**High performance work practices:**

**comparing manager and employee perceptions in organisations in Scotland**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to compare line manager and employee perceptions on high performance work practices (HPWPs) linked to employee skills utilisation in their workplace. The empirical study comprises questionnaires sent to line managers and employees in organisations in Scotland. From the 161 usable responses from line managers it is found that four groupings of HPWPs are perceived to be linked to employee skills utilisation. These are autonomy and empowerment, work organisation and job design, leadership and management, and the learning environment. The perceptions of the 184 respondent employees also reveal these four groupings of HPWPs are perceived to be linked to employee skills utilisation, however a fifth grouping, teamwork and collaboration, is also deemed important to employees. Most similarity in manager and employee perceptions lies in autonomy and empowerment, where ten aspects are either significant or highly significant to the respondent managers and/or employees, as identified in Mann Witney U testing. In total, in the employee findings, highly significant differences are found in 33 aspects across five groupings of HPWPs; in the line manager findings, there are 11 highly significant differences across three groupings. Thus more aspects of the identified groupings of HPWPs appear of greater relevance and importance to employees than the line managers. Not only do the findings add to understanding of the significance of HPWPs linked to employee skills utilisation. In addition, the exposed differences in line manager and employee perceptions among the respondents from organisations in Scotland highlight the importance of appreciation of both of these two viewpoints in organisations seeking to increase utilisation of their employees’ skills.

**Introduction**

Having high performance work practices (HPWPs) is often considered an enabler of workplace skills utilisation (Sung and Ashton, 2005; Belt and Giles, 2009, UKCES, 2013). Academic interest in aspects of high performance working has been on the increase recently, as indicated by there being around 700 academic sources yielded by the ABI search engine on high performance working although only a handful of the publications are derived from research situated in Scotland. Many articles focus on HPWPs, indicating that this is a priority area. However, there is still a lack of insight into which work practices may enable skills utilisation. The term skills utilisation is somewhat contested, possibly obstructing workplace skills utilisation in Scotland (Grant *et al*., 2014), where a need for greater skills utilisation has been identified (Scottish Government, 2011; Warhurst and Findlay, 2012). The definition of skills utilisation adopted in this paper is ‘ensuring the most effective application of skills in the workplace to maximise performance through the interplay of … key agents e.g. employers and employees’ (Scottish Government, 2008:20). This definition expressly recognises both employer (line manager) and employee (non-manager) viewpoints, which may not converge (Kaifi and Selaiman, 2011; Grant *et al*., 2014). Thus HPWPs, skills utilisation, manager perceptions and employee perceptions are all worthwhile dimensions of research.

This paper addresses a research gap in its focus on HPWPs within organisations in Scotland. The aim is to compare line manager and employee perceptions on HPWPs linked to employee skills utilisation in their workplace. Previous work by the authors points to the importance of line managers’ and employees’ perceptions in the sphere of high performance working (Grant *et al*., 2014). Overall, the paper conceptually identifies and empirically investigates five groupings of HPWPs, comparing the views of managers and employees. The starting point of the paper is shaping a definition of high performance working and HPWPs. Next, the paper considers theoretical perspectives of HPWPs, identifying potentially important HPWPs, albeit not exhaustively as this is not the aim of the paper. Subsequently, the questionnaire data collection is outlined. The empirical findings then report on the views of managers who actively opine theirs is a workplace which utilises its employees’ skills compared with managers who do not on the significance of particular work practices, then employees in the same way. Alongside this there is commentary on comparison across the manager and employee respondent groups. From this, conclusions are reached on the significance of key HPWPs in skills utilisation from the viewpoints of managers and employees.

**Defining High Performance Working and High Performance Work Practices**

An inherent difficulty enveloping the high performance concept is the absence of a blueprint definition (Lloyd and Payne, 2004). The concept has been defined for example by Guest (2006:3) as ‘a distinctive approach to managing people at work that raises productivity while also improving the well-being of employees’, and by Belt and Giles (2009:3) as ‘a general approach to managing organisations that aims to stimulate more effective employee involvement and commitment in order to achieve high levels of performance’. Much of the extant literature suggests that high performance working itself is not new or radical (Sung and Ashton, 2005), but rather it is the synergy derived from combining a number of HPWPs that may lead to high level performance. Taking account of the eclectic interpretations of high performance working, in this paper an adapted definition is adopted, namely that: high performance working is a holistic, planned and systematic approach to managing people and work, comprising HPWPs. In turn, HPWPs are taken in this paper to be human resource interventions and actions which contribute, at an operational level, to the totality of high performance working at an organisational level.

