

Trialling a Genetically Engineered Organisation in Post-Disaster Recovery

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Abstract

Although the links between human resource management (HRM) policies, strategies and practices, and organisational performance have been explored from a range of perspectives, only limited attention however has been given to the implementation of a collaborative alliance/partnership HR configuration (Lepak and Snell, 1999, 2002). This paper investigates the case of a large-scale, multi-party alliance which intentionally designed an HRM architecture as a key element for achieving high levels of organisational performance. The findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the model, but also identify a set of critical factors for establishing, and sustaining such a configuration.

Introduction

A significant body of evidence suggests that human resources play a crucial role in creating and sustaining organisational performance (Arthur, 1994; Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Huselid, 1995). Research has sought to identify the set of specific human resource management (HRM) policies, strategies and practices that positively impact on organisational performance. This research has focused on three major areas: (a) micro HRM, covering policies, practices and employee relations, (b) strategic HRM, covering overall HR strategies and their execution, and (c) international HRM, covering HR practices across national boundaries (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007; Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009). This paper is located within the strategic HRM stream of the literature.

Within this strategic HRM stream, there has been an on-going debate between the approaches of universal HR best practices, and context-specific HR practices (Becker & Gerhart, 1996). Lepak and Snell (1992) have however been critical of both approaches, arguing that the approaches tend to view employment and human capital holistically, ignoring the differences between employee groups within a firm. Accordingly, they developed a human resource architecture relating to four different employment modes: knowledge-based employment, job-based employment, contract work, and alliance/partnership (Lepak & Snell, 1999, 2002). Based on analysis of data from 148 firms, Lepak and Snell showed that human capital differs across these four employment modes, in terms of strategic value and uniqueness. They also demonstrated how each employment mode is associated with a particular type of HR configuration.

This paper focuses on the fourth employment mode of Lepak & Snell's (1999) typology – alliance/partnership. Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002) classify the bundle of HR practices associated with this employment mode as a collaborative HR configuration. According to them, this configuration aims at sharing information and developing trust between partners. Firms using an alliance mode are more likely to invest heavily in the alliance relationship itself, as the joint outcomes from the alliance take on increased importance. Compared to other employment modes, in an alliance/partnership mode the factors that would be emphasised include team building, shared learning, and the evolution of the relationship. More importantly, firms are likely to create collective incentives that reward sharing and transfer of information.

The key contribution of Lepak & Snell (1999, 2002) is the proposition that a collaborative HR orientation is essential in organisational arrangements that are alliances or partnerships. However, their research has six specific limitations. First, it is based on a cross-sectional survey of firms. Second, the survey employed perceptual data rather than more objective measures. Third, the performance implications of this HR configuration are not clear from their research. Fourth, their study did not focus on the over-arching HR philosophy or logic that operated in those firms. Fifth, it is not clear from their research how firms implement a collaborative HR configuration and what challenges they face in making it work. Finally, and more importantly, the alliance/partnerships that their study examines were relatively simple and small. Their research did not study large-scale multiple-partner alliances.

The present paper aims to overcome the above limitations by an inductive, qualitative study of a large-scale, multi-party alliance, explicitly created as a project organisation for the rebuild of infrastructure following a major disaster. It focuses on the rationale for the HR configuration associated with this alliance, and the ways in which this was implemented. Specifically, it addresses the following four questions: (a) how was the HR configuration established, and how did it evolve over

the project duration? (b) what were the key components of the configuration? (c) what were the challenges in implementing the configuration? (d) what were the critical factors that were needed to support this HR configuration?

Setting

In September, 2010, the Canterbury region of New Zealand was hit by a major magnitude 7.1 earthquake that caused extensive property damage. The local government, the Christchurch City Council (CCC), initially began to repair and rebuild the damaged infrastructure by creating contractual agreements with five local construction companies. These agreements were aimed at a rapid rebuild using local resources, and were coordinated with other local authorities to ensure quality and cost-effectiveness. Just as this rebuild programme was commencing, in February, 2011 the city was struck by another, far more devastating earthquake. The intensity and scale of destruction caused by the 2011 event far exceeded the capacity of local Council and contractors using traditional, multiple, large-scale projects. Drawing upon smaller models that had been used in construction projects elsewhere, a new, large-scale city-wide alliance was developed between the funder-clients and contractors already involved in the rebuild.

