

Running head: THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF ACADEMIC HUMAN RESOURCE BEST PRACTICES

Applying Research in Practice: An Analysis of the Practical Application of

Academic Human Resource Best Practices

By

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BCom, University of Victoria, 2011

A Master's Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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**Leta Young, 2015
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THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF ACADEMIC HUMAN RESOURCE BEST PRACTICES

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Academic Human Resource Best Practices**

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Executive Summary

Overview and Purpose of Study

Human Resource (HR) departments exist due to an organization's need to monitor the systems that influence employees' behaviour, attitudes, and performance (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, Wright, & Steen, 2006). These departments oversee the design of work, employee recruitment and selection, training, retention, performance management, and compensation. Over time HR management theories have developed and in the past 15 years the focus of these theories has been on strategic human resource management (SHRM), with the concept of human capital emerging. This idea sees employees as vehicles that provide economic value by delivering experience, training, judgement, intelligence, and, most importantly, the ability to build and sustain relationships (Noe et al., 2006).

With the understanding that employees are now viewed as important assets worth investing in, HR departments have discovered that they must work to attract top talent. To do this HR practitioners can look to "best practices" as a way of understanding what employees want from their employer. The notion of best practices indicates that organizations are able to not only learn from their own experiences, but can also learn from the experiences of others – be it competitors, customers, suppliers, or unrelated business groups (Lervik, Hennestad, Amdam, Lunnan, & Nilson, 2005). Academics are also working to understand effective organizational strategies and will look to business successes in an attempt to understand what underlying theories worked well in a given situation. This means that there are two primary sources of information available to managers who wish to learn about best practices – other organization/practitioner experiences and academia.

This paper is written to provide consultants who work with public sector HR managers and employees insight into how these practitioners view and educate themselves on best practices. The hypothesis of the researcher is that despite there being many academic papers dedicated to HR best practices, the majority of practitioners do not read published work and look instead to mentors, colleagues, other HR specialists and other organizations for insight. By understanding the practitioner's perspective and where they look for information, consultants can better appreciate an HR department's operations. Because consultants are typically brought into organizations to help develop solutions to difficult problems this paper aims to prepare these individuals to better understand the practitioner perspectives that may exist with regards to best practices and their implementation.

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Methodology

Over a five month period between 2014-2015 the researcher conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with HR practitioners from British Columbia (BC) public sector organizations with the aim of answering the research question, “Are practitioners in the public sector engaging in what academics espouse as being best practice?” There were 10 leaders, 2 union representatives and 4 unionized employees interviewed. The critical incidence interview questions asked did not change based on the interviewee’s role; however, they could skip questions if they felt they were not applicable.

In addition to the interviews, a literature review was also completed. This review clarified what best practices are and assessed what academics have found to be best practices in various areas of HRM.

The interviewees were selected based on the criteria that they were employed (or had previously been employed) in a provincial public sector environment and had HR responsibilities. Recruitment for this research involved a combination of cold calls and the snowball recruitment technique. The researcher initially accessed a public database of email addresses, and after messaging two dozen individuals with “Human Resource” job titles the researcher received some responses back. From here interviews began and often interviewees would suggest additional individuals to contact.

A conceptual framework was developed by shaping Jeffrey Pfeffer’s list of 13 practices for creating a sustainable competitive advantage through people (1995) into the following five HR pillars:

- Recruitment and Selection
- Retention
- Labour Relations
- Performance Management
- Motivation and Incentives

These five pillars broke down the overarching concept of HR into manageable sections and created a focus for the literature review and the interview questions. The questions asked related to each of these five pillars, and after the information was gathered it was transcribed and further themed using a content analysis technique. The researcher used this information and compared it against the formal literature review to determine what gaps (if any) existed between academia and practice.

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Findings and Discussion

After comparing the literature review with interviewee responses the findings assert that most practitioners know about academically espoused best practices and attempt to engage them when possible, however they tend to not read the literature itself. It was found that even though only one of the 16 practitioners indicated that they regularly look at academic work there was still an impressive amount of cross-over between academic theory and practitioner knowledge with 18 of the 23 identified themes showing overlap. This indicates that despite self-reporting that little to no time is spent reading academic sources, practitioners still receive the researched knowledge. Some suggestions for this successful transfer are that those who do read the literature are educating their colleagues internally, the practitioner-centric information sources are conveying the academic literature in their own way, or consultants are passing along information when brought in to complete projects.

A discovery worth noting, however, is that *knowing* about best practices did not mean that those practices were *implemented*. Regarding implementation, there were three main themes identified as challenges faced by practitioners – time, resources, and organizational size and culture. It was also indicated, however, that when a specific practice has the backing of top directors its implementation is more likely to succeed. This support from the top coupled with employee engagement and buy-in were cited by both practitioners and academics as necessary in successfully implementing new practices.

