

# Critical Assessment of the Role of HR Strategies and Their Impact of on the Employees Performance of Sainsbury's Southern (UK)

Sana Anwaar Ali Bin Nadeem Irfan Ullah Khan  
Centre of Excellence of Technology and Management

## Abstract

Line managers are considered as one of the greatest assets of a company. Therefore, it is vital to satisfy them and keep them actively engaged so that they can add value to the organisation. This research explores the alternative HR strategies to support line managers at Sainsbury's Southern. The research is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with line managers at various levels and across different departments of the company, aimed at exploring the perceptions and experience of the line managers in terms of HR devolution and the level of support provided to them by HR. Secondary data has been used to identify previous works on the topic of HR devolution as well as HR support to line and to also identify the various strategies to facilitate the line managers so that they can perform their new role more efficiently. The findings revealed that the trend of devolution has been successful as the employees interviewed are satisfied with the level of support provided to them by HR. However, some employees raised a few concerns i.e. inadequate training, unclear perceptions regarding the policies, increased workload; ineffective HR practices etc and feel that these need to be improved so that they can perform their new role more effectively.

## INTRODUCTION

### Research background

Increased global competition, the privatisation of once-publically-owned firms and higher unemployment in the last decade have changed the role of Human Resource (HR) function from administrative to more strategic in an attempt to maintain competitive advantage (Gennard and Kelly 1997; Renwick 2000). These changing work practices have significantly affected not only the role of HR, but the role of Line managers (LM) as well (Truss and Gill 2009). Due to these changes in recent years, there has been a lot of tension between the HR function and LM (CIPD 2012). Indeed, one major reason for this tension is the de-layering of organisations and the transfer of HR responsibility to line management as HR seeks to become a strategic partner in the business (Halcrow 2002). Other reasons for line manager's involvement in HRM are to reduce costs, provide a more comprehensive approach to HRM and lastly, speed up decision making (Brewster and Larsen, 2000). Moreover, Brandl et al (2009) state that devolving HR responsibility to Line managers helps build a strong sense of responsibility amongst managers for their team members and allows the HR practitioners to better play their strategic role (Kulik and Perry 2008; Maxwell and Watson 2004). Nevertheless, the perception regarding the devolution widely varies between HR and the LM (Kulik and Bainbridge 2006) as HR managers are believed to be more optimistic than the Line managers regarding the benefits devolution in terms of employee satisfaction and overall organisational performance (Maxwell and Watson 2006). On the other hand, LMs seem reluctant to take on the responsibility for HR work due to lack of knowledge, skills as well as inadequate support from the HR to carry out these tasks (Valverde et al 2006). However, the purpose of this study is to investigate the level of HR support to Line managers at Sainsbury's Bitterne, Portswood and Shirley respectively and the strategies that could be adopted by the company to maximise the HR contribution to support Line managers in these branches.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### HR and the Line

Line managers are those managers who directly manage other employees and have responsibility to a higher level of management CIPD (2012). They not only oversee the work of other employees but also play a key role in ensuring that employees are motivated, productive and competent (Briscoe et al 2012). Nehles et al (2006, p. 256), define first line managers as: Managers at the operational level, who manage a team of operational employees on a day-to-day basis and are responsible for performing HRM activities. Line managers play a key role in accomplishing the organisational objectives (Qadeer et al 2011). In fact, the role of line managers consists of both a management component and a leadership component (Purcell and Kinnie 2007). The management component involves, carrying out specific HR practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisals of staff. Whereas, the leadership role focuses on providing support and direction to subordinates in order to influence their attitudes and behaviours (Wright and Nishii 2006). Wai-Kwong et al (2001, p. 1325) suggest that line managers occupy a position between "the strategic apex and operating core of organisations" and therefore, have a direct impact on the motivation, commitment and