The inference is that the achievement of high performance working requires a deliberate and sustained focus on ensuring effectiveness in how people are managed strategically in their workplace, and also in how work and jobs are designed and managed operationally to enable higher levels of skills utilisation (Grant *et al*., 2014). High performance working is not however achievable solely through possession of skills; rather ‘high performance is some kind of function of an employee’s skills, motivation, and the opportunity to deploy skills’ (Bloom *et al*., 2004:40). Thus it is important to acknowledge that high performance working, comprising HPWPs, can enable utilisation of employees’ skills, as noted earlier (Belt and Giles, 2009; Sung and Ashton, 2005; Stone *et al.,* 2012; UKCES, 2013). Notably, the HPWPs which may lead to successful high performance working in overall performance level are subject to debate, hence deserving of more research. Boselie *et al*. (2005:73) for example note that ‘no accepted theory exists that might classify different practices into ‘obligatory’, and ‘optional’, ‘hygiene’ factors and motivators’, although some commentators distinguish between ‘hygiene’ and ‘core’ (Tamkin *et al*., 2010a:88), and ‘enabling’ and ‘performance’ (Stevens, 2005:1) practices. This paper seeks to address a research gap in HPWPs in its comparison of manager and employee perceptions of HPWPs in skills utilisation. The next section of the paper discusses theoretical perspectives of HPWPs so as to inform the empirical work.

**Theoretical Perspectives of High Performance Work Practices**

The authors’ review of the literature on HPWPs suggests that five groupings may be important, namely*:* autonomy and empowerment; work organisation and job design; leadership and management; teamwork and collaboration; and learning environment. These are outlined, in turn as below, more indicatively than definitively or exhaustively as the aim of this paper is to compare manager and employee perceptions on the same HPWPs, rather than to seek to define these practices *per se*.

*Autonomy and Empowerment*

Morrison *et al*. (2005), reporting from a cross-sectional and longitudinal study, find a positive correlation between perceived autonomy and job satisfaction. Conversely, employee wellbeing has been shown to be reduced in situations of low autonomy, as arguably this is indicative of low levels of trust and lessens the extent to which employees feel able to fulfil themselves through their work (Green, 2009). Therefore, it is plausible that greater task discretion aligned with increased opportunities to participate in the workplace may encourage individuals to work beyond the confines of the job description (Combs *et al*., 2006). Autonomy and empowerment may be increased as decisions within a high performance working approach are made by those who are closest to the customer (CIPD, 2009). However, as Tamkin *et al*. (2010a:5) point out: ‘autonomy sounds simple but in reality is a complex undertaking requiring people to be skilled, motivated and trusted in the workplace’. Adding to this complexity, drawing on findings from the Employment in Britain Survey and the UK Skills Surveys between 1992 and 2006, Green (2009) advises that although levels of task discretion have previously shown signs of increase in some European countries, levels of employee autonomy in the UK have been in decline. Thus, the purported increase in job complexity has not been accompanied by a corresponding rise in the control and discretion that employees can exercise over their jobs (Felstead *et al*., 2007).

In reality, the rhetoric-practice gap on autonomous working is further underlined by Appelbaum (2002:122), who suggests that high performance working is ‘rarely about worker empowerment, despite the hyperbole surrounding these workplace practices’. Indeed, Tamkin *et al*.’s (2008) UK survey found that 77% of private sector and 61% of public sector respondents perceived that tasks are mostly or exclusively decided by managers. What often emerges is thought to be a situation of ‘controlled participation’ (Edwards *et al*., 2002:36), or soft(er) control (Thompson and Harley, 2007), rather than true autonomy and empowerment. Interestingly, Wong *et al*. (2010:8) observe that by 2020 organisations ‘may see the rise of…a new organisational hierarchy where power and status is aligned with an individual’s market value as opposed to role, creating a new balance of power’. Meantime, while it appears that autonomy and empowerment for employees in UK workplaces may be more recognised in theory than experienced in practice, nonetheless particular HPWPs can be identified as contributing to skills utilisation. Principal among these are: task discretion as noted above; employee involvement, encouragement and latitude in decision-making, suggestions and tasks (Belt and Giles, 2009; Sung and Ashton, 2005). Such HPWPs can arguably be seen as being linked to work organisation and job design.

