EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY AND MOTIVATION WITHIN THE STRATEGIC EMPLOYEE RESOURCING FRAMEWORK (SERF)

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Abstract: Employee and team motivation are central aspects of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM). Motivation is necessary for the achievement of organisational integration, employee commitment, flexibility and quality of work, which SHRM advocates as essential to effective organisational performance. Strategic Employee Resourcing Framework (SERF) is a vehicle for facilitating employee and team motivation in the construction industry through integrated employee resourcing activities. This framework supports effective managerial decision-making that takes into account (often competing) organisational strategic priorities, operational project requirements and individual employee needs and preferences. The aim of personality theories is to identify and explain the ways in which individuals differ from one to another. In the context of SERF personality theories contribute toward understanding the individual employee needs and preferences and how these influence their performance. Currently there is little evidence about considerations of personality in employee and team motivation in the context of the construction industry. This paper introduces a current research project that seeks to begin to address this gap between motivation and personality within the SERF. A literature review discussing the current position in terms of employee and team motivation and personality theories is followed by an outline of the research aim and objectives. The paper concludes with considerations of the potential contribution to knowledge and the practical implications of the research.

Keywords: Construction Industry, Motivation, Personality, Strategic Employee Resourcing Framework (SERF), Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on recent research in the area of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) in the construction industry, a Strategic Employee Resourcing Framework (SERF) has been proposed (Raidén, 2004). The SERF consists of five interrelated and mutually reinforcing SHRM activities: team deployment; human resource planning; training and development; performance/career management; and employee involvement, which together take account of organisational strategic priorities; operational project requirements and individual employee needs and preferences (ibid). These SHRM activities share a common influence: their relationship with employee motivation. Both the SERF and motivation theories emphasise the differing needs individuals have. However, Osteraker (1999) highlights that theories of motivation have received extensive criticism due to their insufficient ability to take into consideration the uniqueness of the employees and how this affects the needs they have. Central to the study of individuality is personality. According to idiographic theoretical approaches to personality, personality is unique to every individual. This uniqueness needs to be taken into account in the work place and be aligned with
organisational and team goals (Mullins, 2004; Raidén, 2004). This paper presents an early proposal for a research project that seeks to begin to address this gap between motivation and personality within the SERF model. The project proposal is introduced through a mental map suggested by Wallace and Poulson (2003). This map provides tools for thinking for the development and evaluation of literature and intellectual projects. Accordingly, the structure and components of the mental map are introduced at first. This is followed by an outline of the research project using the mental map. Discussion on the usefulness of this model precedes the conclusions, which consider the potential contribution to knowledge and the practical implications of the research project.

2. THE MENTAL MAP

Wallace and Poulson’s (2003) mental map consists of a complex set of different types of knowledge, literature and projects; tools for thinking and outcomes. Table 1 presents the mental map as matrix, where the y-axis rows refer to the broad areas of [1] knowledge, [2] literature and [3] projects. On the x-axis columns progress from [a] different types (of knowledge, literature and projects) through the [b] tools for thinking to the [c] outcomes for each broad area (knowledge, literature and projects).

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<td>[2] Literature</td>
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<td>[3] Projects</td>
<td>Knowledge for understanding, Knowledge for critical evaluation, Knowledge for action, Instrumentalism, Reflexive action</td>
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2.1 Tools for thinking

Central to the mental map are the tools for thinking (Table 1 column [b]). The definitions for each of the tools depend on how the researcher, reader and/ or writer comprehends the relationship between the tools (Wallace and Poulson, 2003: 11). Nevertheless, Wallace and Poulson (2003: 11) provide some generic definitions, which firstly explain concepts as the “terms which [are] used for classifying, interpreting, describing, explaining and evaluating aspects of the social world”. Secondly, they indicate that perspectives are formed when a set of concepts is combined as a screen in order to view events in the social world. Thirdly, metaphors are used when a researcher, reader and/ or writer is viewing a thing through the image of something else. Fourthly, a design that bundles a small number of concepts with the aim of
illustrating their relationship to each other is called a model. A model is also incorporated as part of a broader theory: “Theories are widely viewed as a coherent system of connected concepts, sometimes lying within one or more perspectives. They may be used to interpret, explain or, more normatively, to prescribe what should be done to improve an aspect of the social world” (Wallace and Poulson, 2003: 13). Finally, any interpretation of the social world rests on a certain assumption(s). Assumptions are based on granted beliefs about an aspect of the social world (ibid). Similarly, the term ideology embraces the beliefs, opinions and attitudes about an aspect of the social world (ibid: 14).