SCIRT, the Stronger Christchurch Infrastructure Rebuild Team, was officially created in May, 2011. This was an alliance-based organisation with a five-year time lifespan, specifically created for reconstructing the horizontal infrastructure damaged by the earthquakes. The alliance consisted of three funding client-organisations – the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA), the Christchurch City Council (CCC) and New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA), along with five civil engineering construction companies – City Care, Downer, Fletcher Construction, Fulton Hogan and McConnell Dowell. The clients were the owners of the physical assets, such as roads, bridges and pipes, which were being repaired, while the construction companies were directly involved in delivering the projects, as non-owner alliance participants.

The alliance agreement set out a goal that was radically different from what had occurred in this area before, creating a special purpose organisation, in which all the sections would function as a collaborative team. The organisation would be characterised by several specific features that would be essential for completing the vast scale of work within the time and cost constraints. Those features were; high performance work practices, innovative thinking and transformational leadership. SCIRT was set up within four months of the agreement being signed, and formally commenced operations in September 2011, seven months after the major quake.

As an alliance, SCIRT did not directly employ anyone; all of its members were seconded from other organisations. In terms of physical location, the organisation was based at its own, new site housed the management and the Integrated Services Team, along with coordinators from each of the Delivery Teams. The SCIRT building layout was specifically designed to encourage members to put aside their home-organisation identity, and start working together across teams to innovate and collaborate. Figure 1 shows the structure of SCIRT.

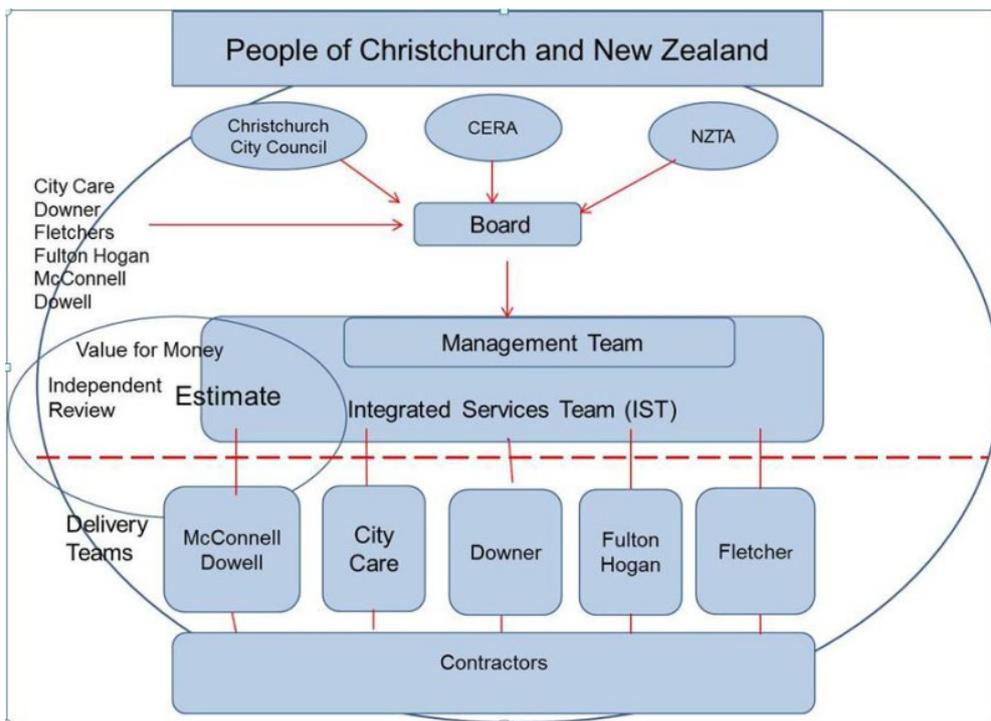


Figure 1: Structure of SCIRT

Research Methodology

Multiple sources of data were utilised, including (a) Individual interviews, (b) group discussions, and (c) review of internal SCIRT documents such as engagement surveys, exit interview summaries and other management reports, and (d) surveys conducted by the research team. In-depth interviews were conducted with 17 individuals covering the SCIRT Board, members of the Senior Management Team, Delivery Team Leaders, Integrated Services Team (IST) Managers/Leaders, two IST members, performance coaches, and front-line staff. Most interviews and focus group discussions were carried out during in early 2014. Some key respondents were interviewed multiple times. Data was also collected through five focus groups comprising of 41 individuals from throughout the organisation.

A short survey comprising research-based validated measures, including team collaborative climate, integration, goal clarity, team leadership, and employee resilience, adapted to fit the SCIRT context (in terms of work content, workforce characteristics) was administered to 40 individuals comprising of 12 leaders, and 28 team members (covering delivery teams, IST members, functional teams). The survey consisted of questions used to measure each variable, with the questions for each measure combined to create an index. These surveys were distributed to discussion groups' attendees and completed at the end of each session.

