Line managers’ views on adopting human resource roles: the case of Hilton (UK) hotels

Sandra Watson

School of Management, Napier University, Edinburgh, UK, and

Gillian A. Maxwell and Lois Farquharson

Division of HRM and Development, Caledonian Business School, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, UK

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore different levels of line manager perspectives, namely strategic and first-line on their role in human resource management (HRM) and human resource development (HRD), and to identify enablers of and barriers to devolving HR to line managers.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a deductive approach, case study data was collected from 76 hotels, owned by Hilton UK, via self-administered questionnaires to strategic and first-line managers. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative results, prior to significance tests being conducted in SPSS to identify differences in means based on managerial positions.

Findings – A number of points of divergence in opinions are revealed, implying that there is potential for the case organisation to secure greater engagement of its first-line managers in HR roles. Reducing the workloads and short-term job pressures of these managers, together with capitalising on the good relations with the hotel HR specialists are means to develop greater engagement. Importantly, improving all line managers’ understanding of the organisational basis of their involvement in HR may bolster their performance in HR activities.

Originality/value – This paper offers a fusion of two theoretical perspectives (HRM and HRD), in addition to identifying differences in perceptions of two different levels of line managers.

Keywords Strategic management, Human resource management, Employee involvement, Line managers, Hotels, United Kingdom

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In 2001, Hilton hotels initiated a service quality approach (Equilibrium), with a human resource (HR) strategy and employee training and development club (Esprit) throughout its hotels that resulted in line managers in hotels assuming greater responsibility for human resource management (HRM) and human resource development (HRD) activities. Together, HRM and HRD activities comprise HR roles. This paper explores line managers’ views on understanding their role, including their involvement in, and commitment to, HR activities – and identifies enablers of and barriers to devolving HR to line managers. Different levels of management in terms of strategic and first-line perspectives are examined. For the purpose of this paper,

The authors would like to thank The University Forum for Human Resource Development for sponsoring this research project, and Hilton hotels for providing access and support.
strategic level managers have been defined as general managers and deputy managers of hotels, whilst first-line level managers encompass departmental heads and supervisors (Hales, 2005). The underpinning literature review addresses the role of line managers from both HRM and HRD perspectives.

Literature review

HRM and HRD have grown up as distinct fields of study using separate theories and practices (Ruona and Gibson, 2004). Relationships between line managers, HRM and HRD are arguably changing (Gibb, 2003) and becoming more fused, despite continuing debate about the focus of HRM (Budhwar, 2000) and scope of HRD (Garavan et al., 1999). In defining the connections between HRM and HRD, the relationship has been dubbed “ambiguous and elusive” (Mankin, 2003). Historically, the literature on these two areas largely treats HRM and HRD separately (Ruona and Gibson, 2004); therefore, this paper explores the theory on line manager responsibility for HRM and HRD in turn.

Inherent in the concept of HRM is a “centre-stage” role for line managers (Renwick, 2003, p. 262). Since the advent of HRM in the UK in the 1980s there has been some debate about devolving aspects of HRM to line managers (Gennard and Kelly, 1997; Hall and Torrington, 1998). Indeed, the devolving of human resource activities to line managers has received much attention by both academics and practitioners in the UK and Europe over the last decade (Larsen and Brewster, 2003). Various reasons for this devolution have been cited, including restructuring, downsizing, and an increased need to focus on encouraging employee inputs for improving their competitive edge (Cunningham and Hyman, 1999; Gibb, 2003; Renwick, 2000). Several researchers assert that line managers assuming some HRM responsibility can positively influence employee commitment and, ultimately, business performance. For example, Cunningham and Hyman (1999) p. 9) highlight the role of line managers in promoting an “integrative culture of employee management through line management”. Thornhill and Saunders (1998) signal the role of line managers in securing employee commitment to quality, while increased productivity has also been asserted as a basis for devolution of HRM (IRS Employment Review, 1995). A recent Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2005) report indicates that line managers’ involvement in coaching and guidance, communication and involvement has a positive influence on overall organisational performance (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003). A key finding from this report is that to gain line managers’ commitment to people management requires support from strong organisational values that emphasise the fundamentals of people management and leadership (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003). Renwick (2003), drawing on the work of Ulrich (1998) and Jackson and Schuler (2000), identifies that a partnership approach to HR requires the integration of HR activities into the work of line managers and that a real partnership approach requires a “triad” approach between HR specialists, line managers and employees. At the same time, Renwick (2003) is also extremely critical of the utility of the “partnership” concept in advancing employee well-being. Nevertheless, as organisations – particularly those in the service sector– need employees’ input to help achieve competitive advantage, involving line managers in HRM has an organisational value.
However, giving line manager responsibility for HRM has also been noted as being “problematic” (McGovern et al., 1997). Challenges lie not least in the relationship between line managers and HRM specialists (Cunningham and Hyman, 1999), “the ability and willingness of line managers to carry out HR tasks properly” (Renwick and MacNeil, 2002, p. 407), and line managers’ knowledge of company policies (Bond and Wise, 2003). Hall and Torrington’s (1998) research on the progress of devolution of operational HRM activities and its consequences, points to organisations making sustained and deliberate efforts to vest HRM responsibility with line managers. Renwick (2003) in investigating line managers views on HRM roles across three organisations found that line managers were willing to do it, were flexible and took a professional and considerate attitude to HR and employees. Whitaker and Marchington (2003) in their case study focusing on senior line managers’ views on devolving HRM to line managers, found that HR support was crucial and that a partnership with HR was beneficial to their role. In addition, they articulated a need for explicit, proactive support from senior management, and recognition and rewards in the HR area. However, researchers have also found tensions between line managers’ general functional and HR responsibilities. For example, Whitaker and Marchington (2003), found that HR took second place in relation to other business needs of sales and marketing and finance, and Renwick (2003) found issues around lack of time, inadequacies in ability and distraction from general managerial focus and tensions between HR specialists’ expectations in relation to completion schedules of HR tasks.