An important finding that emerged through the literature review is the theory of evidence based management (EBM). In EBM practitioners are required to use information from various sources including academia, other organizations, and their own personal experience in order to make informed decisions. Evidence is used in every aspect of decision-making as a means to substantiate changes to policies or practice. Using evidence in this way is beneficial for public sector HR staff because it is a means of demonstrating to top executives the advantage of certain practices, and it encourages buy-in if both research and experience are used to authenticate a proposal. In order for EBM to become fully integrated as a decision making platform, however, the evidence and research must be accessible to managers in a timely fashion – for this reason the paper explored the option of creating a collaborative between academics and practitioners. This would not only bridge any knowledge transfer gap that exists, but it would be beneficial to any party that participates. Practitioners become better informed decision makers, researchers have improved access to research subjects, and if consultants become involved they help ensure that communication between all parties remains clear and purposeful.

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A final concept that emerged throughout the interviews ties into the evolution of the HR field and brings the practice of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) to the forefront. SHRM dictates that the HR function should be integrated into all organizational systems and strategies (Schwind, Das, Wagar, Fassina, & Bulmash, 2013), and the practitioners did acknowledge that it is their responsibility to look at the organization and *“try to predict what is going to be needed for human resources in the future.”* This alludes to HRM being integral to the organization’s overall strategic plan, and indicates that the human resource function must be present when discussing organizational directives. If HR executives are able to be present during corporate strategic planning then they are able to provide input around HR needs. They are also able to educate the other departments on HR best practices, and why they should be included in an overarching organizational plan. As was found via the interviews best practices are far more likely to be implemented if there is top down support, a notion which lends itself to the concept that the most effective way to encourage best practices is through a SHRM model.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can and should be considered by both HR managers as well as consultants who work with public sector HR employees.

- **Recommendation One.** Management staff generally, and HR managers specifically need to understand best practices and how to engage them in an organizational setting. It is the norm for difficulties to arise with best practice implementation, therefore it is important that management understand that these initiatives are not necessarily “one size fits all” and that adaptation is necessary. Decision makers should understand their organization’s vision, mission, values, and culture, and use these tools to guide decision making and process implementation.
- **Recommendation Two.** Access the most senior decision makers and engage them in discussions about best practices and their implications. It was found that in many of the organizations that resistance to implementation came from not having the direction from the top. Understanding where decision making authority lies and knowing that changes will likely not be made unless there is a “top down” mandate helps in directing change management efforts.
- **Recommendation Three.** The initiation of a collaborative between public sector management, academics, and consulting professionals should be considered and, if feasible, initiated. Researchers can provide information to the collaborative, consultants can help form the data into comprehensible reports, and practitioners can use the information in the field.

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Additionally, practitioners can help guide the research so that it is relevant to the field of practice. Through this process researchers can better understand the broader industry needs, and consultants and practitioners can work together to scope out the organization specific issues. The result is the implementation of practices based on accessible research and informed decision making. This process improves organizational legitimacy as decisions are made based on “systematic, causal knowledge” (Rousseau, 2006, 261).

- **Recommendation Four.** In any interaction with practitioners, information must be easy to read, concise and accessible. The majority of interviewees indicated that a lack of time inhibits researching and implementing many best practices. For this reason, communication, strategies, and recommendations for practice as a whole must be succinct. The reason why managers are prone to “management gurus” over academic papers is because the style in which the information is presented is more appealing – if academic writing was more accessible, it would likely be implemented more often (Guest, 2007).
- **Recommendation Five.** It is recommended that when successes occur in relation to an organizational change in practice they should be celebrated – especially in bureaucratic organizations where changes are typically completed at a slower pace. In the interviews there were success stories around movement to hiring centres, implementation of performance management plans, and a move from rights-based to interest-based dispute resolution strategies. These examples demonstrate that change and implementation of best practices can be successful, and organizations need to hold them up as examples for future change.
- **Recommendation Six.** Human resources should be viewed as an important part of an organization’s strategy and all decisions relating to human capital should be dictated by the organization’s vision, mission, values, and mandate. Choices related to hiring practices, training and development, and performance review metrics must be driven by the organizational strategy. Human resource executives need to be involved in decision making at the top organizational level, and they need to use their expertise to help the other departments understand what will be required from an HR perspective when designing a business strategy. Human resources are intertwined in every aspect of an organization therefore having the experts who know about organizational need, industry best practices, and human resource capacity involved in decision making is essential to success.

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to all my loved ones who provided me countless words of encouragement and strength throughout this journey. You offered kind words, laughter, guidance, reality checks and numerous cups of coffee along this journey, and I am forever grateful.

Mom, Dad, Kailyn, Taylor – you have supported me through 20+ years of education and have survived more than a few thrown text books. Your patience and support did not go unnoticed and were absolutely sources of strength throughout the years.