2.2 The different types of knowledge and associated outcomes

As illustrated in Table 1 (row [1], column [a]) there are three kinds of knowledge: theoretical knowledge, research knowledge and practice knowledge. Theoretical knowledge refers to a discussion based on theoretical interpretations of a coherent system of connected concepts (as suggested by the definition of a theory above), which develops through claims about the social world. When the claims are supported by empirical evidence and investigation, research knowledge is produced. Practice knowledge relates to outcomes that are achieved via taking action in the social world (Wallace and Poulson, 2003: 18). The tools for thinking (concepts, perspectives, metaphors, theories and models, and assumptions and ideologies) apply to all three different types of knowledge. In essence, the tools help process and produce different kinds of knowledge.

Arguments form the outcomes of the different types of knowledge (Table 1: row [1], column [c]). They are an essential element in critical analysis in that they support the conclusions which have been drawn about an aspect of the social world (Wallace and Poulson, 2003: 14). Conclusions derive from claims about knowledge. There are two dimensions of variation among knowledge claims; the first is hypotheses and the other generalisations (ibid). The first, hypotheses, refer to proposed explanations for a phenomenon. The second, generalisations, refer to reasoning from detailed facts to general principles.

2.3 The different types of literature and projects and associated outcomes

In terms of literature, Wallace and Poulson (2003) differentiate between four types: theoretical literature, research literature, practice literature and policy literature (Table 1: row [2], column [a]). Theoretical literature contributes to development of theory, research literature examines empirical data to produce research knowledge, practice literature is aimed at informing practitioners (both practice knowledge), and policy literature seeks to influence formulation of policy. These connect to the types of knowledge in their tendency to emphasise claims to different kinds of knowledge (ibid: 20).

The third part of the mental map outlines five sorts of intellectual project for studying phenomena: knowledge for understanding, knowledge for critical evaluation, knowledge for action, instrumentalism and reflexive action (Table 1: row [3], column [a]). Following Wallace and Poulson (2003: 23) the word ‘project’ is used to encompass any enquiry. The different types of projects reflect the way in which an enquiry has been conducted. Each project takes in different types of literature
(theoretical, research, practice and/or policy literature). The outcomes of the different types of projects construct different types of knowledge (theoretical, research and/or practice knowledge) which writers then use to produce different types of literature (theoretical, research, practice and/or policy literature) (Table 1: row [3], column [c]). Thus, should the mental map be viewed as a circle, the loop is complete, as follows:

1. The knowledge for understanding develops theoretical and research knowledge in order to understand but not to improve an aspect of the social world
2. Knowledge for critical evaluation starts from a negative standpoint and attempts, through the development of the theoretical and research knowledge, to criticise, to argue for its rejection and to advocate improvements
3. Knowledge for action starts from a positive standpoint and attempts to develop theoretical and research knowledge with practical application with the aim to inform improvements
4. Instrumentalism also starts from a positive standpoint but with the attempt to impart practice knowledge in order to improve practice

Overall, the elements of the mental map (different types of knowledge, literature and projects; tools for thinking and outcomes) are aimed at helping researchers involved with intellectual projects, and readers engaged with literature in general, to develop skills in critical analysis when developing and carrying out projects. They are also intended to aid such individuals and groups in communicating their intentions, methodologies and outcomes via literature outputs. As alluded to above, this paper uses the mental map to introduce an early proposal for a doctoral study and to test the usefulness of the model.