Similarly, the involvement of line managers in HRD has been the subject of academic debate and organisational challenges. In clarifying the role of line managers in HRD Heraty and Morley (1995) present that activities surrounding identification of training needs, deciding who should be trained and undertaking direct training either fall within the domain of line managers or in partnership with HR specialists. Whereas aspects of HRD concerned with policy formulation, training plans and advising on strategy are more likely to be undertaken by HRD specialists. Gibb (2003) asserts that concerns over increased line manager involvement in HRD are valid in that it may limit the use of specialist resources in HRD. Another issue is that while line managers have been identified as “one of the key stakeholders with the HRD process” (Heraty and Morley, 1995, p. 31), difficulties in securing line manager acceptance of HRD responsibilities have been evident (Ashton, 1984). Research has identified factors that may enable and inhibit the take-up of line manager responsibility for HRD.

Arguably the most significant enabler of line manager responsibility for HRD is the “growing body of literature on the emergence and growth of HRD and in particular HRD with a strategic focus” (Garavan et al., 1995, p. 4). HRD may be seen as providing the key connection between HRM and business strategy (Garavan et al., 2001). Business-led approaches to HRD can indeed be evidenced (Harrison, 1993; Sparrow and Pettigrew, 1988), lending weight to the theory on HRD. For Torraco and Swanson (1995), HRD is not only supportive of, but central to, business strategy. It is also, central to HRM. Therefore, it can be seen that there are important lines to be drawn between HRM, HRD, line managers and business strategy. McCracken and Wallace’s (2000) model of the characteristics of strategic HRD indicates that all four of these factors are integral to a SHRD approach being taken. In this model they are expressed as: integration with organisational missions and goals; HRD plans and policies; line manager commitment and involvement; and complementary HRM activities.
In terms of enabling HRD at an operational level, de Jong et al.’s (1999, p. 183) research suggests that this is “a feasible option” providing specific conditions are met in organisations. One significant condition may be the credibility of HRD as an organisational activity in general. For despite the relatively recent interest in, and expansion of, HRD in UK organisations, there seems to be a residual issue of credibility of the training and development function in organisations generally (CIPD, 2001). Organisational support for line managers in their HRD responsibility is important too in the facilitation of the devolution of HRD responsibility (Heraty and Morley, 1995), as is senior managers’ understanding of training and development issues (de Jong et al., 1999). Trust between line managers and HRD specialists, is another important enabler (Garavan et al., 1993). Lastly, as emphasised by de Jong et al. (1999), line managers acting as role models in demonstrating commitment to HRD in their operational tasks, may be a powerful enabler of HRD.

On the other hand, a number of barriers to the effective delegation of HRD responsibility have been recognised. One potential issue that is conceivably acute in the hotel sector is the pressure of short-term imperatives (Tsui, 1987) that may squeeze out HRD activities for line managers. This factor, in combination with a lack of training in HRD, may minimise the priority of HRD for line managers (Ashton, 1984; Brewster and Soderstrom, 1994; de Jong et al., 1999). Untrained line managers may avoid a coaching role due to their discomfort with it (de Jong et al., 1999). Further, where managers do not reflect a belief in HRD in their operational role the impact of HRD is likely to be reduced (de Jong, 1999), the direct converse of reflecting a belief in HRD being an enabler of HRD, as pointed out earlier.

The literature reveals a clear responsibility for line managers in both HRM and HRD, therefore HR roles, but recognises that to secure involvement clear delineation of tasks, support, training and trust are crucial for effective devolvement of HRM and HRD to line managers. Inhibitors of and barriers to involvement in and commitment to HR from both an HRM and HRD perspective centre on time, work priorities, capability, comfort and trust. However, much of the reviewed research covered in this article focuses on line managers as an homogenous group. Exceptions are Guest and King (2004) and Whitaker and Marchington (2003) who focused their research on senior managers and MacNeil (2001) who identified first-line managers as the participants of her research. Other researchers including Heraty and Morley (1995) investigated views from both line managers and HRM specialists, providing opportunities for comparative views to emerge. However, the empirical research presented in this article draws attention to divergence in views between two different levels of managers in one case organisation, Hilton’s UK hotels. These levels are strategic managers, (Hales, 2005) who are functioning at a strategic (unit) hotel level, as either general or deputy managers, and first-line level managers, who are operational managers functioning at Head of Department and/or supervisory level, similar to Hales (2005) or McNeil’s (2001) first-line manager level. The methods used to gather data in this study are now outlined.