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Chapter One: Introduction

We have all heard the term “our people are our number one asset” reiterated in business rhetoric worldwide, yet studies show that only about one half of today’s organizations truly believe that human resources are a priority, and of these organizations, only one half act on these beliefs (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). In today’s competitive job market, talent will gravitate towards the jobs and organizations that offer the greatest opportunities – and this does not necessarily mean the highest salaries. Employees wish to be engaged, invested in, and educated on the most recent trends and tools. They also appreciate workplace socialization and the opportunity to actively participate in developing their own career paths (Oldham & Hackman, 2010). Organizations that provide growth opportunities for employees will have the advantage of obtaining and retaining top talent, and investing in these assets will lead to further benefits in the form of increased productivity and efficiency (Hinkin & Tracey, 2010). Despite the “lip-service” that management may pay to their employees, budgets and bottom lines are still an employer’s primary concern. If a correlation between employee growth opportunities and money being saved is not immediately evident, then management and directors must be *shown* how their human resources can be a source of competitive advantage. Just as investments are made in capital such as buildings, machinery, tools, and land, organizations must equally invest in human capital. Investment in human capital takes many forms, including: education, training, health and wellness opportunities, socialization, and knowledge enhancement (Becker, 2008; McFadden, 2008), and the return is demonstrated through increased efficiency, effectiveness, and morale.

Human Resource (HR) departments exist due to an organization’s need to monitor the systems that influence employees’ behaviour, attitudes, and performance (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, Wright, & Steen, 2006). Typically individuals in charge of HR are required to oversee processes such as design of work, employee recruitment and selection, training, retention, performance management, and compensation. Over the past forty years many human resource management theories have developed, beginning in the mid-1970s, where quality management and systems theories blossomed, and, following that, the movement from transactional personnel management to a more strategic approach (Davidson, McPhail, & Barry, 2011). More recently, the last 15 years have presented a focus on strategic human resource management (SHRM), with the concept of human capital emerging. SHRM dictates that the HR function should be integrated into all organizational systems and strategies (Schwind, Das, Wagar, Fassina, & Bulmash, 2013), and it embraces the concept of human capital: The view that employees are

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vehicles that provide economic value by delivering experience, training, judgement, intelligence, and, most importantly, the ability to build and sustain relationships (Noe et al., 2006).

Gaining an understanding of where HR departments have developed from will help in understanding the direction in which they are going. Over time, theories develop and lead to changes in policies, practices, and procedures. These theories develop both in practice and in academia, and what this paper aims to understand is how often the “best practices” that are developed and espoused by academics are applied in the main stream public sector. By learning what practitioners understand to be “best practices” and determining where they look to educate themselves on these practices one can better understand the direction a system is heading and can better predict what to expect when working in that environment.

1.1 Background of Client

This paper is written with the intent of educating consultants who work with public sector management, specifically regarding HR issues. It aims to identify where public sector HR practitioners look for information on best practices as this knowledge can aid consultants in understanding what an individual or department deems important. Additionally, understanding what a practitioner identifies as “best practice” will help consultants navigate the environments where they operate and will help them to gain a better understanding of what is viewed as worthy of emulation. Consultants are often brought into organizations to help with difficult problems involving process, and they are often seen as the experts that will best be able to bring theory to practice. This paper aims to better prepare consultants to understand how public sector practitioners might perceive the problems that they invite consultants in to resolve.

Through understanding a practitioner’s mindset, both researchers and consultants can better initiate a knowledge transfer from (academic) theory to practice, and can also better understand the strategic perception of those individuals who currently sit in public sector HR offices.

1.2 Need for this Research

Human resource management (HRM) as a function falls on a spectrum, with some organizations viewing it as transactional and outsourcing their HR processes (Karthikeyan, Bhagat, & Kannan, 2012) and others seeing it as fundamental to their core operations and involving HR in all strategic decisions.

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This paper aims to better understand why entities make the choices they do around HR practice. Specifically, why do some follow academic research, while others look elsewhere for advice – either to their success or to their detriment? By understanding this decision making process we can critically examine the research practice gap. This paper specifically targets HR practitioners within provincial public sector organizations in British Columbia. When looking at policies and procedures it is important to have a sample that is similar in business orientation and goals, and this sample will be homogenous enough to adequately compare data.

1.3 Background

Human resource departments were introduced to focus on “optimizing the performance and potential of the people in organizations, with a view to achieving a dynamic balance between the personal interests and concerns of people and their economic added value” (Tissen, Lekanne Deprez, Burgers, & van Monfort, 2010, p. 638). It is the hub which helps organizations recruit, select, train, motivate, and retain their people – allowing the creation of a talent pool that can be used advantageously.

The organizations that best engage their employees will benefit the most from a human resource advantage. Many academics have written on the topics of investing in employees and employee engagement – amongst them is Jeffrey Pfeffer. Pfeffer has isolated 13 variables that he believes are fundamental when implementing a human resource strategy. He claims that through *employment security, selective recruiting, high wages, incentive-based pay, employee ownership, information sharing, empowerment, self-managed teams, skill development, cross-training, symbolic egalitarianism, wage compression, and internal promotions* a firm should be able to develop and retain their employees (Pfeffer, 1995). Embracing these variables allows for tacit knowledge to build (Luthans & Youssef, 2004) and ensures that employees use the skills they develop to better the firm, which in turn may further an employee’s commitment to the organization.