*Work Organisation and Job Design*

According to Huselid (1995:638), HPWPs ‘can affect individual employee performance through …organisational structures that allow employees to improve how their jobs are performed’. Therefore, it is not only skilled employees that are required within a high skills economy, but also organisation of skilled work, as noted earlier, where employees have adequate power and discretion (Grugulis, 2003; Morrison *et al*., 2005). Some Northern European, most notably the Scandinavian countries, are regarded as world leaders in the field of job (re)design and workplace development (Alasoini, 2009; Gustavsen, 2007; Stone, 2011). However, signalling a different starting point from that of some Northern European countries, trade unions in the UK have shown less interest in work (re)organisation and job design, instead choosing to focus on collective bargaining over pay and conditions (Payne and Keep, 2003; Wilson, 2010).

The growing evidence-base which suggests that organisational structures and work practices may impact positively on skills utilisation is of particular interest to Scottish policy makers (SG, 2007; CFE, 2008). However, as Keep *et al*. (2006:543) caution: ‘while there are numerous expensive public programmes aimed at enhancing the skills of the future and existing workforce, there is [currently] no parallel effort aimed at bringing about work organisation and job redesign’. Particular HPWPs which constitute high performance working to enable skills utilisation can be sifted from the literature; again these may be more theoretically than practically evidenced. They include employees: working to flexible job descriptions (Sung and Ashton, 2005), being able to control the order of their job tasks (Gallie *et al*., 2009), and being encouraged to develop more efficient ways of working (Belt and Giles, 2009). Access to necessary information and resources may also be central (Sung and Ashton, 2005), supporting overall job design for maximum skills utilisation (Giles *et al.,* 2010). Arguably, an important influence in work organisation and job design is leadership and management.

*Leadership and Management*

Realisation of high performance working, in many instances, requires a deliberate shift from traditional command and control management (Cristini, 2008), thus line managers play a pivotal role in the implementation of HPWPs (Pilsbury and Campbell, 2009; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007. Using an aerospace manufacturing case study, Danford *et al*. (2004) find an example of unsuccessful implementation of HPWPs, identifying line management failure and lack of trust as contributing factors. That there is a fairly low trust employment relations dynamic within the UK (Belt and Giles, 2009) may be seen to undermine HPWPs and thus high performance working. Indeed, with an evidence-base which suggests that employment relations and people management generally within the UK, particularly where there is an emphasis on command and control management, there may be potential barriers to more widespread adoption of high performance working (EEF/CIPD, 2003; UKCES, 2013; Wood *et al*., 2013).

Instead there has to be trust and confidence in senior management according to Tamkin *et al*. (2010), and senior managers should recognise health and well-being is central to performance according to Green (2009). Further, line managers have to have the necessary skills to be effective managers and employees should believe that the management style of line managers’ is effective (James, 2006). In considering the elemental factors in high performance working, de Waal (2011) finds that managers within high performance working organisations act consistently with integrity, respect, honesty and sincerity, and as role models to employees. Perhaps capturing the necessary HPWPs for sustainable high performance working, Tamkin *et al.’s* (2010) inquiry into outstanding leadership concludes that the most effective leaders and managers combine their drive for performance with a keen focus on employees as the means of achieving this. This may include treating employees fairly and managers proactively sourcing opportunities for employees’ skills utilisation (Tamkin *et al.,* 2010a). Also, it calls for managers being trained in people management (Tamkin *et al.,* 2004). Additional leadership and management HPWPs are regular employee appraisals and feedback on job performance (Guest *et al*., 2004), including acknowledgement to employees of their doing a good job (Sung and Ashton, 2005). A further aspect of employee focus within outstanding leadership, arguably, is teamwork and collaboration.