3. A MENTAL MAP FOR EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY AND MOTIVATION WITHIN SERF

3.1 Rationale for the study – background knowledge and anticipated outcomes

The proposed research project explores the role of personality in motivation and its relationship with the motivational elements of SHRM within the SERF model (team deployment, human resource planning, training and development, performance/career management and employee involvement). The need for investigating the role personality plays in employee motivation, and the importance it should therefore receive within the SERF model, builds from the recent interest for adopting SHRM-style people management practices in the construction industry (Druker and White, 1995; Maloney, 1997; Dainty et al, 2000; Loosemore et al, 2003; Raidén, 2004; DTI, 2005). The complex environment within which construction organisations operate, combined with the economic fluctuations which influence the industry’s workloads, presents a considerable challenge for effective people management (Druker and White, 1995; Raidén et al, 2004). The short-term timescales force quick decisions on fundamental aspects of organisational working life and operations. Traditionally, managers from a craft or engineering background naturally attempted to achieve “the best” technical/financial business outcome and took appropriate steps to implement that fit (De Feis, 1987). Many construction managers still operate in this fashion, focusing on the achievement of financial, programme and quality outcomes over other
project performance criteria (Dainty et al, 2003). Thus, much of the current project allocation decision-making tends to be ad hoc and based on the implicit knowledge of senior managers (Raidén et al, 2004). The skills and knowledge requirements of the project dominate the decision-making, at the expense of individual needs and aspirations. Employee resourcing decision-making is at an imbalance, which leads to employee dissatisfaction, staff turnover and consequently a recurrent demand to recruit.

The aforementioned rationale focuses on practice knowledge, suggesting an argument (outcome of the knowledge) that the potential outcomes of the research should help the industry, and organisations within it, to improve their approach to people management. This is clearly in line with the applied nature of cross-disciplinary research.

The current position of theoretical knowledge further supports the need for the research. This derives from the following claims. The development of motivational programs was directed by personality theories in the early 1900s (Wiley, 1997). In spite of this strong connection between the two subjects, theories of motivation receive recurrent criticism on their insufficient ability to take under consideration employees’ uniqueness (Osteraker, 1999). Some theorists, such as Maslow, McClelland and Adams, attempted to include elements related to personality characteristics. For example, Maslow stated that employees achieve the highest level of motivation through self-actualization (Cloninger, 2004). Yet, he fails to explain how personality as a whole affects motivation.

This brief position statement highlights severe weaknesses in current theory. Thus, the proposed study is strategically placed to contribute to the development of theoretical knowledge in addition to the practice knowledge. In particular, publications produced to communicate the outcomes of the research are anticipated to provide context specific, in-depth accounts of the relationship between motivation and personality within the SERF (this is supported by the research methodology, see section 3.3 below).

Finally, to close the gap in research knowledge, the project rationale stems from the conflicting results of recent empirical studies. These outcomes have opened up a debate, which would clearly benefit from an added input. In short, Furnham et al (2002), for example, argue that personality does not have a strong influence on employees’ levels of job satisfaction. In contrast, Nikolaou’s (2003) investigation suggests that there is a relationship between personality and job satisfaction. However, Furnham et al’s (2005) later cross-cultural research established a strong relationship between some personality traits and work values. Further, context specific research considering personality in the construction industry is scarce. Thus the outcomes of the proposed research have potential for valuable input into the existing body of research knowledge.

3.2 Theoretical, research, practice and policy literature

The above establishes the proposed study as applied and cross-disciplinary on the basis that all three kinds of knowledge (practice, theoretical and research knowledge) are used to build the rationale for the project. This assertion dictates that all four types of literature (theoretical, research, practice and policy literature) should be considered. Due to the early stage of the project, focus here is placed on theoretical and research
literature on SHRM, motivation, SERF and personality, since these types of literature form the foundations for this project (Wallace and Poulson, 2003: 17). The practice and policy literatures will be examined as an integral part of further development of the study together with a more thorough in-depth examination of the theoretical and research literatures.

SHRM, motivation and the SERF

Over the past decade the SHRM paradigm has developed as an effective and profitable approach to people management. It is a widely accepted and adopted approach to personnel recruitment, retention and performance improvement within many public and private sector organisations (Baker, 1999). However, despite the labour-intensive, “people oriented” nature of the construction industry (Druker and White, 1995: 80) little attention has been paid to SHRM within the sector (Loosemore et al, 2003; Raidén, 2004). Some have suggested a need for construction organisations to move toward SHRM-style people management practices (Druker and White, 1995; Maloney, 1997; Dainty et al, 2000; Raidén, 2004), but few have considered how to implement this change effectively (Loosemore et al, 2003).