While these notions are not revolutionary, they do represent a shift from the mindset of managers who dominated the workplace a generation or two ago. Historically, managers saw human resource management, or “personnel administration,” as a transactional operation, with employees being seen as a cost and not an investment (Ananthram, Nankervis, & Chan, 2013). Strategic human resource management became more mainstream through the late 1990’s and into the new millennium.

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Pfeffer first wrote his summary of 13 practices in 1995, and the concepts have flourished over the last 20 years. What this project aims to understand is to what extent does this idea of investing in people through implementing best practices transcend into the practitioner environment? What does it take for a practicing HR professional to look at a list of “best practices” and decide that they are worth implementing? And what inhibits or enhances a practitioner’s employment of the strategies that are prolific in academic writing? This paper looks at what practitioners understand to be “best” practices in their own industries, what policies and procedures they currently try and imitate, and when they do not choose to follow these expounded principles, why do they take a different path? The result is a report that outlines both the connections and the gaps between literature and practice.

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Chapter Two: Literature Review

Pfeffer's 13 practices were used as inspiration in forming a skeletal framework that amalgamates his list into five different aspects of the HR framework. This conceptual framework is described further in the paper, but this literature review features "best practices" that fall into the five pillars that follow:

- Recruitment and Selection;
- Retention;
- Labour Relations Strategies;
- Performance Management;
- Motivation and Incentives.

As was established in the introduction, HR departments have transformed in the last few decades to become more strategic. In SHRM we see organizations treating their human resources as an investment that requires training, development, heightened autonomy and decision making authority (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010). SHRM stems from the ideas of high involvement and high commitment work practices, and delivers the underlying message that increased participation in decision making empowers employees and increases their productivity (Stanton & Manning, 2013).

In addition to a general transition towards strategic HR processes, the public sector in particular has seen a movement towards what has come to be known as New Public Management (NPM). NPM is a theory originally developed in the United Kingdom and it describes how HR management techniques typically found in the private sector can and perhaps *should* be transferred into the public sector. Such practices include a focus on performance management and promotion based on performance indicator success. This paper will not go into the details of NPM; however, the theory is becoming renowned and its fundamental basics are worth noting. NPM encourages the use of contracting as a way of coordinating progress. The theory replaces traditional public administration with relational contracts in an effort to enhance efficient resource allocation (Lane, 2000). This in turn leads to reforms aimed at improving organizational effectiveness and can result in organizational re-structuring and stricter employee performance management. This presents a challenge to HR professionals, as organizations

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work to find ways to implement effective NPM strategies while maintaining the well-being of employees (Burke, Allisey, & Noblet, 2013). NPM theory as it relates to HRM indicates that management should move away from the rigidity of bureaucracy and gives employers more choice in their HR policies, allowing more flexibility in work practices which should, in theory, lead to improved employee and organizational performance (Stanton & Manning, 2013). According to Stanton and Manning (2013, p. 255), the issue with this is that this same style of reform can also lead to “job loss, work intensification...lack of job security... and high labour turnover.” Thus, NPM is a theory worth noting, but when implemented, it is up to HR professionals to find ways to manage this new structure by building the high trust environment that such a transition requires. This literature review aims to identify the various best practices that should be implemented in five key areas as HR managers attempt to create “high trust” environments where they can lead and develop employees while still managing change.

2.1 Human Resource Management in the Public Sector

Even with NPM influencing public sector firms to adopt private sector influence, there are still undoubtedly many factors that make the public sector a unique environment. Public sector organizations are accountable to elected officials and the public at large, and the level of public scrutiny is far greater for public sector than private (Cunningham, 2016). This means that targeted strategies must be in place to ensure these organizations meet the needs of the communities they serve.

The public sector is considered to be any organization at the federal, provincial, or local level that provides programs or services for the good of the general public (Cunningham, 2016). These can include social services, regulations, safety and justice departments, as well as common services and established community planning. These institutions hold a responsibility to their constituents to implement strategies to best serve the general public interest (Lindholm, in Cunningham, 2016).

One of the most defining features of the public sector is “the extent to which state-funded services are influenced by government and its associated authorities, regulatory bodies, and elected ownership” (Burke et al., 2013, p.2). Public sector organizations are closely monitored as these organizations are responsible for maximizing the tax dollar investment that is being made to their operations. In recent years, multiple austerity measures have been introduced into the public sector environment including lay-offs, wage freezes, and workplace redesign, resulting in challenges for the HR departments in these organizations (Ivanova, 2013). These challenges include ensuring staffing levels

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meet organizational need, service provision is maintained, and workforce morale remains intact, despite the challenges being faced (Burke et al., 2013).