discretionary behavior of their staff. Indeed, survey by CIPD of 1,300 HR managers found that the people who are closely involved with the day to day work of the staff had the most influence over the attitudes, behaviours and performance of their employees (People Management 2001). Although the role of LM is predominantly concerned with controlling and providing direction to a relatively narrow operational unit (Hales 2006), they are also responsible for monitoring performance, managing the human and physical resources and translating strategy into practice (Nohria et al 2003). On the other hand, HR function is an organisational resource (Roehling et al 2005) that helps the organisation to create value and achieve competitive advantage. It constitutes a myriad of functional areas, including responsibilities for recruitment and staffing, compensation and benefits, and training and development (SHRM 2008). However, the changing nature of HR makes it difficult to define the HR function as it is very different from the days when it was seen purely as a personnel department (Pass 2006). However, HR was traditionally defined as a function within an organisation whose responsibilities range from records maintenance to recruitment of, management of, and providing direction to people who work in the organisation (Torrington et al 2005). Overall, the main objectives of any HR function are Recruitment and Selection, development of competencies and maximising employee involvement and engagement (Armstrong 2005). Line manager's enactment of HR practices

HRM is usually conceptualized as a set of HR practices developed by the HR function in an organisation (Boselie et al 2005). These practices are assumed to have a uniform impact throughout the organisation (Francis and Keegan 2006). In fact, line managers' role is vital to the success of HR policies and practices (Armstrong 2009) and HR strategies cannot be successfully implemented without their involvement, commitment and cooperation (McConville 2006). This is because they are considered the "doers" who make things happen within the organisation (Budhwar 2000). Research has shown that first line management can greatly influence the way people behave and carry out their work in organisation (Purcell and Hutchinson 2007) and in order to positively influence the firm performance, the HR practices should be effectively and efficiently enacted by line managers (Paauwe 2009). Nevertheless, distinction can be made between intended, implemented and perceived HR practices (Wright and Nishii 2006). Intended practices are those developed by the policy makers of the organisation so as to accomplish the desired attitudes and behaviours (Gilbert et al 2011). Due to both external and internal influences, the actual practices carried out in the organisation rarely match the intended ones (Ulrich and Brockbank 2005). One reason for the perceived differences in the HR practices is the implementation of HR practices by various Line managers (Hall and Torrington 1998), according to their varying level of competence (Wright and Nishii 2006). Another reason for this may be the lack of communication between HR and line. Communication is an important factor to counteract differences between HR and line expectations (Tubre and Collins 2000). Further, according to Currie and Procter (2001), people management activities can be most effectively carried out when HR and Line hold similar views regarding the conduct of people management activities in the organisation. Nevertheless, many line managers nowadays find it difficult to fulfill their duties due to lack of appropriate tools and support from HR (Torrington et al 2008). It is also believed that in most organisations, the implementation of HR strategies and practices by Line managers is often taken for granted (MacNeil 2006). In fact in a CIPD (2011) survey 80% of the respondents agreed that if better equipped, they can add more value to the business. On the contrary, from an organisational perspective, line managers have a fundamental role in implementing and monitoring the HR strategy and practices (Hales 2006) and also in fostering a supportive work environment (Macky and Boxall 2007). Research by Larsen and Brewster (2003) revealed that effective execution of HR practices by line managers give employees a feeling that they are supported by the organisation. Similarly, the employees will be more attached to the organisation if the environment is supportive (Eisenberger et al 2002) and will hence show positive attitudes and behaviours (Harney and Jordan 2008). The support provided by line managers can be in the form of effectively carrying out appraisals, giving feedback, offering training when required etc. (Harris 2007). According to Gratton and Truss (2003), line managers are responsible for executing the following HR activities:

### **Recruitment and Selection**

Recruitment and selection is recognised as a key activity in HR (Millmore 2003). Recent literature points out significant developments in recruitment and selection processes specifically in terms of their focus and sophistication (Hassan 2011). Caldwell (2003) claims that the focus of recruitment and selection has become more strategically driven. On one hand, increased emphasis is being placed upon selecting employees against organisational rather than job – specific criteria (Bowen and Ostroff 2004). Whilst on the other, it is argued that the strategic orientation requires greater involvement of Line managers in the process (Hope-Hailey et al 2002). Indeed, many organisations nowadays, are giving line managers much more leeway to carry out the process of recruitment and selection themselves. According to a study conducted by Hsu and Leat (2000), there is a general desire among HR professionals in contemporary organisations that the HRM policies should be integrated with the corporate strategy and that line managers should not only carry out the recruitment and selection process but also have a particularly influential role in decisions regarding the selection of their staff. Furthermore, 40% of

respondents of the same study indicated that they preferred shared responsibility of recruitment and selection rather than making line managers solely responsible for the process. Similarly, survey conducted by Cranet on New Zealand organisations in 2004 found that recruitment and selection was the only area where line had major influence (Rasmussen et al 2010). However, research by Cunningham and Hyman (1995) found that line managers involvement is least in the area of recruitment and selection. In addition, critics like Mullins (2007) and Milmore et al (2008) argue that in most cases, line managers lack the appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out the recruitment and selection process which will undoubtedly affect their overall performance (Whittaker and Marchington 2003). This argument is supported by McCracken and Wallace (2000) who are convinced that incapability and misunderstanding of HR practices may expose the organisation to lawsuits and tribunals. Even so, it can be argued that since line managers are very close to the daily operation and customer, they might possess good knowledge regarding organisational facts and needs and hence make appropriate decisions regarding recruitment and selection and the size of the workforce working for them.

### **Learning and Development**

In today's turbulent business climate, line managers have a crucial role to play in encouraging, facilitating, carrying out the learning and development (L&D) of their staff (Garavan et al 1993). They are the strong link between learning and development and the business strategy of their organisation (Leisink and Knies 2011). A survey conducted by SHRM (2008), asked HR professionals to rank the priority of their organizations' top three critical HR functional areas and 57% of the respondents reported that L&D was the top-ranked priority for their organisations. Moreover, according to a survey by CIPD (2007), 90% of the respondents agreed that line managers play a key role in supporting L&D whereas only 12% among them feel that line managers take L&D seriously. Similarly, although line managers play a critical role in 'setting the weather' for development (Knight and Sheppard 2011), they are not wholeheartedly engaged in the training process (Maxwell and Farquharson 2008) and are usually reluctant to take responsibility for the learning and development of their staff (Khan 2012). There is also evidence of success regarding line manager's involvement in the L&D. Since there is a growing trend of devolving many HR functions to line managers, it is critical for line managers to recognise the importance of their involvement in the L&D (Renwick 2004). Moreover, their responsibility and participation should not just be confined to the operational aspects of L&D but they should also be involved in the policy and planning aspect of it (Heraty and Morley 1995) as it results in improvement of the organisational performance (Mindell 1995).

### **Reward Management**

Although Reward schemes are believed to be an important means of attracting and retaining employees (Brown and Purcell 2007), determining the pay and how staff will be rewarded is among the most challenging HR tasks (CIPD 2007). Furthermore, the literature on line manager's contribution in reward management is largely confined to their influence on performance related pay though the broad definition of reward encompasses many other aspects including financial and non- financial rewards. Bloom and Milkovich (1998, p. 22) define rewards as 'a bundle returns offered in exchange for a cluster of employee's services'.

In addition, businesses are continuously developing ways to retain their workforce but due to lack of knowledge and line manager's limited involvement in the process, it is not effectively communicated to the employees (McMullen et al 2007) e.g. CIPD's (2005) survey showed that organisations may not fully benefit from their reward schemes if it is not properly communicated to the workforce. The survey further revealed that although 60% of organisations expect line managers to communicate the reward strategy to their staff, less than a third involve them in its development. Similarly, another survey by CIPD (2006) based on 535 organisations found that although line managers had very little say in determining the salary rises, bonuses and other benefits, they were still expected to inform their staff regarding these decisions (Works Management 2005). Furthermore, while researches have pointed out the growing trend of involvement in the people management activities by line managers, the role of HR in providing support in the delivery and monitoring of these practices have been largely ignored (Hope 2006). Therefore it is important to involve line managers in the process of determining rewards right from the start when a new pay and grading structure is being decided and must also be provided support in the delivery of these practices (Ker 1985)