Research methods
The purpose of the Hilton research project as examined here is to explore the views of two different levels of line managers – strategic and first-line – on their role in relation to HRM and HRD activities. In order to do this, the primary research firstly addressed
the question of how committed line managers feel to HR activities. It then explored the key mechanisms that help support line managers with their HR responsibilities. In order to gain a balanced understanding of issues and pressures influencing commitment to, and involvement in, HR activities the question of what barriers hinder managers’ involvement in HR activities was addressed. The underlying research question of whether strategic and first-line level managers differ in their views on their HR roles in the company threads through each aspect of the empirical work.

In order to address the research questions, a deductive approach was taken in developing the questionnaire, with the content being informed by the literature review and semi-structured interviews with the UK HR Vice-president. The interviews explored the most recent strategic developments in relation to the devolvement of HR activities to line managers. The key themes explored were organisational structures, systems and processes used to support line managers, as well as expectations of them as regards HR roles.

The questionnaire was designed to include Hilton-specific questions as a form of action research and theory-derived questions on consultation with a regional HR director, a hotel HR manager and an external survey organisation. The questionnaire commenced with exploring the understanding and acceptance of Esprit. This is the HR strategy of employment designed to support the service quality initiative. It is also an internal club, which employees may join following training and development. Following on from this, key themes of the questionnaire were exploration of HR activities in relation to involvement in and importance of HR; support mechanisms; barriers; training; level of confidence; and any identified issues and further support. The latter section of the questionnaire addressed biographical data of respondents. The questionnaire format encompassed nominal, ordinal, ranking and Likert rating scales, and several open-ended questions. It was piloted, on both strategic and first-line managers in one hotel, resulting in minor changes being made to the survey instrument in relation to terminology, structure and ordering of some questions.

The population comprises some 760 managers in Hilton hotels throughout the UK: ten questionnaires were distributed to each hotel for self-selected and anonymous completion in summer 2003. The response rate is 328 questionnaires, 43 per cent. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative results, prior to one-way ANOVA significance tests being conducted in SPSS to identify significant differences in means based on managerial position. Significance levels were assessed at 95 per cent ($p \leq 0.05$) and 99 per cent ($p \leq 0.01$) thresholds. The null hypothesis was that there was no difference for the variable being tested (i.e. the position of the manager makes no difference to the level of importance attached to each questionnaire statement). In addition, the Bonferroni post hoc test was carried out on significant ANOVA scores to give a more detailed indication of where the variances in mean are most significant. Open-ended question responses have been coded into themes to enable these to be presented using percentage response rates. Quantitative responses are supplemented, in the findings, with qualitative questionnaire statements where appropriate. The findings are discussed below in terms of strategic and first-line managers’ understanding and ownership of Esprit, and perceived roles in relation to HR, including enablers and inhibitors influencing their effectiveness in delivering HR activities. Reference is made to the UK HR Vice-President’s (VP) views on key current
issues concerning the Esprit tool in order to frame the Hilton perspective on line managers’ involvement in HR.

Case background
In 2001 Hilton introduced a global service quality initiative that seeks to establish a service brand (Equilibrium) and service culture (Esprit/Hilton moments), with support from an HR employment strategy, which includes an employee training and development club (Esprit). Esprit is also portrayed within Hilton as being a concept of directing the way employees work. It consists of a range of HR activities that are designed to ensure that employees are able to support the service quality initiative of Equilibrium.

Esprit has been designed to embrace the key principles of employee recognition, respect and reward. It “starts with recruitment but relies more on appropriate [employee] development... Esprit training aims to change behaviours to deliver Hilton moments” (UK HR vice-president). Upon successful completion of training, employees become members of Esprit entitling them to access rewards and incentives. Extra rewards can be given to employees who demonstrate excellent customer service. Hotels are provided with annual targets for Esprit membership numbers and these are measured as part of the hotel’s performance indicators. Although initiated by Hilton’s corporate Human Resource department in the UK, Hilton perceive Esprit as being concerned with instilling a service culture throughout the organisation, believing this to be owned by all Hilton employees. Managers’ response to Esprit is generally perceived to be very positive. However, one of the key challenges concerns embedding Esprit into the organisation. According to the UK HR VP it is “about ‘walking the talk’ – line managers have to live this concept day in and day out e.g. in the way they speak/behave/interact”. The UK HR vice president reports that “very few challenges were experienced around acceptance however there are still some around ownership – Who owns Esprit? Esprit should live in the hotels and they should determine recognition rather than being seen as a Head Office initiative”. In attempting to ensure that Esprit is operationalised effectively, all line managers in hotels are expected to assume responsibility for it through a range of HR activities. These activities include selection, training and development, employee motivation and recognition, and performance management. Line managers are provided with support from specialist HR staff at unit and Head Office level. Hilton refer to HRM and HRD activities under the generic term HR, hence this is the term used in the findings below. In this respect implicitly the HR and line managers need to work in partnership (Brown et al., 2004). Although out with the focus of this research the HR specialist’s role at Head Office can be viewed as being Strategic Partner, with unit level HR specialists at unit level act as Functional Experts (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2001).