Another unique feature of the public sector is that the average employee age is higher when compared to the average age of the working population, with up to 50% of Canadian public sector employees eligible to retire within seven years (Truss, 2013). Most public sector employees tend to join their organizations and stay for the course of their careers, likely due to the benefits, job stability, and/or pension plans offered. This distinctive characteristic of the public sector demographic points to the need for HR staff to hire a certain calibre of employee from the onset. If, as an employer, it is understood that you have low turnover, it indicates that you should invest the time and effort into hiring and developing the best possible employees.

A third trait unique to the public sector is the high level of unionization and the influence that this can bring. In Canada, as of 2012, 71.4% of public sector staff were unionized (Galarneau & Sohn, 2013, Table 2). In these environments it is typically the union who is involved in negotiating the employee's conditions of employment. Unions aim to be updated on any decisions related to the well-being of their members, which can pose challenges for management who must look at the organizational perspective as a whole, as opposed to solely the employee's viewpoint. This divergence in interests can lead to tension between the union and management, which means having a strategy for interaction is imperative.

A fourth factor worth noting is that in British Columbia, the Merit Commissioner holds the Public Service specifically (and public sector as a whole via influence) accountable to the concept of merit – a factor which aids in maintaining political neutrality. It is believed that through applying the principle of merit, both employee engagement and public confidence increase (Office of the Merit Commissioner, 2015). The principle of merit is important in the public sector because it impacts the way in which employees are hired and promoted. Hiring based on merit means that the selected individual meets all the essential qualifications required specifically for the role and candidates are assessed in relation to the merit criteria established, and not necessarily in relation to other candidates (Kernaghan, 2011).

Historically, public sector HRM systems have been criticized as being “inflexible, unresponsive, slow, rule-bound, and user-unfriendly” (Lavigna, 2002, p.1), and HR managers have been charged as being inefficient and ineffective (Truss, 2013). There is a movement to improve this image, and the

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belief is that effectiveness can be developed by recruiting, retaining, and motivating competent and talented employees (Kernaghan, 2011; Lavigna, 2002). The following sections look at how academics believe organizations should operate to be the best possible employers while delivering the best services to stakeholders. It looks at practices related to recruitment and selection, retention, labour relations, performance management and motivation and incentives. This literature review will set the stage for the paper, and will be referenced in the final discussion section in an examination of what similarities and differences exist between academia and practice.

2.2 A Brief Explanation of Best Practices

The notion of best practices indicates that organizations are able to learn from the experiences of other organizations – be it competitors, customers, suppliers, or unrelated business groups (Lervik, Hennestad, Amdam, Lunnan, & Nilson, 2005). Often when other organizations implement new successful practices academics will also look to the success and attempt to understand why the underlying concepts worked well in these situations (see Appendix A for a summary diagram of how academics develop theories by analyzing an operation's successful practices). They then write theories which practitioners can use to aid in the understanding and implementation of these best practices. By analyzing the research behind successful implementations and understanding the case study itself, organizations can mimic what others have done in an effort to avoid "reinventing the wheel." It is important, however, that decision-makers understand that best practices are not necessarily "one size fits all" and that some adaptation is necessary for successful implementation (Allen et al., 2010). When bringing in a policy or procedure that has worked for another organization one must examine whether or not it aligns with their own organization's values and core competencies. Best practices should be treated as overarching notions to be integrated within a strategy rather than as a blueprint or predefined tool available for immediate consumption (Lervik et al., 2005).

There are two theories as to why HR practitioners do not implement academic best practices: the first is that HR research has become too technical, and is out of reach for practitioners in the field, and the second is that HR practitioners do not read the research because they see it as impractical to their needs. The issue with this is that a failure to be knowledgeable to best practice research puts a practitioner's organization at a disadvantage, as a greater awareness of relevant practices will lead to better execution of the HR role (Rynes, Brown, Colbert, & Hansen, 2002). Successfully investing in the human resource department is very important when attempting to engage an organization's human

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capital (Rodwell & Teo, 2004). Paying close attention to what is deemed “best practice” is important as the information derived by benchmarking can be valuable in assisting individuals in management roles (Ulrich, 1997).

2.3 Recruitment and Selection Practices

In 2007 the Prime Minister’s advisory committee on the Public Service had a focus on improving HRM, and they stated that a “well-functioning and values-based public service is critical to the success of every country” (Government of Canada, 2007, Framework section, para. 1): HR staff can and should use this as the starting point for their hiring practices. One value that is continually considered in public sector hiring is merit. The merit principle indicates that citizens should have a reasonable chance at being considered for public service employment, and that selection should be exclusively based on a person’s ability to complete the job (or their “merit”) (Office of the Merit Commissioner, 2015). This principle and the corresponding merit system are important in upholding the values of fairness, equity and transparency (Kernaghan, 2011). It is important that managers and HR staff create, implement, and follow a values-based framework that helps ensure that staffing appointments are made through a “systematic, informed, [and] ethical balance” (Government of Canada, 2001, para. 2.68).