### **Performance Management**

According to ACAS (2012), it is highly important for businesses in today's competitive and unstable environment, to get the best out of their employees. This can be done by understanding staff motivation and establishing an effective performance management process. Armstrong (2009) suggests that line managers play a pivotal role in each stage of the performance management (PM) cycle from planning and designing to implementation of the process. Their role at the planning stage is to agree with team members their roles and personal development plans. They then monitor the achievements against the plans and provide coaching where

necessary. Lastly, they conduct formal review meetings and provide feedback so as to plan forward. Researchers such as Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) and Coens and Jenkins (2002) have identified a key relationship between employees and their immediate line managers and argue that line managers have a great impact on the performance of their staff as they are the ones who translate the organization's core business goals into departmental goals (Renwick 2003).

On the other hand, research by Harris (2001) found that PM is the most disliked management activity among line managers and they regard it as a mere bureaucratic and administrative chore that has nothing to do with their job (Carlton and Sloman 1992; Lee 2005). Although they see themselves good at it (Guest and King 2001), the process is often poorly carried out by them (Redman 2001). Similarly, PM according to line managers can be no more than a means of carrying out compliance and considered as a managerial burden rather than an effective strategy to improve business results (Furnham 2004). But though there is lack of decisive evidence that it leads to improved performance, proponents of PM such as Armstrong (2000) and Molleman and Timmerman (2003), in their research have provided evidence that firms who include line managers in the PM process outperform firms who take no input from the line in the process, in terms of productivity. Therefore, it is necessary for the HR function to ensure that the line managers are involved in the process and they should not only possess the right knowledge and skills but also the right attitude to carry out the process.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research strategy**

According to (Yin 2004), the above strategies can be employed for exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research. A case study strategy has been adopted by the author for this dissertation in order to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the HR strategies and its contribution in supporting the line managers at Sainsbury's Limited. Also, another reason for using case study approach is that the boundaries of the HR support and the context of Sainsbury's is not clearly evident (Saunders et al 2007). The case study strategy is appropriate for this research since it entails practical analysis of a particular current observable fact in its actual existence through various sources of data (Yin 2004).

This technique was found useful as the participants were able to answer the questions without any specific restrictions, which enabled the researcher to gather rich amount of data.

10 interviews were conducted in total and participants were randomly selected from different departments of the organisation. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed to evaluate as many points as possible. Atkinson and Heritage (1984) suggests that recording and transcribing interviews not only helps to correct the neutral limitations of the memories but also allows thorough examination of what people say. The interview questions were divided into several key themes i.e.

- Areas of strong HR support

- Areas of weak HR support

- Frequency of contact

- Nature of partnership between HR and Line Managers

- Effectiveness of HR policies and the contribution of LM to Policy formulation

- Main People management problems

Various questions were asked under each key theme. These themes were sent out to the interviewees one week before the actual interview so as to ensure that they have a clear understanding of what the interviewer intends to ask them. Each interview approximately lasted for about 30 to 35 minutes. Besides, company reports along with text books, research articles, academic journals articles, websites, blogs, magazines and newspapers were used as a source of secondary data.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

This section of the research aims to analyse the alternative HR strategies to support line managers at Sainsbury's and focuses on the data that has been collected through semi structured interviews from three stores of Sainsbury's in the Southern region. Ten individuals from across various departments including one HR manager were interviewed in total. Each interview lasted for about 30 to 35 minutes. The individual interviewees have been working for Sainsbury's for 3 to 15 years so they all had some experience of the HR restructuring in the organisation. The information collected has remained anonymous for ethical reasons and the respondents are identified as P1, P2, P3 and, so on. The data that is not presented in this section is included in Appendix A. The data is divided into 4 key themes i.e., The Nature and Extent of HR Support to Line Managers at Sainsbury's Under this theme, the researcher asked a total of five questions along with several prompts.