*Teamwork and collaboration*

Butler *et al*. (2004:6) identify teamwork as ‘the medium whereby tacit knowledge shared amongst the work group is developed into explicit knowledge’. Therefore, although diverse and complex to characterise (Christini, 2008), teamwork is often viewed as being central to high performance working (Hughes, 2008). The rationale is that those involved in teamwork HPWPs are likely to experience a more skilled job than those who are not (Bacon and Blyton, 2003). Most empirical studies of teamwork focus more on organisational performance and management implications, than on the effects of team working on employees *per se* (Bacon and Blyton, 2005). However, Gallie *et al*. (2009) refer to the ideological consequences of teamwork, in that systems of teamwork in some cases merely substitute supervisory control with a less tangible form of normative control, thereby potentially leading to increased work intensification and job stress which can reduce employees’ ability to carry out their jobs effectively. Conversely, teamwork can contribute positively to employee health and well-being (Gaillie *et al*., 2009).

In drawing a connection with the autonomy and empowerment HPWPs, Danford (2003) observes that the impact on employees’ sense of trust, commitment and job satisfaction may be more to do with job autonomy than actual team working practices. Indeed, irrespective of the interpretation of teamwork, Harley (2001) notes that the effects of teamwork are largely influenced by levels of task discretion, and the effects of and from teams largely depend on the overarching character and structure of the team (Green, 2008). Some studies also demonstrate variations in the formation of teamwork as a positive HPWP. For instance, Batt (2004), examining differential outcomes of team structures for 1,200 employees in a large telecommunications organisation, found that self-managed teams were associated with higher levels of perceived discretion, job satisfaction and employment security. Gallie *et al*. (2009), using data from the from the British Skills Survey series,[[1]](#footnote-1) similarly found that employees working in semi-autonomous teams, particularly those in self-managed teams, experienced higher levels of commitment than those who did not work in a team environment. However, signalling the potential significance of teamwork as a HPWP, Lloyd and Payne (2005:3) note that ‘while some consider self-managed teams with common objectives… as central to the HPW organisation, for others any sort of team will do – even if it is just a re-labelling of a former work group’. It seems that across these studies, teamwork can contribute to organisations’ effectiveness (Hughes, 2008). Related to this may be employees being encouraged to work well together to solve problems and carry out their jobs (Kazenbach and Smith, 2005). Inherent in this, arguably, is a conducive learning environment.

*Learning environment*

The importance of the workplace learning environment is signalled via a widespread view amongst proponents of high performance working that organisational adaptability and flexibility are increased through more highly skilled and trained employees (de Waal, 2011). Consequently, skills and learning are noted as being integral to sustainable high performance working approaches (Green, 2010) and employees within high performance working organisations. The CIPD (2009:1) notes such organisations ‘are seen as being more highly skilled and having the intellectual resources to engage in lifelong learning and master new skills and behaviour.’ At an organisational level, high performance working means there needs to be organisational commitment to the learning and development of employees (Ashton and Sung, 2002), with the organisation encouraging development and trying out of new skills (James, 2006) as HPWPs. At a management level, Willmott and Purcell (2009:6) observe that ‘line management behaviour is also central to the degree people learn at work.’ Therefore, connecting to leadership and management, HPWPs may also require regular reviews of employees’ training needs (Sung and Ashton, 2005), together with regular personal development planning with employees contributing to the content of theirs (Wood *et al*., 2013. More generally, another learning environment HPWP may be encouragement of employee reflection on their skills utilisation (James, 2006), while ensuring that employees are provided with adequate training to carry out their jobs and that the training is always explicitly linked to their jobs (Sung and Ashton, 2005).

Drawing a link with the work organisation and job design work practices, Brown *et al*., (2010) acknowledge that a well-structured and challenging work environment can channel and facilitate informal learning which many employees value, and, in turn, engender a positive disposition towards learning generally. Payne (2011:42), for instance, notes that ‘there is now a substantial body of research which suggests that the way in which work is organised…has a significant bearing on the depth and quality of informal learning that takes place inside the workplace’. Moreover, it is often considered that employees within high performance working organisations are better equipped through greater job autonomy and discretion (Felstead and Gallie, 2004), recalling the autonomy and empowerment grouping of HPWPs above. For example, de Waal (2011:11) advises that high performance working organisations develop their workforce by ‘inspiring them to work on their skills so they can accomplish extraordinary results, and holding them responsible for their performance.’ Therefore, the learning environment is likely to be influenced and affected, perhaps even dynamised, by the groupings of HPWPs covered earlier.