It was identified above that motivation is a central element of SHRM. Stewart (2003: 8) supports this with an assertion that the key to organizational success is motivated employees. Motivation theories tend to explain what motivates employees (content theories) or how they might be motivated (process theories). In the context of the construction industry the importance of employee motivation is often highlighted through the need for qualified workers (Yankov and Kleiner, 2001); increased scarcity of skilled employees and managers (MacKenzie et al, 2000) and the complex, dynamic and uncertain nature of the industry (Smithers and Walker, 2000). This is directly linked to the industry performance improvement agenda, via the hypothesis that stimulated and trained employees can improve their performance and consequently the industry’s productivity (Yankov and Kleiner, 2001; DTI, 2005), but with little empirical evidence. Indeed, although motivation forms a central element of SHRM, and the DTI’s (2005) Respect for People Agenda calls for industry wide performance improvement on people issues, literature searches within the leading journals produce insufficient results to demonstrate matching research activity.

The SERF is a model designed to take into account the (often competing) organisational strategic priorities, operational project requirements and individual employee needs and preferences in managerial decision-making in a way that facilitates employee motivation and the achievement of organisational/ team goals simultaneously (Raidén, 2004). Through effective management of the five activities (team deployment; human resource planning; training and development; performance/career management; and employee involvement) in an integrated way, the aim is to encourage construction organisations to initiate and develop practices associated with the SHRM-style people management, away from the traditional ‘personnel’ focused approach (ibid). Although employee involvement forms one of the five core components of the SERF, little is known of the type of role personality should play within the framework and the importance it should therefore receive.
Personality Theories

Personality theories seek to identify and explain the ways in which individuals differ from one to another (Cloninger, 2004). Four main approaches have emerged: nomothetic approaches, idiographic approaches, cognitive approaches and psychoanalytic approaches. The main interest of nomothetic approaches is to collect data from groups and apply this to developing an understanding of individuals (Mullins, 2004). Focus is on personality types and traits. These compare one person with another (Carlson, 1971), which makes understanding a person as a whole difficult and fails to recognize personality as a combination of many aspects. In contrast to the nomothetic approaches, idiographic theories study individuals one at a time rejecting explicit comparisons, although implicit comparison may be unavoidable (Cloninger, 2004). Idiographic theories suggest that personality is influenced by the environment and thus development of personality is an interaction of parameters. The cognitive approaches study mental processes and their effect on behaviour. Similarly to idiographic theories, they suggest that personality is formed through interaction with the environment. The central focus of the psychoanalytic approach is the level of consciousness. Freud (classical psychoanalysis) and Jung (analytical psychology) developed the core foundations in this area: people are not aware of the most important determinants of their behaviour (Cloninger, 2004).

In summary, it is clear that this initial brief points to multiple areas of literature that may be anticipated to contribute to the development of the research. A more comprehensive examination of relevant literature will be undertaken as part of the doctoral study.

3.3 Projects – the ‘how’ in the mental map for exploring the relationship between personality and motivation within the SERF

The third element in Wallace and Poulson’s (2003) mental map differentiates between five sorts of projects: knowledge for understanding, knowledge for critical evaluation, knowledge for action, instrumentalism and reflexive action (Table 1: row [3], column [a]). On the basis of the above (sections 3.1 – 3.2), the third approach, knowledge for action, is that anticipated as most suitable for the proposed research. This type of project starts from a positive standpoint with the view to develop theoretical and research knowledge with practical application (Wallace and Poulson, 2003: 23).

Currently the research aim (to investigate the role of personality in managing individual and team motivation utilising the SERF model) is supported by three literature related objectives: (i) to identify what aspects of personality should be considered in employee motivation; (ii) to identify what aspects of personality should be considered in team motivation; and (iii) to explore what is the relationship between personality and the motivational aspects of SHRM in SERF (team deployment, human resource planning, training and development, performance/career management and employee involvement). The development of the research methodology will build on these to incorporate the empirical investigation. This will follow from the idiographic approaches to personality, which focuses on developing an understanding of the uniqueness of individuals and the development of the self concept. This suggests a qualitative approach as the most appropriate method (Mullins, 2004; Cloninger, 2004). Much of the recent psychological research is also qualitative and includes detailed
interview information, case studies and sometimes observational studies (Goodwin, 2002). Additionally, researches in SHRM support qualitative research methods and in particular in-depth interviews, case studies and questionnaires (see for example Dainty et al, 2000; Raidén, 2004; Sheehan, 2005). Hence, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with open-ended questions are anticipated to form appropriate methods of data collection. The semi-structured interview seems particularly suitable since it allows for in-depth questioning but also provides a degree of structure (Naoum, 2003). This encourages the interviewees to discuss motivation and personality from their frame of reference. It is accepted that the researcher will have an impact on the study situation. However, every effort will be made to compensate for any bias within the research design.