11. The Areas of Strong HR Support to Line Managers

Under this theme, the researcher asked a total of one question.

Q1: In which areas are you provided strong HR support?

A bar chart has been drawn for this question as the aggregate value was more than 100.

Of the 60% who said they get strong support in Recruitment and Selection, one replied: Similarly, of the 70% who said HR supports them in learning and development, one replied: Next, of the 40% who said they get strong HR support in rewards, one of them said: Again 40% said that they have strong HR support in terms of Discipline and Grievance. One of them replied: In addition, in terms of discipline and the HR manager had similar views as above and said: 40% said that HR support is highest in terms of other policies such as working hours, health and safety etc. e.g. one of them said:

Lastly, out of 20% said that they get support in terms of Performance management as HR provides them guidance as well as proper training in order to carry out the process in the most effective manner.

As mentioned earlier, line managers play a crucial role in terms of encouraging, facilitating, and carrying out the learning and development of their staff Garavan et al (1993). Similarly it is clear from the above data that the highest support that line managers get is in the area of learning and development. Most of them said that HR not only helps them in the process of imparting training to their colleagues but also develops them as a manager so that they can manage their own staff in the best way possible. The above findings echoes the work of Andersen et al (2007), who suggest that line managers should be given adequate training before devolving HR role to them so that they can manage their work effectively as HR agents. As 70% of the respondents agreed that they get strong HR support in terms of L&D, it can be assumed that line managers have not only accepted but are also happy in their new roles as Hales (2005) said that the extent to which line managers are willing to accept their new roles depends on the extent to which the organisations invest in their training and development. This proves that the new HR role hasn't been pushed upon them as said by Kulik and Bainbridge (2006) in the literature review, rather have been given sufficient support in terms of training so that they can easily carry out their new roles effectively.

Next, the area where line gets the second highest support is in terms of recruitment and selection which is recognised as the key activity in HR (Millmore 2003). Most of the respondents agreed that HR supports them in the process of recruitment and selection right from the start when the vacancy is advertised. Although HR supports line managers in the whole process, there are some respondents who feel that they need proper training on recruitment and selection so that in future when HR dissolves completely, they can do it themselves without the support of HR. This statement can be supported by Hsu and Leat's (2000) study who found that HR professionals in many contemporary organisations also believe that line should not only make decisions regarding the selection of the staff but also learn to carry out the recruitment and selection process on their own. But since the devolution trend recently started at

Sainsbury's, line managers' haven't completely taken over the HR responsibility. This can be supported by the HR managers statement who also agreed that the devolution is taking place step by step and they are currently sharing the responsibility of the HR work with line so that line managers can learn the appropriate knowledge and skills from them and later use the same skills to carry out the process at their own..

Reward Management is believed to be another area where line managers get strong support from HR. According to Brown and Purcell (2007), rewards are an important means of attracting and retaining employees. The findings above show that although line manager have some say in the process as HR encourages them to recognise the colleagues who perform their job/role well so that they can be rewarded, they do not have too much say in the development of the reward strategy as it is developed at the head office and gets fed to them by HR. Therefore, HR supports line in the process of rewards by communicating the process of it via meeting and then line managers are asked to put forward their nominations so that HR can reward those colleagues accordingly. Moreover, according to one respondent, although line managers are also involved in the determining the wages and salaries of their colleagues to some extent as they can give their recommendations, the final decision of it lies with the HR and senior management. This can be related to Ker's (1985) study who stated that it is important to involve line managers in the process of determining rewards right from the start when a new pay and grading structure is being decided and HR should also provide them support in the delivery of these practices.