In addition to a selection technique that relies on merit, there are several other commonly cited best practices relating to recruitment and selection:

- Create a strong brand and reputation (Rothman, 2015; Vandenabeele, 2013).
 - A strong brand and organizational reputation will attract the best and most motivated candidates.
- Post clear and specific job descriptions (Hiltrop, 1999; Lui et al., 2004; Pfeffer, 1995; Pfeffer, 1998; Rodwell & Teo, 2004; Rothman, 2015; Subramony, 2009).
 - Be specific and selective about the qualities, competencies, and values required.
- Use a comprehensive interview process (Deloitte, 2010; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010; Rynes et al., 2002; Rynes, Giluk, & Brown, 2007; Rothman, 2015).
 - Use structured interviews as they are considered more valid than unstructured interviews and valid selection practices are important for performance outcomes.

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- *When appropriate* go beyond interviews and use formal testing such as intelligence tests, integrity tests, and personality tests as these can help in predicting job performance and productive work behaviours.
- Formalize succession planning (Hiltrop, 1999; Lui et al., 2004; Quinlan-Gagnon, 2010; Rothman, 2015; Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2013).
 - Recruit continuously to create a talent pool of applicants.
 - Once applicants are hired ensure workforce management and succession management plans are in place.

Employees in the public sector tend to stay with an employer longer than those in the private sector – they may move within the organization but the statistics indicate that they are more likely to maintain a relationship with one employer long-term (Truss, 2013). An organization should brand itself as an employer of choice in order to recruit the best employees, given the likelihood of a long-term employment relationship (Rothman, 2015). This branding should promote the benefits that public sector employees tend to value such as job security, growth opportunities, appropriately competitive wages and benefits, and flexible work schedules (MacBride-King, 2010).

Selective hiring means being precise about the most critical skills and carefully considering the job requirements needed for a position – being *too specific* means that the employer might lose good applicants, but being *too general* means that the hiring manager might be over-burdened with too many applications. Organizations must screen on the most important attributes, skills, and behaviours and use several rounds of screening to ensure only the most qualified participants are interviewed (Pfeffer, 1998). Once applicants are shortlisted the next important factor in hiring is conducting fair and effective interviews. Best practice for interviewing includes a structured process with a set scoring protocol. This leaves less room for bias and makes the process fair for all applicants (Rynes et al., 2007). Additionally, the use of behaviour based questions is most commonly cited as providing the best outcome for interviews, with the theory stating that “past behaviour predicts future actions” (Barclay, 1999; Kessler, 2006, p.62).

Academic literature also points to using the practice of IQ testing, integrity testing, and personality testing as a source of input for a selection process. This is seen as an objective approach to applicant selection, and can be used for systematic screening. According to Rynes et al. (2007) general mental

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ability (or IQ) is a very strong predictor of performance and testing for this should be implemented in the selection process when appropriate¹. Additionally, when executed appropriately the use of personality testing can aid in determining a potential employee's values fit within an organization (Rynes et al., 2007).

Employers must be both selective and strategic in their hiring, which might mean maintaining an attractive hiring pool for future needs. This means both a pool of external candidates and internal candidates who can be groomed for future roles. Employee succession plans are important to have in place to ensure knowledge is transferred across generations of employees (Rothman, 2015).

2.4 Retention Practices

In this paper, retention is thought of as the efforts made by an organization to maintain a working environment which supports current staff staying and is comprised of practices aimed at reducing turnover. Retention of quality employees is important for organizations because experts estimate that the cost of replacing an employee is, on average, approximately twice the cost of that employee's salary (The Wall Street Journal, 2009). In addition to the cost of replacing an employee organizations must also consider the impact turnover can have on staff attitudes. Companies with strong retention practices in place will typically see an improvement in productivity, morale, and commitment (Hiltrop, 1999; Kernaghan, 2011).

The following list outlines the academically espoused best practices relating to retention:

- Set clear expectations (Allen et al., 2010; Hiltrop, 1999; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010).
 - Provide realistic job previews and a thorough orientation to set clear expectations and diminish the potential for inflated notions.
 - Demonstrate a clear career path within the organization and ensure clarity around job scope and promotion opportunities.

¹ There is research that shows cognitive testing can adversely impact certain minority groups, and as such should not be used as a sole source of evidence in a selection process. Companies may prefer a different way to test general mental ability (GMA) (Rynes et al., 2002). It is noted, however, that assessing IQ and GMA is an important factor and should be taken into account in the hiring process; however, the way in which it is assessed may be contested. Other options for assessing GMA include structured interviews, work samples, and simulations.