From the above review of key literature, to recap, five groupings of HPWPs are identified, namely: autonomy and empowerment; work organisation and job design; leadership and management; teamwork and collaboration; and learning environment. These provide a theoretical lens (Creswell, 2009) through which to compare empirically the perceptions of managers and employees on HPWPs linked to employee skills utilisation in their workplace.

**Research method: questionnaire**

Directly informed by the literature review, a questionnaire was developed in two versions for comparison of line manager and employee perceptions across a range of workplaces, thereby addressing the aim of the paper. It is acknowledged that a single method of data capture may constitute a limitation, though it is hoped that the response rate of a total of 345 questionnaires would offset this limitation. It is also acknowledged, as stated earlier, that the questionnaire is neither intended nor needed to be either exhaustive or definitive.

 The questionnaire was themed according to the five groupings of HPWPs set out within the literature review above, comprising items in nominal, Likert-grouping and open questions. The Likert rating scale questions were on a five point scale, ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). An open question at the end of each section asked respondents to note any additional work practices which could improve the skills utilisation of the organisation’s employees; none were noted. The line manager version was made up of 80 questions in total, the employee version 75, plus biographical questions. Three items featured in only one version of the questionnaire; where findings on these are included in the findings reported below, a ‘not applicable’ (n/a) phrase in the tables identifies the item as being in one questionnaire only. Specific questionnaire items are included in the results section below.

Following piloting, the authors’ existing contacts within the organisational networks of Investors in People Scotland, GoodPractice and Peoplematters (Europe) Limited were used to gain access to a sample population which comprised the contacts’ Scotland-based client groups. Each of the contacts distributed the line manager and employee questionnaires to their client groups, inviting them to participate, anonymously if they wished, in the research. The surveys were then administered electronically to a range of self-selected organisations in Scotland, across all sectors. A usable response of 161 line managers and 184 employees was achieved. (As the sample size is not known to the researchers due to the snowballing technique through organisational networks, the percentage response rate cannot be calculated. Similarly, because many respondent organisations were not categorised as private, public or voluntary sector by respondents, representative industry response rates cannot be calculated.) Table 1 below specifies the composition of respondents opining proactively that their workplace culture utilises employees’ skills or not. It is noteworthy that most of the respondent managers (61%) actively opine that their workplaces utilise the skills of their employees whereas most employee respondents (52%) do not, suggesting that managers and employees, but especially the employees, believe there is capacity to increase employee skills utilisation.

Table 1 Workplace utilisation of employees’ skills

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| --- | --- | --- |
| *workplace utilises employees’ skills.*(based on 5 point Likert scale question on:‘employees’ skills are utilised in my workplace’) | **managers** | **employees** |
| **yes** (comprising strongly agree and agree responses) |  98 (61%) |  88 (48%) |
| **no** (comprising neither agree nor disagree + disagree & strongly disagree responses) |  63 (39%) |  96 (52%) |
| **Total** |  161 | 184 |

Via SPSS, Mann Witney U tests of significance of particular work practices in the five groupings outlined in the literature review were run, comparing the views of managers who actively opine theirs is a workplace which utilises its employees’ skills with managers who do not. Then Mann Witney U tests of significance of particular work practices in the same work practices were run comparing the views of employees who actively opine theirs is a workplace which utilises its employees’ skills with employees who do not. (Thus the statistical comparisons are within, not across, the manager and employee groups.) Only items yielding highly significant or significant differences among the groups of manager and employee respondents are included in the results, where p≤ .01 is highly significant & p ≤ .05 is significant. Analysis of the medians indicates that the managers and employees who actively agree on their workplace utilising employees’ skills strongly agree/ agree with the questionnaire item in general; further, the converse is the case whereby managers and employees who do not actively agree on their workplace utilising employees’ skills mainly strongly disagreeing/ disagreeing with the particular item.

**Findings**

The highly significant and significant findings found in each of the five groupings of HPWPs outlined in the above literature review are presented, in sequence, in the ensuing section. The differences within the respondent line managers can be seen in the first column/s, then the differences within the respondent employees in the following column/s, where they are found to exist.