The interviews and focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed, and independently coded by multiple researchers using NVivo software for analysing qualitative data. The codes and themes were discussed within the research team to ensure consistency and validity, with codes and reflective memos used to identify specific themes. Initial coding, followed by focused coding coupled with analytic memos, led to the identification of six themes that represented key enabling factors in the collaborative HR configuration (Saldana, 2009; Saldana, 2016).

Findings

Collaborative Culture

Alliances are not entirely innovative or new in the construction industry. The Australian Federal Government for example, has detailed guidelines for alliance contracting in infrastructure and transportation. One key respondent in SCIRT characterised these standard types of alliance in the construction industry as a "performance-incentivized contractual arrangement." While most contracts rely primarily on monetary arrangements, what made SCIRT unique was the deliberate adoption of additional non-monetary components, including values and ideals, as core elements that shaped the organisation. SCIRT can be described as a performance-incentivized contractual arrangement that is animated by a spirit of co-operation to achieve a noble purpose.

Multiple, distinct, non-monetary elements that were utilised, and it was the combination of these elements that made this alliance structure particularly distinctive:

- collective sharing, among all alliance partners, of both the profit (gain) and loss (pain) from project outcomes;
- a package of multiple, proactive human resource management practices that included staff engagement & wellbeing, leadership styles, teamwork, collaboration, ongoing learning, improvement and innovation, and transfer of learning to parent organisations.

Alongside the emphasis on values and ideals, the alliance was also a commercial arrangement that had to achieve specific outcomes. SCIRT developed competitive performance metrics to ensure efficiency and cost-containment.

The collaborative HR configuration at SCIRT had two main components: the first was the Peak Performance Plan (PPP). This Plan was developed with the goal of building and sustaining high performance and resilience. The PPP framework was based around six key elements: (a) stronger leadership, (b) intentional transitions, (c) leveraging industry learning, (d) developing people, (e) high performing teams, (f) wellness and engagement. The stronger leadership element was pivotal and underpinned the other six elements. In order to make the alliance arrangement work, the top management of SCIRT had articulated a management philosophy of *Collaborate, Influence, and Lead*. The pervasive themes of underlying the PPP framework were collaboration, learning, and collective ownership. The end-goal was that infrastructure was rebuilt within cost and time budgets, through these approaches. The Human Resources team at SCIRT conceived and implemented the Plan. Initially it covered only the Integrated Services Team. The Human Resource Manager presented the plan to the Board who enthusiastically supported it and decided to extend it to the Delivery Teams.

The other central component of the SCIRT HR configuration, complementing the peak performance plan, was the use of coaching. SCIRT engaged external consultants to coach the organisation's leader and teams in the skills needed for leadership and collaboration.

In summary, SCIRT was intended to be a high-performance work system with a shared vision and strong values that emphasised collaboration, learning, and collective ownership. It was a significant departure from the traditional contractual model, based on agency theory, that prevails in the construction industry (Hinton & Hamilton, 2015).

Outcomes

A range of outcome measures suggest that SCIRT was successful in creating this collaborative HR configuration. Surveys conducted by the organisation showed that members of SCIRT rated “align & involvement of teams” between 67 and 78% (average 71.2%). Perceptions of well-being and engagement ranged from 74 and 76% (average 75.4%).

Exit interviews also indicated that SCIRT was successful in creating a positive work culture. Ratings of key aspects of organisational functioning generally increased throughout the organisation’s timeframe, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Member perceptions of the SCIRT environment

Item (1 = Poor, 6 = Excellent)	Dec-12	Aug-13	Feb-14	Jul-14	Feb-15	Jul-15
Induction to SCIRT	4.17	4.25	4.44	4.54	4.69	4.5
Work Culture	4.78	5	4.76	5.09	5.25	5.37
Adequate guidance and support to carry out job	4.89	5.04	4.66	4.88	4.83	5.13
Did your manager demonstrate strong leadership skills (communication, guidance & support)	5.17	5.09	4.62	5.15	4.89	5.23
Opportunities to share opinions and influence	4.72	4.63	4.55	4.76	4.77	5.07

An overwhelming majority of staff indicated that they would return to SCIRT to work there again, if the opportunity so presented itself. From 2013, as the SCIRT programme moved towards its closure-date and the likelihood of returning reduced, this item had to be reworded from specifically returning to SCIRT, to instead gauge the extent to which they viewed the SCIRT setting as ‘a positive environment’ and they ‘would work in this environment again’. This amended wording brought highly positive responses, as shown in Figure 2:

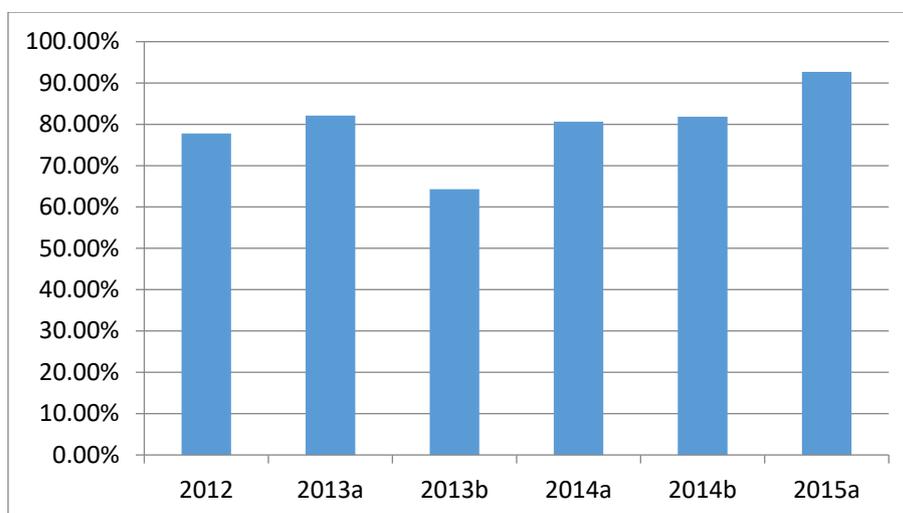


Figure 2: Exit survey responses

Our own surveys validated these findings, with team members and leaders having similar evaluations of the various elements of the SCIRT culture, as shown in Figure 3:

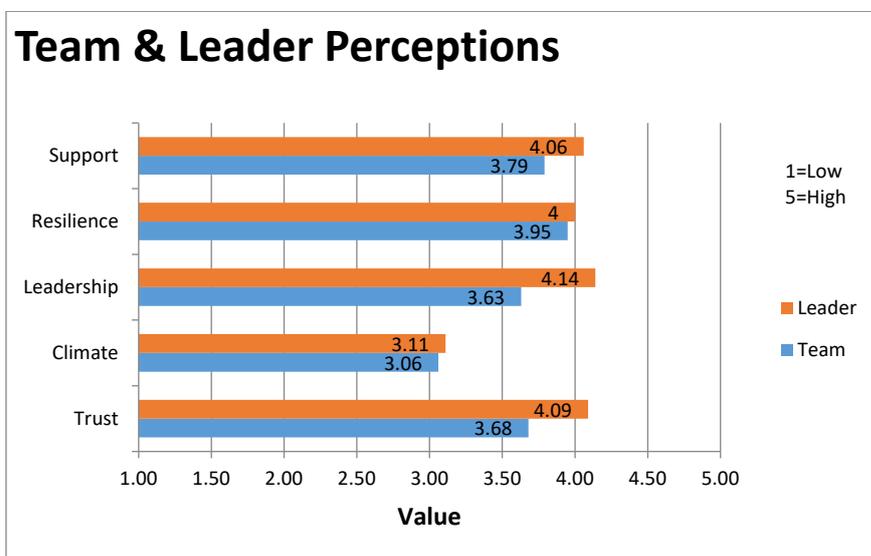


Figure 3: Team member and leader perceptions of the SCIRT environment

The key question that follows on from this, concerns identifying the factors that contributed to creating this environment. The following discussion firstly outlines the enablers, the factors that supported the collaborative configuration - and then the tensions, the challenges or pressure points involved.

1. ***Enablers: factors supporting the collaborative configuration***

There were five factors that supported the collaborative HR configurations. We discuss these in this section. They are: (a) the Noble Purpose and values; (b) leadership; (c) HR's role as a strategic partner; (d) performance metrics; and (e) coaching.

(a) **Noble purpose and values:**

From its initial inception, SCIRT was strongly value-driven. The Board articulated what was later termed the "noble purpose", that is, "creating resilient infrastructure that gives people security and confidence in the future of Christchurch". This altruistic, community-focused theme served to unite and align all the stakeholders as they worked toward the shared goal. The noble purpose was underpinned by an accompanying set of values, which included community welfare, openness to learning and other perspectives, a collective orientation, generosity and trust, safety and 'zero harm', and the development of people.

The leadership also emphasised a set of exemplar behaviours and ways of working: active listening, open and honest conversations, working together, having courage to speak up, leading by example

and striving for excellence. Together, the purpose, values and exemplar behaviours, all facilitated a collaborative culture as they aligned the different stakeholders to a higher purpose, creating a shared language and values. As one respondent stated:

“I think one of the strongest leadership things I’ve seen is an unrelenting focus on the noble purpose. and I think that’s at the core of leadership, having people really clearly knowing what they’re there for.”