Findings and analysis
Respondent profiles
All 76 hotels are represented in the sample, with 34 per cent of respondents located in Central and North England, 22 per cent from Scotland and Ireland, 29 per cent South of England and 16 per cent in London. The majority of the respondents are female (56 per cent). Females form the majority of all levels of managers represented in the sample. Of the sample, 30 per cent comprises strategic management, consisting of general
managers and deputy managers, whilst first-line level consisted of 53 per cent are departmental managers, 9 per cent supervisors and 7 per cent (assistant and deputy departmental managers). Of the respondents, 2 per cent did not indicate their position in the organisation. The age profile of the respondents indicates that 52 per cent of the sample is between 26-45 years of age, with 18 per cent in the 18-25 years category and 6 per cent over 45 years of age. Some 56 per cent of the respondents have been in their current position for one-five years, 15 per cent over five years and 27 per cent less than one year. Of those who have been in their current position for less than one year, 39 per cent have been with the organisation for less than one year, representing 10 per cent of the total returns. Of the respondents, 48 per cent indicated that they had been with Hilton hotels for one-five years and a further 38 per cent over five years (Table I).

Understanding and ownership of Esprit
Prior to examining line managers’ views on their human resource management and development roles, it is important to ascertain whether their views on Esprit align with the corporate intention. It is evident, from the questionnaire results, that the managers in this sample do not universally share the corporate understanding of Esprit. The majority of line managers (87 per cent) perceive Esprit as a club for employees, in relation to employees becoming members and being eligible for rewards and recognition incentives. This view is strong with 82 per cent of strategic managers and 90 per cent of first-line level managers agreeing with this statement. Only 26 per cent of the respondents indicate that Esprit is a concept directing the way employees work (23 per cent strategic level managers and 27 per cent first-line level managers). A further 14 per cent of respondents indicated that Esprit is a way of working practices, with 20 per cent of senior managers and 11 per cent of first-line level managers expressed this view. Also, 10 per cent of the respondents indicate that it is both a club and a concept, with a further 8 per cent viewing it as a concept directing the way employees work, a club for employees and a way of working practices. Other views expressed, by 8 per cent of the respondents, focused on Esprit being a reward/benefit package and an incentive or motivational scheme. For example, Esprit is “an incentive for employees to achieve a company standard resulting in membership of Esprit” (departmental manager). Only four respondents indicated understanding of the beliefs and values underpinning Esprit, as expressed in these responses “a belief/culture system” (General Managers) and “positive enforcement of Hilton as a group in the minds of our employees” (General Manager).

There also appears to be discrepancies regarding ownership of Esprit. The general view expressed is that there is multiple ownership. On average, nearly all respondents provided three responses each, generating a total of 865 responses, but strategic level managers were more inclined to give multiple responses than first-line level managers. However, in analysing these based on number and level of respondents it can be seen that 69 per cent of managers (62 per cent senior managers and 73 per cent first-line level) consider Esprit to be owned by Hilton. Whilst 54 per cent of the total sample indicated that employees own it, 66 per cent of strategic level managers agreed with this view. Almost two-thirds of the respondents consider it to be owned by Human Resources at head Office, while strategic level managers agreed with this view (36 per cent Head Office HR and 41 per cent hotel HR) slightly more than first-line level managers (26 per cent Head Office HR; 27 per cent hotel HR). Of senior managers,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managerial level</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>No. of respondents (n = 328)</th>
<th>% age of respondents</th>
<th>Gender (%)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Length of service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic 30%</td>
<td>General/deputy managers</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43 M</td>
<td>≤ 35 = 62%</td>
<td>&lt; 5yrs = 48%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57 F</td>
<td>&gt; 35 = 36%</td>
<td>5-10yrs = 29%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs = 21%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-line 68%</td>
<td>Department managers</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>43 M</td>
<td>≤ 35 = 73%</td>
<td>&lt; 5yrs = 64%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73 F</td>
<td>&gt; 35 = 26%</td>
<td>5-10yrs = 20%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs = 14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46 M</td>
<td>≤ 35 = 79%</td>
<td>&lt; 5yrs = 75%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54 F</td>
<td>&gt; 35 = 21%</td>
<td>5-10yrs = 18%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs = 7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant and deputy departmental managers</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30 M</td>
<td>≤ 35 = 74%</td>
<td>&lt; 5yrs = 56%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70 F</td>
<td>&gt; 35 = 26%</td>
<td>5-10yrs = 22%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs = 13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43 M</td>
<td>≤ 35 = 83%</td>
<td>&lt; 5yrs = 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>56 F</td>
<td>&gt; 35 = 15%</td>
<td>5-10yrs = 23%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs = 16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td></td>
<td>328</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>43 M</td>
<td>≤ 35 = 83%</td>
<td>&lt; 5yrs = 59%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>56 F</td>
<td>&gt; 35 = 15%</td>
<td>5-10yrs = 23%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs = 16%</td>
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</table>
35 per cent perceive Esprit to be owned by senior management, whilst only 17 per cent of first-line level managers agreed with this statement: “staff members from department heads have to take ownership of Esprit” (departmental manager). Although 30 per cent of respondents expressed the view that departmental managers own Esprit, senior managers were more inclined to agree with this statement than first-line level managers. This may reflect the perceived rhetorical ownership, rather than the actual practice. It is also notable that most strategic and most first-line managers believe that people other than themselves own Esprit: 35 per cent of the former group acknowledge their ownership and 24 per cent of the latter group. Of the 3 per cent who chose other response, all of them expressed the view that everyone in the organisation owns Esprit, reflecting the corporate view of ownership. As one senior manager indicated “we all do – our ideas generate improvement” (Table II).