According to the data, 40% of the respondents believe that they get highest support in other policies and practices. The main policies highlighted in this context were health and safety, working hours and holidays. They said that HR provides them support in terms of advice and training to perform all these tasks. They added that HR also supports them by communicating these policies to them when the updates come down from the head office. The communication helps them know what training have they taken before and which training they are taking next so as to make sure that they carry the same pattern forward. This can be supported by Zupan and Kase's (2007) argument who says that HR support in terms of policies and practices can highly influence line managers' attitudes towards carrying out their new role and also their perception regarding the importance of HR practices within organisations. Lastly, in terms of Performance management, the above data shows that only a few interviewees agreed that they get strong HR support in that area. This can be related to the findings of Harris (2001), mentioned in the literature review of this dissertation. Who said that Performance management is one the

most disliked management activity as it is considered as a bureaucratic and administrative chore that has nothing to do with their job.

## 12. The Areas of Weak HR Support to Line managers

Under this theme, the researcher asked one question.

Again, a bar chart is drawn for this question as the value exceeded 100% 50% of the respondents recognised “ Lastly, only 10% of respondents replied that they are happy with everything as they have strong support from HR in most of the areas. From the above data, it is clear that line manager’s get the least support from HR in terms of policies because most of them are not aware of all the policies and the ones, who are aware of them, do not know how to follow or implement them. This implies that most of the policies are not communicated to them in a proper manner. Harris et al’s (2002) study can be linked to the above finding who found that unclear perceptions in terms of policies and practices lead to variation between actual and enacted policies as line managers implement/ use the policies according to their own perception and understanding. This may consequently result in decreased performance of the overall organisation. Therefore, not only should be the policies properly communicated but HR should also arrange a refresher training for the line managers so that if they have forgotten anything relating to the policy, they can refresh their memories regarding that. Another problem faced by most line managers is the rigid mind set of the long serving employees who only do and follow policies in their own ways. Hall and Torrington’s (1998) also argue that one of the major reasons for perceived differences between HR practices is the implementation of it by various line managers according to their own level of competence. Therefore, HR should make sure that the policies are communicated equally to all staff and ensure that they are being followed in the right manner, as Tubre and Collins (2000) also agreed that effective communication between Line and HR is important factor to counteract differences between their expectations. Learning and development is identified as another area where line managers aren’t provided adequate support. Though there is also evidence of success regarding line manager’s involvement in the L&D, the data shows that the major concern regarding the learning and development is the training conducted by store trainers as they only cover the shifts from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Similarly, another concern regarding learning and development is the inability to carry out the training sessions due to increased work load. This statement reflects the study by Brewster (2007) mentioned earlier, who states that one of the major reasons for line managers’ frustration regarding their new role is the increased work load, lack of time and inappropriate HR support to perform the HR tasks. The respondent further suggested that HR alone should design and run these training sessions so that they can work on other important things. This however, contradicts the findings of a survey by CIPD (2007) where 90% of the respondents agreed that line managers play a key role in supporting learning and development in organisation. Indeed, according to Garavan et al (1993), it is line managers’ job to encourage, facilitate and carry out the learning and development of their staff. But taking into consideration Renwick’s (2009) work, since there is a growing trend of involving line in the HR function, they may not recognise the importance of their involvement in the L&D of their staff. Therefore, in order to facilitate the line managers, HR should share the responsibility of L&D process with them so that line manager can focus more on their people management role.

The next significant area of weak HR support identified by some respondents is Discipline and Grievance. The above data shows one of the major concerns is regarding the inadequate training on the discipline and grievance process. This is also evident in Whittaker and Marchington’s (2003) study who concluded that line managers in most organisations are unsure about the skills they need to manage the behaviour of their staff which may be due to insufficient training provided by HR function. One respondent said that instead of providing physical or visual training, they are provided with packs on discipline and grievance to read and follow while managing any similar situation. This is in line with the findings of Whittaker and Marchington (2003) suggested that in order to carry out their devolved role more effectively, line managers need proper guidance from their HR professionals rather than an interpersonal training course or handing a script to read. On the other hand Harrison (2002) explains that due to financial pressures, organisations may not make significant investments with regard to learning and development of their staff. Although this may not be true in terms of Sainsbury’s as the HR manager said that line managers. In addition, another respondent who although seemed satisfied with the amount of training and guidance from HR in terms of discipline and grievance, said that HR should involve more people in the process rather than giving the whole responsibility to line managers for executing the process.