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- Create a caring, committed, and supportive culture (Allen et al., 2010; Goddard, 2010; Hiltrop, 1996; Hiltrop, 1999; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010; Lui et al., 2004; Kernaghan, 2011; Kopersiewich, 2010; Rothman, 2015; Ulrich, 1997).
 - Maintain a high level of quality leaders, supervisors, and mentors.
 - Ensure open channels of communication aimed at breaking down barriers.
 - Emphasize the value of people and celebrate success.
 - Demonstrate trust by providing flexibility in scheduling and alternative work plans (job sharing, compressed workweek, etc).
- Invest in employee development (Abel & Laanquist, 2013; Allen et al., 2010; Goddard, 2010; Hiltrop, 1999; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010; Kopersiewich, 2010; Lui et al., 2004; Pfeffer, 1995; Rothman, 2015; Suttapong, Srimai, & Pitchayadol, 2014; Rodwell & Teo, 2004).
 - Help employees engage their skills through growth opportunities.
 - Build talent pools and promote employees from within.
 - Help develop employees and provide well-defined career ladders.
 - Invest strategically in training and development such that employees are able to use their new skills to help the organization meet their goals.
- Empower employees (Allen et al., 2010; Batt & Appelbaum, 1995; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Pfeffer, 1995; Pfeffer, 1998; Quinlan-Gagnon, 2010; Subramony, 2009; Suttapong et al., 2014; Ulrich, 1997).
 - Provide employees with autonomy, empowerment, and the opportunity to make decisions, as this leads to intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction.
 - Give employees the opportunity to be on self-managed teams.
 - Be open about organizational information and knowledge.
- Build trust through employment security; trust is essential when sharing both performance and strategic information (Pfeffer, 1998; Suttapong et al., 2014; Vandenabeele, 2013).
- Create a high commitment culture (Goddard, 2010; Kernaghan, 2011; Rothman, 2015; Rynes et al., 2002; Truss, 2013; Ulrich, 1997; Vandenabeele, 2013).
 - Garner commitment through building pride in the workplace.
 - Develop the employee's desire to serve the public.

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- Demonstrate to employees that their work is appreciated.
 - Create a high commitment culture and recognize that values fit has a positive consequence for employee attitudes and length of service.
 - Promote public sector values of fairness, transparency, and equity.
 - Conduct satisfaction surveys to assess employee levels of commitment.
- Exit interviews can help in learning where the employment experience can be improved (Allen et al., 2010; Ulrich, 1997).

A common theme when discussing retention and talent development is that employees need to be treated respectfully. Be open and honest with staff: Start from the moment they are hired and are provided with a clear vision of their employment, and continue through their career by empowering them with autonomy and decision making authority. This trust and respect ties into the opportunities for alternative workplans, telecommuting, and compressed work weeks as it shows trust in the employee's ability to complete responsibilities without the watchful eye of a supervisor. This culture of respect and trust begins at the top, from a leadership team who demonstrates support for staff. Similarly, that same leadership team is responsible for investing in their employee's growth and developing the skills required for filling internal positions. Hiring internally and creating a talent pool of employees is not only strategic from the employer's perspective, but it also demonstrates that leadership trusts that their own people are capable of taking on the challenges of new roles.

2.5 Labour Relation Practices and Strategies

As mentioned previously, the public sector in Canada is highly unionized (Galarneau & Sohn, 2013; Stanton & Manning, 2013). It is important for employers to maintain positive relationships with unions as they can significantly influence various aspects of work and employment regulations (Lucio, 2013). The following is a list of best practices regarding labour relations strategies:

- Maintain open communication (BC Public Service Agency, 2015; Bryson, Forth, & Kirby, 2005; Cooke, 1992; Gill & Meyer, 2013; Lucio, 2013).
 - Hold ongoing conversations with labour unions that encourage information exchanges and provide opportunities for explanation, collaboration, and cooperation.
 - Ensure there is opportunity to hold open honest conversations, particularly if the conversation involves a change in practice.

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- Use unions to create an efficient line of communication between employees and management and maintain a relationship of trust with the union representatives.
- Be solution focussed in dispute resolution techniques (Budd & Colvin, 2008; Lucio, 2013; Pohler & Luchak, 2015).
 - Maintain a system of proactive employee-focused dispute resolution techniques (specifically mediation practices) as a preferred method of conflict resolution.
 - Ensure that whichever system is used demonstrates efficiency and equity, and gives all parties a chance to voice their concerns.
- Maintain respectful relationships (Lucio, 2013; Pohler & Luchak, 2015; Singh & Burke, 2013).
 - Signal that the organization aims to be fair, open, transparent, and respectful.
 - Ensure equality in negotiations, bargaining, and the overall union-management relationship.
 - Be fair and impartial in the treatment of employees.

The relationship between unions and management is never going to be perfectly harmonious and conflict-free, nor is that the purpose of the relationship. The goal of management is to help an organization reach its goals effectively (Huszczko & Hoyer, 1994), and in a unionized environment the union's role is ensuring employees are treated fairly in this process. The union-management relationship does not, however, have to be rife with conflict.