**Line managers’ roles in HR**

In order to obtain an overview of the range of HR activities undertaken by line managers, they were asked to indicate the human resource activities in which they were actively involved, the perceived level of importance in relation to importance to business effectiveness and then to rank the most important five of these. Table III provides a breakdown of the results.

As can be seen from Table III, both strategic and first-line managers rated team building, communication, motivation, selection performance appraisal and health and safety as being important to the business and indicated a high degree of involvement in these. Strategic level managers stated more involvement in budgeting and forecasting, employee retention, disciplinary and grievance, performance appraisals than tactical level managers. First-line managers indicated greater involvement in dealing with membership of Esprit club than strategic level managers. Overall, the strategic managers indicate a slightly greater level of involvement in HR activities than the first-line managers. This is evident across 12 HR activities. Although this result may initially appear surprising, the nature of hospitality management at general management and deputy management level would generally encompass a strong emphasis on HR activities (Watson, McCracken and Hughes, 2004). This result also

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locus</th>
<th>No. of respondents (n = 328)</th>
<th>Age of respondents (%)</th>
<th>Strategic managers (%)</th>
<th>First-line managers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hilton plc</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head office human resources</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>department</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual hotels</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel human resources</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departmental managers</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table II.**

*Ownership of Esprit*

**Note:** Multiple responses were permitted
### Table III.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human resource activity</th>
<th>Strategic level managers involved(^a) (%)</th>
<th>First-line level managers involved(^b) (%)</th>
<th>Mean score (1 = most, 5 = least)</th>
<th>Rank importance to business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection of employees</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation and morale of employees</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction of new employees</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team briefings &amp; communication</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee budgeting &amp; forecasting</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance appraisal</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of training needs</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esprit membership</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring employee availability to participate in training and development activities</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards and benefits</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary and grievance procedures</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating training</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring HR processes are maintained</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \(^a\)\(n = 99\), \(^b\)\(n = 323\)
adds weight to Hale’s (2005) assertion that broader HR responsibilities do not lie with first-line manager level.

A total of 21 per cent of the respondents took the opportunity to provide additional comments on their role in relation to HR activities. Comments relating to training came to 38 per cent, encompassing analysing training needs, encouraging employees to participate in training, delivery and evaluation. Communications was mentioned by 14 per cent of the respondents predominantly with HR specialists, communicating HR issues to staff and attending HR meetings. Other activities mentioned by respondents included coaching, sickness interviews, teambuilding and payroll management. Complaints regarding workloads and staffing levels were voiced by 10 per cent of the respondents, as demonstrated by one tactical level manager:

The increased workload in relation to HR issues has required departmental managers to take their focus off customers and staff, resulting in increased workloads negating the effect of Equilibrium.

A further 5 per cent complained about HR support within their hotel and head office as indicated by one first-line manager: “I think that HR needs to be more visible within our unit”. In contrast, 9 per cent of the managers were extremely positive about their role in HR activities, as indicated by the following quotes from two of the first-line managers: “I feel I have a better/greater opportunity to be more involved within HR because of the hotels and staff itself. It is fantastic not only to be supported by our own team, but the whole “hotel team” as well” and “I get support and encouragement continuously. I run my department as if I was HR – but with the bonus of all the help I need available – works fantastic[sic]”.

Thus, the majority of both groups of line managers are involved in a range of HRM and HRD activities, and there were nearly twice as many managers who were positive about these than there were managers who were negative in their comments.

Enabling HR activities
One of the key influences on line managers’ attitudes to HR activities is the extent to which they perceive HR is considered important by the organisation. In addition to level of importance given to HR at the hotel level, line managers were asked to assess the importance of HR as a general business activity by rating the level of importance attached to HR by the organisation, with five being essential and 1 unimportant. Strategic level managers (M = 4.41) consider that great importance is attached to training and development by unit managers (M = 4.19). The ANOVA test reveals a significant variance of $f(4,323) = 2.809, p < 0.05$. The Bonferroni test shows that the difference lies between senior managers and departmental managers. The hotel HR manager’s role in supporting the carrying out HR activities was also rated as very important (M = 4.09). The ANOVA test reveals that there is significant variance $f(4,323) = 3.305, p < 0.05$. The Bonferroni test shows the difference lies between senior managers and departmental managers. Head office support (M = 3.88) and training and development expenditure compared with capital expenditure (M = 3.70) were rated as being given less importance. However, 98 per cent of strategic managers felt that senior managers and directors at regional and head office put importance on training and development. A significant variance was found $f(4,323) = 6.165, p < 0.001$, with the Bonferroni test highlighting that the differences lie between
senior managers and all other level of managers. These results indicate that strategic managers consider HR as being of strategic importance in Hilton (McCracken and Wallace, 2000). This view is slightly divergent to the contentions of Guest and King (2004) who found that HR was not seen as a high priority by senior managers.