(b) Leadership:

The leadership of SCIRT was a major factor in creating and sustaining the collaborative culture. The executive general manager who led the organisation, was unrelenting in his articulation and focus on the noble purpose and values. He viewed the creation of a collaborative, high performance culture as an intentional, deliberate process. He was personally committed to creating an environment characterised by collaboration and continuous learning. He described his leadership philosophy as:

“It’s about understanding how people operate and then understanding what makes things happen. Actually, nothing happens without language. Nothing happens without either a written or a spoken word. I don’t care who you are, if you can do, unless you could mime, and it’s about understanding the different conversations that are available to you to use for different things. You actually can intentionally have different conversations with people at different times to get different outcomes and it’s being intentional about using those tools that are available to you, building up your store of arrows on your back and when you’re in a situation recognising what’s the arrow you need, pulling it out and going for it.”

(c) HR’s role as a strategic partner:

Another key aspect was the central role given to the HR function, especially in creating and maintaining of SCIRT’s collaborative culture. The executive general manager viewed the HR function as a strategic partner, rather than an administrative function. The HR manager viewed her role as

“My role as HR Manager at SCIRT is quite an unusual HR role. Nobody is employed by SCIRT. It’s not an employer organisation. It’s a virtual organisation and as such, that has implications for what the HR role does. I see it as two large chunks of work, if you will. So, one is around resourcing, but resourcing frameworks. So, frameworks to ensure that there are systems in place for all the different organisations to bring people into the organisation, and having an organisation-wide view of risks in terms of resources - but also looking from it, because it’s a project, a five year project -, how do we transition people in, and how do we transition people out so, we minimise the impact that we have on the industry and the Christchurch employment market.

The other big chunk of my work...is around creating an environment or a culture where 100 different organisations are working towards the same vision with aligned as opposed to the same, aligned values and mindsets and creating a culture of high performance because we have a phenomenal task to do by 2016 and we can’t leave high performance to chance.”

(d) Performance metrics:

SCIRT was a strongly performance-driven organisation. The programme of work involved over 700 projects for the duration of the organisation. Initially, the projects were distributed equally among the five delivery teams (construction companies). Subsequent projects however were allocated based on their performance in the projects they completed. Performance measures included innovation, teamwork, and community engagement. Performance was measured on a monthly basis and the results were widely shared:

“I think the one positive thing has been very clear [is] what the goals have been, to the point where they are obviously put on the walls and stuff like that. I think that is why we have been able to do the job ... When you have got only a couple of key things you need to focus on, you tend to work towards them and achieve them.”

“The other thing I like is the visibility of SCIRT. You can walk around and see what we need to deliver. Your targets are on the wall and everything.”

(e) Coaching:

The executive general manager had personally experienced the value of coaching in an earlier project, and placed importance on this in developing the organisation;

“If you look at coaching and your peak performance, and developing and maintaining an organisation, you’ve got to be intentional. So, upfront in something like this I look for people like [our external consultants] who have the sort of culture building and team building skills. So, they’re an alliance coach or a peak performance coach and there is a number of them around.... So, the coaches, we got them and helped to build their capacity here and then we’ve transitioned them into delivery teams, primarily to try and help the delivery teams get more of a focus and an understanding of - actually, sure it’s a project, but you can do it smarter by using experts to help you get the way you operate better, and to help grow leadership in your people. Traditionally, engineers don’t get the whole people thing. They don’t and it took me 15, 16 years to get it.”

Coaching helped team leaders develop skills and capabilities in working collaboratively to achieve the goals. The organisation members were positive about the value of coaching:

“She was really helpful, to the point where I was actually going to get her to sort out the rest of my life ... I have never done a lot of that kind of life coaching stuff ... I was struggling with having a lot of confidence at the start to chair a meeting that I didn’t think I was experienced enough to be in, in the first place. She was directing the conversation towards ‘Why do you think that you don’t have the ability to do this?’ I was like, ‘Well, actually, yes, I kind of do. There is no reason I can’t do this’. She was really good at prompting me to actually think this through and go, ‘Well, some of these ideas I have got are kind of just in my head, they are not actually reality. I just need to go out there and be a bit more confident’.”

Another respondent described their experience of coaching:

“He really threw down some challenges and yet he had empathy and understanding. So it was very, very good. Helped me a great deal ... You see the world through your own lenses, don’t you and you don’t know necessarily how other people regard you ... I was a relatively humble person and, in many areas, didn’t think I should speak up about stuff. And what it taught me was that by just talking about things openly ... my experience, which is significant really, might rub off on others, or might be beneficial to others and that’s been a big part of the learning.”