Autonomy and empowerment

As can be seen in Table 2 below, there are six autonomy and empowerment HPWPs which have highly significant differences between the two groups of line managers and two groups of employees. Reflecting the practices raised by belt and Giles (2009) and Sung and Aston (2005), these are: encouragement for employees to make decisions and take ownership of tasks/ projects; seeking employees’ suggestions; employee freedom to implement suggestions; employees’ use of discretion in adjustments to their work; and employees testing their ideas without fear or blame. In addition, two HPWPs are highly significant to the employee respondents, namely: their involvement in decisions and their having empowerment to use their skills fully. These have significant differences to the line manager respondents, where p=.013 and p=.017 respectively, suggesting they are not deemed as having such importance in HPW for skills utilisation as the identified highly significant factors. All of the highly significant p values for employees are .000, while three of those found for line managers are .000, with the other five ranging from .001 to .004.

Table 2 Autonomy and empowerment

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Autonomy and empowerment questionnaire items (from a total of 10 items in both the LM and employee questionnaires) where p≤ .01 is highly significant & p ≤ .05 is significant | Line managers (LMs) highly significant | LMs significant | Employeeshighly significant |
| Employees are consistently involved in decisions affecting their jobs. |  | .013 | .000 |
| Employees are encouraged to make decisions. | .000 |  | .000 |
| The organisation is quick to seek suggestions from employees. | .002 |  | .000 |
| Employees take up opportunities to make suggestions. | .004 |  | - |
| Employees have freedom to implement suggestions. | .000 |  | .000 |
| Employees are encouraged to take ownership of tasks/ projects. | .001 |  | .000 |
| Employees show keenness to take ownership of tasks/ projects. | .003 |  | - |
| Employees use discretionary behaviour to make adjustments to their work. | .000 |  | .000 |
| Employees can test ideas without fear or blame. | .002 |  | .000 |
| Employees have empowerment to utilise their skills fully. |  | .017 | .000 |

With ten autonomy and empowerment HPWPs emerging with highly significant differences among line managers and/or employees, it is apparent that this grouping of work practice is perceived as being very relevant, even important, to line managers and employees alike. However, employees seem to perceive aspects of this grouping of work practice as slightly more important than their line managers, according to the p values as above among the respondent groups.

Work organisation and job design

Table 3 below reveals that two work organisation and job design work HPWPs have highly significant differences among the two respondent groups. These are employees controlling the order of their job (Gallie *et al*., 2009) and employee jobs being designed for maximum skills utilisation (Giles *et al*., 2010), with respective p values of .001 and .000 for both line manager and employee groups. One factor – flexible employee job descriptions (Sung and Ashton, 2005) – has significant differences to both groups (p=.111 for line managers and .028 for employees). These three practices apart, the significance results vary across the respondent groups. For the line managers employees controlling the order of their job tasks is highly significant (p=.001). Two further work HPWPs are found to have significant differences among the line managers: employees having access to necessary information for their jobs (Sung and Ashton, 2005) where p=.035; and employees being encouraged to develop more efficient ways of working (Belt and Giles, 2009) where p=.045, compared to highly significant, where p=.000, for employees. Two work organisation and job design practices are found to hold differences at a level of significance for the employee respondents, namely employee access to necessary resources, with p=.019, and flexible working to job descriptions, as noted earlier, with p=.028.

Table 3 Work organisation and job design

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Work organisation and job design questionnaire items (from a total of 7 items in the LM and employee questionnaires alike) where p≤ .01 is highly significant & p ≤ .05 is significant | LMs highly significant | LMs Significant | Employeeshighly significant | Employeessignificant |
| Employees have access to necessary information for their jobs. |  | .035 | .000 |  |
| Employees have access to necessary resources. |  - | - |  | .019 |
| Employees work to flexible job descriptions. |  | .111 |  | .028 |
| Employees control the order of their job tasks. | .001 |  | .001 |  |
| Employees are encouraged to develop more efficient ways of working |  | .045 | .000 |  |
| Employee jobs are designed for maximum skills utilisation. | .000 |  | .000 |  |

Therefore the views of line managers and employees are broadly similar overall as regards work organisation and job design HPWPs being relevant and important, though, again, apparently slightly more so among the employees.