In order to gain an understanding of managers’ views on the value of HR, they were asked to rate HR aspects, with 5 being excellent and 1 being poor. The highest mean score was found in relation to the working relationship with the HR manager ($M = 3.91$). This result supports the importance of relationships between HR and line managers as indicated by Brown et al. (2004), Renwick (2000) and Whittaker and Marchington (2003). Strategic managers ($M = 4.18$) were more inclined than first-line managers ($M = 3.88$) to rate this as excellent. The Bonferroni statistical test confirms significant differences between senior managers ($p < 0.005$) and departmental managers ($p < 0.005$). Individual contributions to training and development were rated as excellent by 13 per cent of the managers, while 47 per cent indicated that this was very good and 31 per cent that it was good ($M = 3.65$). Significant differences in the mean was found $f(4,323) = 2.912$, $p < 0.05$. This was between strategic managers and those who did not indicate a job title. A total of 25 per cent of the respondents rated the HR function in their hotel as excellent, 35 per cent very good, 21 per cent good, with 6 per cent indicating this was poor ($M = 3.59$). The importance of a good relationship between line managers and HR specialists was also highlighted as an issue by Guest and King (2004) who report mainly negative comments on the relationship between HR and line managers and the policies implemented.

The scope and benefits available through Esprit were considered to be excellent by 15 per cent of the managers, with only 4 per cent rating these as poor ($M = 3.44$). A total of 74 per cent rated the managerial team effectiveness as very good or good, with 10 per cent rating this as excellent and 2 per cent as poor ($M = 3.30$). Some 17 per cent of strategic level managers rated this as excellent compared with 7 per cent of first-line managers. Almost three quarters (74 per cent) of the respondents (both strategic and first-line managers) indicated that senior managements understanding of training and development issues was good/very good, a further 11 per cent considered this to be excellent with 3 per cent rating this as poor ($M = 3.39$). So, although there is a perceived view that senior management within the organisation understand training and development, only those managers working at a strategic level consider that this is viewed as a strategic priority.

The literature highlighted concerns around line managers’ relationship with HR, managers’ lack of willingness to undertake training and development and perceived senior managers’ perceptions of HR. The results in this survey indicate that none of these issues are of concern to strategic managers, although departmental managers and supervisors rated the HR function and the working relationship with HR lower than senior managers. “HR should be a support for departmental managers and members of staff. For that they should come out of their office and talk to people and not delegate the job to departmental managers and threaten them with disciplinaries if they struggle to achieve everything without support” as indicated by one departmental manager. This finding supports the view that HR acts as a support to line managers as presented by Larsen and Brewster (2003), Renwick (2003) and Whittaker and Marchington (2003). It is also interesting to note that personal involvement activities
were rated higher than team and strategic aspects of HRM and HRD. For example, individual managers’ contribution to training and development was rated higher than senior managers’ understanding of training and development and the managerial team effectiveness.

In relation to organisational support for line managers identified by Heraty and Morley (1995) and McGovern et al. (1997) as facilitating the devolvement of HR, most often cited were personal development (61 per cent of respondents) and the provision of appropriate support material (61 per cent), across both strategic and tactical managers. The maintenance of the profile of Esprit, through conferences and newsletters, was considered to have been helpful by 45 per cent of the respondents, but more so by strategic level managers (52 per cent). Senior management support was considered to have assisted line managers by 42 per cent of the managers, but particularly by strategic level managers. Techniques and ideas, for example best practice, was cited by 35 per cent of the managers and administrative support by 31 per cent of the respondents. This analysis reveals that there is strong evidence of support in the form of training and development and supporting materials, however less evident to first-line managers is senior management support, seen as being a facilitator by Heraty and Morley (1995).

In an attempt to gauge line managers’ commitment to, and involvement in, HR, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with statements on values surrounding HR (5 being strongly agree and 1 strongly disagree). Table IV provides a breakdown of the mean scores with standard deviations for each of these statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value statement</th>
<th>Strategic level</th>
<th>First-line level</th>
<th>Mean scores</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel personal responsibility for my team members</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>0.652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I support the employees in my team</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have responsibility for HR in my team</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esprit is fundamental to the success of Hilton</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>0.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employees value Esprit</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and development is an explicit part of Hilton moments/Equilibrium</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust the HR specialists in my unit</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>1.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a strategic approach to training and development in my unit</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I value HR activities in the achievement of business objectives in my unit</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reflect the values of Esprit in my day-to-day role</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employees value Hilton HR initiatives</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team atmosphere in my hotel reflects the value of Hilton moments/Esprit</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departmental managers work as a team to support Hilton moments/Esprit</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV.
Value statement means with standard deviations
What is particularly interesting is the strong sense of personal responsibility for staff within teams, with managers indicating that they support and feel a strong sense of responsibility for their employees and HR, particularly strategic level managers. This indicates an ownership of HR, but on their own terms, concerned with the caring/engaging aspects of HR rather than ownership of administration and procedural issues. This is an area that was highlighted in the interviews with the UK vice-president of HR: “The challenge is for all managers, supervisors and operations managers to understand that they are responsible for their people, in the same way they also own Esprit.” However, the lower rating of the questionnaire statement “I reflect the values of Esprit in my day-to-day role” may indicate that both strategic and tactical level managers understand this responsibility but are not able to actually practice this on a daily basis (12 per cent of senior managers and 7 per cent of departmental managers felt that they did not reflect the value of Esprit). This reflects one of the key challenges identified by Hilton. This is likely to impinge on the extent to which managers act as a role model, which de Jong et al. (1999) highlight as an enabler for line managers to undertake HR activities. This may also influence the lower responses given in relation to the ability of teams and departments to reflect the values of the service initiative of Equilibrium. Although responsibility for HR has the third highest mean, the perceived value of HR activities in achieving business objectives is less obvious, with 16 per cent of managers strongly agreeing and 45 per cent agreeing with this statement. However, senior managers rated this more highly than first-line managers. Somewhat contradictorily, first-line managers rate the importance of the HR initiative of Esprit higher than strategic level managers. The level of trust in HR (Garavan et al., 1993) is apparent across both strategic and first-line managers, although 12 per cent of the departmental managers indicated that there is a lack of trust in HR. In relation to a strategic approach to training and development, which McCracken and Wallace (2000) contend influences line managers’ commitment and involvement, 62 per cent of strategic level managers, and at a tactical level, 64 per cent of departmental managers, 54 per cent of supervisors, and 61 per cent of others agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Although there is evidence from the descriptive statistics that support mechanisms for line managers to undertake HRD and HRM roles are in place in Hilton, the ANOVA, test shows that there are two questionnaire statements which are significant to the 0.01 level: “I feel personal responsibility for my team members” $f(4, 316) = 6.505$, $p < 0.01$; and “I have responsibility for HR in my team” $f(4, 313) = 6.080$, $p < 0.01$. The Bonferroni test shows that for the statement “I feel personal responsibility for my team members” there are significant differences between the mean responses of department managers and supervisors, and between supervisors and senior managers. And for the statement and “I have responsibility for HR in my team” there are significant differences between senior managers and supervisors, between senior managers and other respondents, and between supervisors and departmental managers. Thus, there are gradations of feelings for personal responsibility across the management jobs but strategic level managers feel this most keenly. This supports the point made previously, i.e. senior managers view their role in HR in personal (caring) terms. This is also supported by the analysis of Guest and King (2004) who discuss the tacit and personal aspects of line manager’s HR roles rather than an emphasis on administrative/procedural aspects, which is more strongly associated with HR practitioners.
Barriers to HR activities