2. Tensions: challenges to the collaborative configuration

Building and sustaining a collaborative culture within SCIRT was not a smooth, conflict-free process. There were a number of tensions that had to be negotiated. The post-disaster recovery context shaped the time-frames of the organisation:

“So, because the organisation is a five-year organisation, people talk about things happening in SCIRT time. So, a month is like six months to a year. So, the pace of change is very quick.”

There were five key tensions or ‘pressure points’ that had to be negotiated to sustain the collaborative culture. These are discussed below.

(a) Middle level leadership

Individuals who were unfamiliar with the *lead, influence, collaborate* framework, and the ambiguity of working in a post-disaster setting, found the work environment challenging. They talked about confusion, around asking for guidance around areas such as over-empowerment, role clarity and relational challenges in creating a team:

“One problem with SCIRT is it’s a bit fuzzy as to who you ask, or how you deal with it, because if it is not in the specification it is not there. Who is empowered to make the decision to do something different? And if we just do whatever we think best, well that might not be what the client thinks is best.”

“Confusion around rules and responsibilities. There is still a little bit of that and that happens across all of the delivery teams ... people are unsure as to the boundaries of their role, or their decision-making authority, or who they could influence. Even on-site, what does a project manager do, and what is a project manager accountable for - as opposed to a site environment? What are they accountable for, and who calls the shots in this regard, and who is actually responsible for quality and health and safety? So until the leaders themselves are really clear on that, and communicate that and manage that, the next level down or the guys will get mixed messages.”

(b) Transitions to and from SCIRT

SCIRT members were typically on fixed-term secondments, and the relatively high level of turnover associated created an environment of continuous change. Individuals often found it hard to revert back to their home-organisation after working at SCIRT:

“There is definitely uncertainty, and people who are a bit unsure as to what is going to be happening next. ‘What is going to be happening next for me, what is happening to the design teams, what are we going to do to deal with this quality issue that the client is asking for, strategically what are the client’s priorities?’

“I have been on secondment basically since I have been employed with them. I feel like I know everyone here and going back it’s like ... starting school all over again. I need to learn everybody’s name. Yes, it is a little bit daunting because when you are working in this sort of environment people know what you are capable of. But I am a bit nervous about going back, and no one knowing who I am or what I can do.”

(c) Transfer of learning

A collaborative culture is intended to promote the sharing of knowledge and information. The post-disaster setting required a high degree of innovation, creating new solutions for problems that were peculiar to post-disaster reconstruction and repair work. In addition, a system of continuous improvement was needed as a means to increase the efficiency of the work-processes, in order to manage time and cost goals. Within SCIRT, incentives were created, and structures were established, for the dissemination of learning and new insights. However, the nature of the organisation brought significant challenges as it required convincing members to share commercially valuable insights across other members who were normally competitors, in the five delivery teams and eighteen design consultancies. The competition inherent in the structure could inhibit collaboration:

“Some of us, we just want to get on with the job and we want to compete against these other four delivery teams. So, we’re really passionate about our own now. Yes, we’ll share ideas and different things, but they go into a big bucket and I’m not sure that they are even being shared around the place because I don’t see any evidence of that.”

“When we started off we talked about this being a test bed; ‘This is a unique opportunity, five contractors, let’s test things out’. Perhaps we haven’t fully realised that opportunity. In some areas we have; other areas we haven’t. Perhaps where we have done it, we haven’t sold it well enough. We haven’t actually had time to sell it.”

(d) Achieving alignment – unresolved structural issues

This was perhaps the major challenge in sustaining the collaborative culture. Some delivery team members for example, felt disconnected from the SCIRT management:

“What else really unbalances the whole thing is the people from within this building in those positions just slightly above us trying to have some impact; they leave or they get seconded up higher because it is sort of ‘jobs for the boys’.”

A major issue seemed to be the alignment with the clients:

"[There is] a lack of ability to change policy, not necessarily within SCIRT but within the wider stakeholders, within Council, and almost a reluctance to accept that there needs to be change to meet this task because it's a huge and complex task. But [they are] carrying on in a business-as-usual mindset."

A continuing issue seemed to be the relationship between the integrated services team (IST) at SCIRT and the delivery teams:

"Probably most of the delivery teams would have an opinion that sometimes that people from the IST can behave like a policeman and come and tell people what to do which may or may not be appropriate ... we're all SCIRT."