The proposed research sample consists of “knowledge workers”. According to Manville and Ober (2003), the core of modern business is not real estate, machinery and building but an employee with intelligence, understanding, skills and experience; the “knowledge worker”. Employees with knowledge, skills, experience and qualifications managed in a positive way can be a strong competitive advantage for the company. Knowledge workers within construction firms often consist of the managerial and professional employees (Raidén, 2004). It is these groups that have experienced the SHRM-type individualisation of the employment relationship in construction organisations.

In summary, the proposed research is formulated on three kinds of knowledge: theoretical, research and practice knowledge. Similarly the anticipated outcomes reflect all three kinds of knowledge. Currently literature is drawn mainly from theoretical and research literature but it is expected that practice and policy literature will inform the study at a later stage. The project is planned in line with the principles of knowledge for understanding type of enquiry. In terms of the tools for thinking, the above discussion reveals that the main focus in the early development of ideas has been on concepts (SHRM), theories (motivation and personality) and models (the SERF). Perspectives or metaphors have not been employed; neither have strong assumptions or ideologies formed beyond suggestions for methodological approaches. The following section discusses the extent to which the mental map has been useful.

4. USEFULNESS OF THE MENTAL MAP

The description of Wallace and Poulson’s (2003) mental map (section 2 above) stated that the tool is aimed at helping researchers involved with intellectual projects to develop skills in critical analysis and assist them in communicating their intentions, methodologies and outcomes via literature. In the light of the research proposal introduced above, it is confirmed that the map is a useful guide for illuminating concepts in the literature through a critical lens. However, more importantly the map was found helpful in developing clarified and comprehensible explanations for the early ideas. The mental map provided an essential introduction to ‘learning to read critically’ (Wallace and Poulson, 2003: 10). Through the tools for thinking it helped to establish a common language between different members of the research team and thus facilitated effective communication. The map made it also necessary to think about the research ideas holistically and in-depth. Heavy emphasis on the ‘what’ of the project was balanced with the ‘how’ and considerations for potential outcomes.
However, in writing this paper it became evident that an alternative order of arranging the three main areas in the mental map (Table 1: [1] knowledge, [2] literature and [3] projects) would be helpful in communicating research intentions, methodologies and outcomes. As a result, it is suggested that the first step focuses on literature. This provides the background to any study and is often the strongest point of justification for a project. Literature forms the main source of knowledge at early stages of academic enquiry. It helps in deciding on the approach for a project and also forms the foundations for the outcome(s) via critical discussion. An examination of the ‘how’ in terms of project type should follow the literature. Projects help explain the research path which will be/ was taken in achieving the outcome, knowledge, which therefore forms the final element. In summary, where Wallace and Poulson’s (2003) [1] knowledge, [2] literature, [3] projects ordering may be useful as a generic guide to ‘learning to read critically’, an alternative literature, projects, knowledge format is suggested as more suitable for writing efforts. It is beyond the scope of this paper to suggest formats for visual representation of the model, however, the matrix (Table 1) was certainly useful here and it would perhaps be interesting to explore the ‘circle’ view mentioned above.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has introduced a current research project that seeks to begin to address a gap in understanding the relationship between motivation and personality in the construction industry via the SERF model. This proposal derives from the assumption that motivated employees are an important asset in modern businesses. Several theories of motivation help to predict and manage employee performance; however, these theories fail to address personality. Wallace and Poulson’s (2003) mental map was used to structure and refine the initial ideas. On the one hand, this was helpful in developing a critical approach to reading literature, formulating clarified and comprehensible explanations for the early ideas, facilitating effective communication within the research team and encouraging a holistic, in-depth approach. Heavy emphasis on the ‘what’ of the project was balanced with the ‘how’ and considerations for potential outcomes. On the other hand, an alternative ordering for the main areas was suggested: literature, project, knowledge (instead of knowledge, literature, project). Despite both the positive and alternative suggestions regarding the mental map it is important to remember that there is always the danger to limit researchers’ innovations, interpretations and reflection should there be an attempt to fit all ideas into a model or a map. The next stages of the current project embark on detailed literature review and development of the methodology, which should pave the way toward the anticipated outcomes: contribution to understanding personality in motivation via theoretical, research and practice knowledge.

6. REFERENCES

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