The two main barriers to supporting line managers with their HR role are heavy workloads and short-term job pressures, similar to findings by McGovern et al. (1997). Heavy workloads are seen as a barrier particularly by departmental managers (91 per cent) and supervisors (93 per cent), whilst strategic level managers (77 per cent) and supervisors (91 per cent) perceive short-term job pressures as barriers. This has been identified in the literature (Tsui, 1987) as being a key barrier to devolving HR activities to line managers. Almost a quarter of the strategic level managers (24 per cent) stated that heavy workloads or short-term work pressures (23 per cent) were never a barrier to their HR role. Role conflict is identified as being a barrier often or always by 29 per cent of the sample, with more first-line managers (33 per cent) perceiving this as a barrier than strategic level managers (19 per cent). Discomfort with a coaching role is seen as a barrier by less than 10 per cent of the sample. These findings concur with results from previous research, for example, McGovern et al. (1997).

The importance of training of line managers to enable them to undertake HR activities has been highlighted by a number of authors including Ashton (1984), Brewster and Soderstrom (1994) and de Jong et al. (1999). Lack of skills to support learning was not seen as a particularly strong barrier with only 14 per cent of the sample highlighting this as an inhibitor, although 32 per cent of supervisors and 21 per cent of departmental managers cited this as a barrier. Of the other skills deficits seen as barriers, time management was seen as a barrier, particularly by first-line managers (49 per cent). This supports the issues of heavy workloads and short-time pressures. Although lack of delegation and communication skills were not seen as barriers by the majority of respondents, a perceived lack delegation ability was reported by 48 per cent of the supervisors and 28 per cent of the departmental managers. Similar findings around skills and training deficits were reported by McGovern et al. (1997).

These results concur with further views on training that were explored in the questionnaire. The majority of respondents across all levels of management felt that further training on HR would help them to either to some extent (36 per cent) or to a great extent (38 per cent), with a further 11 per cent expressing the view that training would help them to a great extent. A mean score of 3.47 was reported for the total sample, with department managers and supervisors having higher mean scores of 3.53 and 3.63 respectively, although the ANOVA test results showed that there are no significant variances in means in relation to level of managerial positions. Similarly, the level of confidence to support training and development is seen to be high across all the managers with 38 per cent indicating that they feel very competent and 57 per cent competent in undertaking HR activities. This result is in line with Whittaker and Marchington’s (2003) findings who reported that seniors are to keen to engage in doing HR tasks in general, and Renwick (2003) who argues that although line managers think that doing HR work is no problem, they actually face problems when doing it in action. The mean score for the sample on a five-point Likert scale is 4.31. Senior managers have the highest mean score at 4.46, whilst tactical level managers had a lower mean score of 4.16. This is supported by the findings of the ANOVA results f(4, 323) = 2.883; p < 0.05 and the Bonferroni test that shows that the variance is between senior managers and other managers (p = 0.066), although the significance level is not high.
Discussion
The empirical findings reveal that there are indeed a number of key points of divergence in the positions of the strategic and first-line managers on line managers’ adoption of HR in Hilton’s UK hotels. These differentials in opinions thread through line managers’ roles in and commitment to HR activities, together with support for and hindrances to HR activities. They may be rooted in the evidently widespread misunderstanding of Esprit in Hilton, wherein the focus is on the staff club dimension at the expense of the intended concept of directing the way employees work. This is not only an important finding but also a pressing issue that Hilton needs to address to avoid misdirection of managers’ efforts in HR. For although more strategic than first-line managers recognise their responsibility for Esprit, it is only a minority whose understanding seems to conform to the organisational line. Such misunderstanding may act to undermine the business partnership model of HR that is a central plank of the CIPD approach for HR (Brown et al., 2004).