Leadership and management

Perceptual dissimilarities across line managers and employees is a notable finding in the statistical differences in leadership and management HPWPs, as Table 4 below displays. Not one particular practice is either highly significant or significant in common across line managers and employees. Indeed it can be seen that among the line managers there is only one significant difference between those who actively opine theirs is a workplace which utilises its employees’ skills with managers who do not. This is their having the appropriate training in people management (James, 2006), where p=.006, though it should be noted that the employees were not asked this question. Three senior management practices come out as having significant differences among the managers: senior management being trusted (Danford *et al*., 2004), p=.046; senior management recognition of health and well-being as central to performance (Green, 2009), p=0.40; confidence in senior management leadership (Danford *et al*., 2004), p=.014. In contrast, these three practices yield highly significant differences amongst the employees (respectively, the p values are .000, .001, and .000). Additionally, five other factors emerge with highly significant employee differences: line managers having the necessary skills to be effective managers where p=.000 and employees considering line managers’ management style is effective (James, 2006), p=.000 (line managers were not asked this question); appraisals being conducted regularly, p=.004 and regular job performance feedback (Sung and Ashton, 2005), p=.000; acknowledgement of doing a good job (Guest *et al*., 2004), p=.001; and line managers proactively sourcing opportunities for employee skill utilisation (Tamkin *et al*., 2010), p=.000.

Table 4 Leadership and management

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| Leadership and management questionnaire items (from a total of 8 and 10 items in the LM and employee questionnaires respectively) where p≤ .01 is highly significant & p ≤ .05 is significant | LMs highly significant | LMssignificant | Employeeshighly significant |
| Senior management can be trusted to treat employees fairly. |  | .046 | .000 |
| Senior managers recognise health and well-being as central to performance. |  | .040 | .001 |
| There is confidence in the leadership of senior management. |  | .014 | .000 |
| Line managers have the necessary skills to be effective managers. | - | - | .000 |
| Line managers are appropriately trained in people management. | .006 |  | n/a |
| Employees consider line managers’ management style is effective. | n/a | n/a | .000 |
| Appraisals are conducted regularly (at least annually). | - | - | .004 |
| Regular feedback is provided on employees’ job performance. | - | - | .000 |
| Employees are given acknowledgement of doing a good job. | - | - | .001 |
| Line managers proactively source opportunities for employee skill utilisation. | - | - | .000 |

Thus the dissimilarity between line manager and employee perceptions widens and more leadership and management HPWPs seem of relevance and importance among employees. This underlines the pattern in this as noted earlier in work organisation and job design HPWPs.

Teamwork and collaboration

In this grouping of work practice the dissimilarity between manager and employee perceptions is stark in that none of the specific teamwork and collaboration practices come out with either highly significant or significant statistical differences among the managers whereas four practices are employee highly significant and another one employee significant, as Table 5 indicates. Highly significant differences lie in: employees being encouraged to work collaboratively (Batt, 2004), p=.000; teamwork contributing positively to health and well-being (Gallie *et al*., 2009), p=.003 and the organisation’s effectiveness (Hughes, 2008), p=.002; alongside job related stress not affecting employees’ ability to carry out their jobs effectively (Gallie *et al*., 2009), p=.001. The practice of statistically difference among employees is their working well together to solve problems and carry out tasks (Katzenbach and Smith, 2005), where p=.012.

Table 5 Teamwork and collaboration

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Teamwork and collaborationquestionnaire items (from a total of 8 items in both the LM and employee questionnaires) where p≤ .01 is highly significant & p ≤ .05 is significant | Employeeshighly significant | Employeessignificant |
| Employees are encouraged to work collaboratively. | .000 |  |
| Employees work well together to solve problems and carry out tasks. |  | .012 |
| Teamwork contributes positively to health and wellbeing. | .003 |  |
| Teamwork contributes positively to the organisation’s effectiveness. | .002 |  |

Hence the emergent pattern of dissimilarity in line manager and employee views, together with greater significance in employee differences, is reinforced in relation to teamwork and collaboration HPWPs. It is notable that no highly significant or significant differences are found among the line managers in this grouping of HPWPs.