(e) Communicating changes

The short timeframe, work pressures, the diversity within the members, and the fact that the organisation was operating and still being constructed at the same time, occasionally inhibited the extent of communication, which could sometime be frustrating:

"I think because changes are being made so quickly ... it can get quite frustrating. Yesterday we were doing it this way and now today we are doing it this way. Why? When did that change? If you are heading down this road and everyone is like, 'Actually, no, didn't you know that yesterday we all decided to go this way'. It is a ... frustration that I have done all this work on the tangent; 'You could have told me' ... I think it is just maybe because people have been working a little bit in isolation over here, not realising that what they have done could benefit everybody."

Within SCIRT, there were differences on how these pressure points were perceived. The initial leadership team saw the pressure points as an opportunity for conversations, problem-solving and collective learning. Others, however, saw some of the pressure points as unnecessary or stressful distractions.

Towards a framework of collaborative HR configuration

SCIRT provides a unique opportunity to extend the contribution of Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002) by identifying the necessary conditions, and factors that moderate the relationship between a collaborative configuration and organisational performance. Figure 4 summarises our research findings.

Those findings offer a number of insights regarding the conditions that are necessary for a collaborative configuration. The first is that it is vital for the HR function to be accepted into working in a strategic partnership with the organisation's senior leadership. The approach of the senior leader, particularly their willingness to genuinely partner with the HRM function and give the HRM function a broader role in creating all the aspects of organisational culture, is a central factor for creating and sustaining this type of HR configuration. A collaborative HR configuration cannot be created and sustained by the HR function alone. Secondly, at the heart of a collaborative configuration is the

alignment of multiple partners towards a common goal. This requires that the organisation has an over-arching higher purpose which is supported by explicitly articulated values and behaviours. Accompanying this, there needs to be explicit, transparent and shared performance metrics to measure and monitor this collaborative culture. Finally, coaching and training of team leaders is another vital element, as leaders and particularly middle-level leaders, need to learn new ways of leading, influencing and collaborating with people.

A collaborative HR configuration will always be associated with a set of tensions and pressure points. The external context exerts a strong influence on the success of the collaboration, with hostile environments hindering collaborative approaches. Although communication and sharing of information is a key factor of success, the internal dynamics of an alliance, and the system of staff turnover that is often present, can constrain relation-based collaboration and learning. Alongside this, the development of high-quality middle level leadership capability, particularly team leaders, is crucial for the success of the alliance. While competitive tensions can inhibit collaboration, having skilled and competent leaders this can play a significant part in mitigating this. The way in which the leaders view and manage the tensions is the key determinant of the success of a collaborative HR configuration. A leadership mindset that views these tensions as opportunities for learning, improvement and enhanced performance outcomes is more likely to be successful.

Conclusion and Implications

This research extends the work of Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002) by suggesting antecedent and moderating factors that might influence the relationship between a collaborative HR configuration and performance, in an alliance setting. The in-depth case study of SCIRT has a number of major implications for HR practitioners.

Although a post-disaster environment itself is not a typical business setting, the SCIRT case does have much in common with other organisations. SCIRT's focus was very clearly directed at a goal that many other organisations are pursuing; that is, improving performance.

The HR configuration that SCIRT adopted in order to achieve that performance goal was intentional, and the elements were tightly integrated. The configuration was 'genetically engineered'; it was intentionally designed to create a very specific type of new organisational culture that would work towards achieving the organisation's purposes. All of the elements were carefully selected, and integrated with one another to support those outcomes. In this regard, SCIRT demonstrates what should be a pattern of design, intent and integration for other organisations, and the case also illustrates what can be achieved with this.