Beyond this, the first key differential in opinion lies in the finding that a higher proportion of strategic managers report involvement in HR activities than first-line managers, despite the operational and team work emphasis of their jobs in particular. This reflects McGovern et al.’s (1997) contention on the challenge of securing line manager responsibility for HRM. Further, it possibly reflects Hutchinson and Purcell’s (2003) assertion that gaining line manager commitment to HRM necessitates strong organisational values that emphasise HRM in that the first-line managers’ understanding of Esprit is more limited than the strategic managers’, as highlighted above. In a similar vein, the personal level of responsibility for team members and responsibility for HR in teams is perceived to be higher amongst the strategic level manager respondents than first-line level respondents, the second key differential. This is likely to be related to the nature of hotel management work with its strong emphasis on people management skills (Christou and Eaton, 1997).

Third, the questionnaire results indicate that only the strategic managers consider that HRD is viewed as important within Hilton (McCracken and Wallace, 2000), underlining the need for greater understanding of the Esprit concept. Fourth, although there is strong evidence of support for line managers in their HRM and HRD activities generally, there is less evidence that first-line managers feel they have senior level, organisational support for their HR activities, which is an important facilitator according to Heraty and Morley (1995). Fifth, the strategic managers rate their working relationships with HR specialists in their hotels higher than the first-line managers do, although the overall rating is high. Such a partnership between strategic line managers and HR specialists is, as Whittaker and Marchington (2003) assert, from their study of strategic managers, a crucial support to line managers in HRM and is a key facilitator in developing a business partnership approach (Brown et al., 2004). Last, a high majority of first-line managers see heavy workloads and short-term job pressures as hindrances to involvement, in HR roles, in keeping with Mc Govern et al.’s (1997) and Tsui’s (1987) findings, while short-term job pressures are seen as the main barrier to HR activities by strategic managers and not to the same extent as the first-line managers.

Conclusion
This paper makes a contribution to practice in two distinct areas. First, there is a lack of empirical work addressing understanding of issues around devolvement of HR roles
to line managers in the hospitality sector. It provides an analysis of the range of HR roles and the perceived importance of these to two different levels of line managers. Second, the article enhances understanding, by providing line managers’ divergent views on enablers and inhibitors influencing their ability to adopt HR roles. This is important in relation to enhancing the experience of employees in the industry, as first-line managers undertake aspects of teamwork, communication and motivation, with this research highlighting that first-line managers are less involved in HR activities than the strategic level managers. This could be related to the nature of hotel management with there is a strong focus on people management skills for strategic managers as well as first-line managers.

**Implications for practitioners/educationalists**

The principal implication of these divergences in opinion across the two management levels is that there is potential for first-line level managers in Hilton’s UK hotels to engage more in the HR activities that underpin the company’s service culture. That this level of managers are apparently less involved in these activities than strategic level managers in the hotels is at best ironic and at worst commercially detrimental, given their main responsibility for the very employees who deliver – or not – the Hilton moment service exchanges.

To realise this potential the organisation could investigate how they are embedding the principles of, and HR practices of, Esprit, to engage first-line managers. This will require attention being given to ensure that the philosophical aspects of Esprit are given greater focus, and that senior managers are more visible in their support for HR activities. Partnership working between HR unit level specialists and first-line managers could be clearly articulated, in line with the Brown et al.’s (2004) guidelines. In addition, the values associated with Esprit require to be embedded through a range of supportive mechanisms, including training and senior management support.

A further contribution to industry practice can be found in relation to identification of the difficulty of balancing business driven involvement with philosophical commitment to HR activities. In relation to educational implications, this work highlights the importance of ensuring that HR is seen as a critical component of all hospitality management education programmes. The implications of this research to both industry and education are forwarded with reservation, as the authors’ are aware of the limitations of the research being based in one organisation. Further work within Hilton's UK hotels, encompassing employee and HR specialists’ perspectives, would add a further dimension to understanding line managers’ involvement in HRM and HRD. Moreover, research across a range of organisations and countries would provide a comparative element to the project.

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Line managers’ views on adopting HR


**About the authors**

Sandra Watson is Head of Human Resource Management at Napier University Business School, Edinburgh, UK. Her research interests are on human resource development issues in hospitality and tourism, with a focus on management skills, competence and capability. She has published many articles and has edited texts on human resource management and development. Recent publications include an analysis of managerial skill requirements in Scottish tourism/evaluation of training initiatives in a period of downsizing in the hospital sector and HRM and service quality in the international hotel sector. Sandra Watson is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: s.watson@napier.ac.uk
Gillian A. Maxwell is a Senior Lecturer in human resource management in the division of HRMD at Caledonian Business School. An active researcher, her research centres on a range of strategic human resource management developments and issues. Examples of recent journal articles include the topics of work-life balance, gender balance in management, and human resource management research ethics. She has also co-edited and contributed to two textbooks on strategic human resource management.

Lois Farquharson is a Lecturer in human resource management in the division of HRM & D at Caledonian Business School. As an active researcher, her research focuses on key human resource management issues associated with managing organisational change, organisational culture, and the development of equality and diversity.
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