**Learning environment**

As can be seen in Table 6 below, nine learning environment HPWPs yield highly significant differences among the employees, all with a p value of .000. Once more in stark contrast, this is not so among the line managers where only three practices are significant (compared to highly significant among the employees), namely the organisational factors of: encouraging new skills development, p=.033, and trying out new skills (James, 2006), p=.021; and commitment to the learning and development of employees (Ashton and Sung, 2002), p=.021. Three of the other employee highly significant factors centre on training, namely: employees feeling they are provided with adequate training to carry out their jobs (a question not included in the line manager questionnaire), training being explicitly linked to employees’ jobs, and regular reviews of training (Sung and Ashton, 2005). A further two centre on personal development planning (PDP) in it being carried out regularly and including employee contribution (Wood *et al*., 2013). The last highly significant employee practice is their being encouraged to reflect on their skills utilisation (James, 2006).

Table 6 Learning environment

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Learning environment questionnaire items (from a total of 8 and 9 items in the LM and employee questionnaires respectively) where p≤ .01 is highly significant & p ≤ .05 is significant | LM significant | Employeehighly significant |
| Employees are provided with adequate training to carry out their jobs. | n/a | .000 |
| Training is always explicitly linked to employees’ jobs. | - | .000 |
| Regular reviews of employees’ training needs are carried out (at least annually). | - | .000 |
| Employees are encouraged to reflect on their skills utilisation. | - | .000 |
| Employee PDP is carried out regularly (at least annually). | - | .000 |
| Employees contribute to the content of their PDP. | - | .000 |
| The organisation encourages development of new skills. | .033 | .000 |
| The organisation encourages employees to try out new skills. | .021 | .000 |
| The organisation is committed to the learning and development of employees. | .021 | .000 |

Resultantly, the pattern of line manager and employee dissimilarity in conjunction with greater employee significance differences is further reinforced by the findings in the learning environment grouping of HPWPs.

**Conclusions**

This paper empirically compares line manager and employee perceptions on HPWPs, based on questionnaire respondents’ opining proactively that their workplace utilises employees’ skills or not. The geographical context of the respondents is organisations in Scotland. In the respondent line manager perceptions four groupings of HPWP are found to be linked to employee skills utilisation. These are autonomy and empowerment, work organisation and job design, leadership and management, and the learning environment. The respondent employees’ perceptions also reveal these four groupings of HPWPs are perceived to be linked to employee skills utilisation, however a fifth grouping of HPWP is also deemed important to employees, namely teamwork and collaboration. This informs understanding of the HPWPs, and aspects within them, that may in concert support greater employee skills utilisation in the surveyed organisations in Scotland where skills utilisation is seen as an issue by the Scottish Government (Warhurst and Findlay, 2012).

Further, particular aspects of each grouping of HPWP are signalled as significant in the findings section above. Most highly significant aspects are found, across line managers and employees, in autonomy and empowerment, suggesting this as the most important grouping of HPWP. Encouragement for employee decision-making, employees having freedom to implement suggestions, and employees having discretion to make adjustments to their work, are examples of aspects of autonomy and empowerment. Overall, most similarity in the manager and employee perceptions is found in autonomy and empowerment HPWPs, where a total of ten aspects are either significant or highly significant to the respondent managers and/or employees. However, across the other groupings of HPWPs, more aspects appear of greater relevance and importance to employees than the line managers, as indicated by the results in statistically significant differences. In total, in the employee findings, highly significant differences are found in 33 aspects across five groupings of HPWPs; in the line manager findings, there are 11 highly significant differences across three groupings.

In addition to informing understanding of the significance of HPWPs linked to employee skills utilisation, the exposed differences in line manager and employee perceptions highlight the importance of appreciation of both of these two viewpoints, as noted in earlier research (Grant *et al*., 2014). Indeed, the employee perceptions are arguably not only more informative than the managers’ but also more valuable as they concern their own skills utilisation. The main inference is that to exclude employee perceptions of HPWPs would substantially limit any effort or initiative to increase employee skills utilisation. The next stage of the analysis of the empirical work presented in this paper is exploratory factor analysis of the relationship between the dependent variables HPWPs in effective skills utilisation, alongside drawing on case study empirical data on organisations where line managers consider there is effective employee skills utilisation.

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