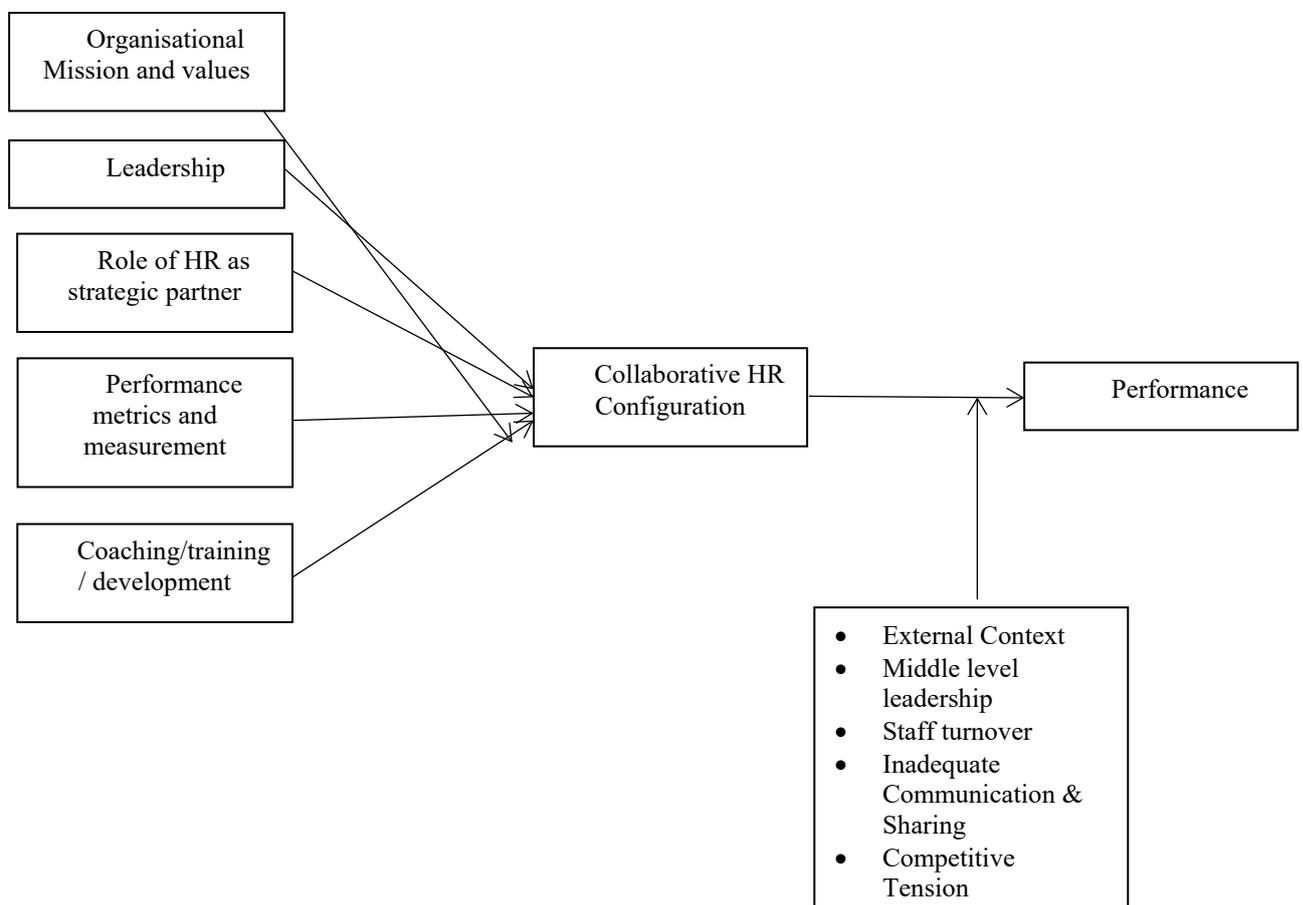
As an organisation, SCIRT does differ from stereotypical, traditional models with standard employment arrangements. That older model however, is diminishing and being replaced by team-based project work, and employees with shorter tenures. SCIRT points to an increasing trend today, and may represent the prototype of future organizations, which are likely to be temporary arrangements of individuals and organisations, united by a common purpose. Those arrangements are likely to be characterized by a new way of working which simultaneously involves contractual arrangements, accompanied by a new type of trust that is alliance-based, rather than part of a traditional employer-employee relationship.

Longstanding HRM models are not directly compatible with these newer work forms and structures. The established HR strategies and practices were based in an environment oriented to continuing, permanent staff. The case of SCIRT highlights a need for new models, a re-orientation and a new way of working for HR practitioners in the newer environment.

The study of SCIRT points to the future, illustrating how HRM practitioners can play a major role as architects, champions, and guardians of vital, new, organisational cultures. The HRM role is not confined to the more traditional perceptions which view it as solely administering of a series of technical processes. HRM can instead take on a new leadership role that is part of an integrated system based around organisational culture, with the HR practitioners' influence extending throughout the wide range of areas where that culture is involved. This culture is centred on creating a unifying purpose, values, and behaviours that are shared by all organisational members. These factors influence the organisation's way of functioning and its effectiveness.

HRM can create and sustain a collaborative culture, but this can only occur if the right opportunities are provided. For this to happen, the organisation's senior leaders need to be prepared to accept HRM into a strategic partnership role. The HRM practitioners themselves also need to have the skills and willingness to enter into this role, letting go of old mindsets, taking risks, and changing the perceptions of HRM in organisations. The SCIRT case demonstrates the outcomes that can be achieved when those factors are present, with an HRM function that has the ability, and the organisational mandate, to lead in creating a collaborative HR configuration.

Figure 4: Collaborative HR Configuration Framework



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