Rewards and recognition is another area of weak HR support identified by a small number of respondents. The data shows that although the respondents are satisfied with the actual process of reward management, they feel that there is no recognition for the amount of work that they do. This may lead to feeling of dissatisfaction among line managers and therefore, they may not perform to the best of their abilities. This statement can be supported by Eisenberger et al’s (2002) work, who states that employees will be more attached to the organisation if the environment is supportive and will hence show positive attitudes and behaviours (Harney and Jordan 2008).

Lastly, another 10% interviewees raised their concern regarding the recruitment and selection process.

The findings above show that some managers are not satisfied with the process of recruitment and selection and feel that it should be redesigned so that the right candidate is chosen for a certain job, They further said that the process should include a role play so they can see how the person would behave in a particular situation and perform a certain task as agreed by McCracken and Wallace (2000) who said that incapability of staff may expose the organisation to lawsuits and tribunals. Therefore it is important that HR should not only change the recruitment policy but also involve line managers in the process of designing as they are the ones working directly with the employees.

## CONCLUSION

This research is aimed at critically assessing the alternative HR strategies to support line managers at Sainsbury's Southern. The objectives of this dissertation were accomplished through primary as well as secondary data. The literature review discussed the findings by several authors regarding HR devolution to line and the support that HR gives to line in the transition and how it affects the overall performance of the organisation. In the beginning, the significance of line managers and the HR function in the organisation has been discussed. It was analysed that line managers play a fundamental role in people's management and their role is vital to the success of HR policies and practices as HR strategies cannot be successfully implemented without their involvement, commitment and cooperation. The research indicated some positive links between HR support to line managers and higher organisational performance. It was also found that strong HR support to line enables organisations to achieve higher competitive advantage. The literature review also discussed the major HR practices enacted by line managers i.e. Recruitment and Selection, Performance Management, Learning and Development, Reward Management, Discipline and Grievance and other HR policies.

The primary data which was collected through semi structured interviews, based on six key themes, revealed that majority of the line managers interviewed were satisfied with the level of support they get from HR. From the author's perspective one reason for the satisfaction could be the open and friendly atmosphere of the stores as well as the non-hierarchical culture of the organisation that fosters creativity and encourages collaboration.

The research further revealed that majority of the line managers in the three sites are happy with the devolution trend as they acknowledge that they are the ones who work closely with their colleagues and can therefore manage them more effectively than HR. They also believe that they have adequate support from HR in terms of training and guidance to perform their new role. On the other hand, a few numbers of managers said that either they are not provided with any training or the kind of support they are provided with is very poor due to which they feel ill equipped to perform their devolved role. One reason for the inadequate training and support may be the wrong perception of HR managers who believe that since line managers have always had the responsibility for people management, they have sufficient knowledge to carry out their devolved role. Similarly, another reason for dissatisfaction highlighted by some line managers is the increased workload that holds them from performing their other duties.

The research also found that the communication and frequency of contact between HR and Line is very good as HR not only communicates with them on a daily basis but is also very approachable and keeps them informed regarding the new policies and procedures of the company. Furthermore, in terms of HR policies and practices, although most line managers agree that the HR policies are effective and help them in their new role, the sickness and absence, recruitment and selection and the bonus policy according to some managers need to be improved so that they can fully benefit from it.

Further, the main people management problems recognised by majority of line managers is their own unclear perception of HR policies, lack of efficiency and, low morale of staff due to their changing working pattern, the rigid mind set of long serving employees and alienation. It is assumed that that lack of physical/visual training and inadequate support may be one of the main reasons for all these problems. Nevertheless, a very limited number of managers said that HR has trained them in the right way to tackle all these problems.

