an MBA dissertation. The findings will be used both to enhance the researcher's current approach to management and to inform other academics and management professionals.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen to take part because you either have a line-manager based in the same office as yourself, or, a line-manager based in a completely different geographical region.

Do I have to take part?
It is your choice whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to confirm your consent via e-mail or recorded voice. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect the standard of care you receive in any way.

What will happen to me if I take part?
You will be contacted by the researcher from the Chester Business School and asked to attend either a video, or in-person interview. Before the interview begins, the objectives will be clearly explained and you will have the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will be recorded. The recording will not be distributed and any comments or statements used in the final report will be kept **anonymous**. **None of the participants involved in this study will be identifiable** in the final report. You will be given the opportunity to review any parts of the report pertaining to your interview before submission to the Business School and the report will not be submitted if there is any part you are not satisfied with.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
There are no disadvantages or risks foreseen in taking part in the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
You will be contributing to the management learnings of the researcher as well as other management academics and professionals. You may also be able to identify ways in which remote line-management can be more effective in MWH IT.

What if something goes wrong?
If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact:

Dr Ali Rostron
Module Tutor, Management Research in Action – MBA (Part-Time)
Faculty of Business & Management, University of Chester, Queen's Park Rd, Chester CH4 7AD
01244 511805 or a.rostron@chester.ac.uk

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential so that only the researcher carrying out the research will have access to such information.

Participants should note that data collected from this project may be retained and published in an anonymised form. By agreeing to participate in this project, you are consenting to the retention and publication of data.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results will be analysed and form part of the findings and conclusions of an MBA dissertation. It is hoped that the findings may influence the management approach of the researcher and contribute to management learnings of other academics and management professionals. Individuals who participate will not be identified in any subsequent report or publication.

Who is organising and funding the research?
The research is funded and organised by the researcher.

Who may I contact for further information?
If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact:

Katie Fox
07887538657
katie.fox@stantec.com

Thank you for your interest in this research.