Although all the (interviewed) line managers agreed that they work in partnership with HR to accomplish the overall goals of the organisation, it was found that since HR policies are made at the head office, they do not contribute in the policy making. HR in the store and the Line managers are only the implementers of the policies. However, some of respondents said that even though they do not contribute, their opinion does count and is also recognised.

Next, learning and development was identified as the area where line managers get the most HR support. It was revealed that HR not only support line managers in imparting training to their colleagues but also provides them training and courses to prepare them for future. The area where line managers get the second highest support was recruitment and selection. It was found that HR does most of the initial bits of the recruitment and selection process i.e. the advertising of vacancy, getting the slots filled are preparing the interview pack. The responsibility of interviewing and selecting the employee lies with the managers. However, the final decision is

always made by the HR rather than the line. Although most line managers interviewed said that they are satisfied with the process, one respondent said that he needs some more training for recruitment and selection so that in future when the HR completely vanishes, he is able to carry out the process himself. Similarly, Reward management was classified as the 3rd area of strong HR support. It was revealed that though line managers have some autonomy in the actual process, they are not involved in the formulation of the reward strategy. It was discovered that HR communicates the process to them via meeting and are asked to put forward their nomination. Therefore it can be said that line managers do not hugely contribute in the process rather than giving their recommendations and determining the wages and salaries of their colleagues. After reward management, discipline and grievance was recognised as the next areas where HR supports the line managers. It was found that HR not guides line managers but also supports them by providing them a note taker for the disciplinary meeting. Moreover, it was also revealed that line managers get support in terms of working hours, holidays and health and safety. The support provided by HR is in terms of communication, advice and training in this context. Further, a low number of people said that they get strong HR support in terms of Performance management.

On the other hand, HR policies were identified as the area of weakest HR support as most as most managers claimed that they are not fully aware of the policies and are not even properly communicated to them. Further it was also found that due to unclear perception and poor communication, some manager follow the policies according to their own understanding which affects the performance of the organisation. Further, another area of concern highlighted by most managers was that the store trainers do not cover all shifts. Also, it was found that some managers are unable to carry out the training sessions of their staff due to increased work load. It was also suggested that HR should alone design and run the training sessions so that the line managers can concentrate on other tasks. In addition, it was discovered that some due to lack of training, most managers are unsure of the skills they need for managing their staff as the only support they are offered is the pack of policies to read rather than providing them with proper training. It has also been suggested the HR should share the responsibility of discipline and grievance process with line managers instead of giving them the whole responsibility to carry out the process. Lack of recognition was another weak area identified by some line manager as they said that there do not get recognised for the amount of work that they do. Lastly, it was suggested by some respondents that HR should redesign the process of recruitment and include a role play in the process so that they can they can determine how a person will behave in a particular situation and hence select the most suitable candidate for the job. The forgoing findings show that the aim and objectives of the report have been fully achieved.

Since the three branches of Sainsbury's i.e. Bitterne, Portswood and Shirley have recently gone through HR restructuring, it is important for the stores to satisfy its line managers as they are the core of their organisation and without their cooperation, the company wouldn't be able to perform well. This study will help the stores to understand the importance of HR contribution to support the line managers. It will be beneficial for the company in a way that it will come to know the different perspectives of the line managers with regard to HR devolution and also their perceptions regarding the HR policies and consider new ideas and opinions to feed into its existing policy so as to attain higher level of business success.

This study was an interesting and rewarding piece of work, which not only increased the author's knowledge about the topic but also enabled her to learn more about conducting research in a professional manner. The major benefit of conducting this research was that the author could relate her knowledge of the topic to the practical work environment and understand as well as recognise the difference of opinions and views regarding the devolution trend and HR support to line. One of the challenges that the author faced was to record the interviews as some of the interviewees felt insecure and were afraid to speak openly about certain issues. It, therefore, required tactful application of persuasion skills to secure their agreement in this regard. However, all these findings should be viewed in the light of various limitations of the study including the small sample and the results may differ in case of a larger sample size. Also, since the author was constrained by time and information accessibility limitation, there certainly is further scope for research on this topic.

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