Engaging in ongoing conversations is essential, as unnecessary conflict arises when one party tries to implement unilateral change without involving the other in discussion. Unions have the ability to communicate to their members regarding changes and organizational decisions, and they can help create (or destroy) employee trust (Gill & Meyer, 2013). For this reason, it is in the employer's best interest to engage with the union in a respectful, honest, and meaningful way. Once a constructive relationship is established it is important to maintain trust and open communication at the employee level as well. In any unionized setting there will be a formalized grievance process in place to ensure that employees have the opportunity to address workplace concerns. While historically this process would take the form of formal grievance arbitration, the literature points to the need for a more employee-centric approach, such as both formal and/or informal mediation (Lucio, 2013). In mediation "mediators do not take sides, nor do they make decisions or recommendations. Instead they encourage

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people to focus on common interests and work towards a mutually acceptable solution” (Ministry of Justice, 2012, para. 2). This process allows for a consensual agreement to be drafted, and gives both voice and process back to the disputants.

Ultimately the purpose of a union-management relationship is to ensure the fair treatment of employees in a workplace. In order to maintain this perception of fairness organizations must signal to their staff an aim to be transparent and respectful. This should be worked towards and established over time, and will be demonstrated to employees via negotiation and bargaining styles, as well as through the way changes are communicated. Maintaining open lines of communication and being present for ongoing discussions and input from all stakeholders will create a positive union-management relationship. It is when secrecy prevails and unilateral decisions are made that this relationship will break down and workplace job action will become more prevalent.

2.6 Performance Management Practices

Performance management and measurement is a challenge increasingly faced by public sector organizations, particularly as the public increases the pressure on agencies to prove their effectiveness (West & Blackman, 2015). The following list is comprised of published practices that are considered “best” in the area of performance management:

- Reduce barriers and encourage open communication (Pfeffer, 1998; Quinlan-Gagnon, 2010; Rothman, 2015).
 - Open communication is a key aspect of performance management, as employees and managers must be comfortable talking about performance issues and successes.
 - Reduce status differences and create a sense of commonality that encourages approachability.
 - Take away the fear associated with performance reviews so the conversations can be more productive.
- Clearly link organizational goals to employee performance reviews (Hinkin & Tracey, 2010; Quinlan-Gagnon, 2010; Rothman, 2015; Rynes et al., 2007; Stanton & Manning, 2013; Suttapong et al., 2014; Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2013; Ulrich, 1997; West & Blackman, 2015).
 - Communicate objectives and share the organizational vision with employees, while providing them with a clear picture of how they fit into that vision.

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- Conduct performance appraisals and identify opportunities for development based on these evaluations.
- Be consistent and transparent about organizational goals and build company values into the performance review system.
- Ensure managers are trained in developing and delivering performance evaluations (Hiltrop, 1996; Rynes et al., 2002; West & Blackman, 2015).
 - Managers need an appropriate level of training on conducting performance reviews, so there are reduced errors (such as leniency).
 - Poorly executed performance appraisals can lead to lower job satisfaction and decreased organizational commitment therefore management should be evaluated on how they give performance reviews, develop their teams, and foster initiative amongst their employees.
- Ensure a consistent and dependable review process is in place (Goddard, 2010; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010; Quinlan-Gagnon, 2010; Suttapong et al., 2014; West & Blackman, 2015).
 - Conduct developmental performance appraisals and ensure employees know what they are being evaluated on.
 - Provide employees with ongoing coaching and communication, as there should be no surprises during a performance review.
 - Results from reviews can and should be used in decision making regarding financial compensation and career progression.
 - Performance results should serve as a workplan throughout the year and be used to document both learning needs and accomplishments.
 - Employees at all levels should be subject to the review process to ensure consistency across the organization and to normalize the process.
- Use 360 degree reviews when possible (Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Rogers, Rogers, & Metlay, 2002; Rothman, 2015).

When implementing performance management in a public sector environment it is important that individual performance not be too far separated from organizational performance. There must be an alignment of goals, values, systems, and incentives (West & Blackman, 2015). It is up to the HR

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department to support managers in creating an environment that views performance appraisals as a positive and useful tool that will help recognize employee strengths and improve their weaker areas. If management views performance appraisals as a tedious task that has to be completed once a year, it will not benefit the staff or the employer. Those responsible for performance management must buy into the concept of it or else their employees will notice their lack of commitment. For this reason, thorough management training and development must occur for performance reviews to truly be effective (Quinlan-Gagnon, 2010). Management needs to understand how the organization completes its ratings and/or ranking systems and must also note the impact that a poorly completed performance review can have on an employee's career – particularly if the organization uses these reviews to determine promotions, training, and wage increases. If employees sense that their managers are not fully invested in the process then they will likely not believe that the outcomes (goals, training, etc.) are important.

In addition to being invested in the annual review process, managers should also aim to be open communicators with their employees year round (Quinlan-Gagnon, 2010). Having open, honest, and trusting relationships with employees means that when it comes to discussing performance the employee is more likely to trust the feedback they receive. It also means that performance issues are more likely to be addressed on the spot throughout the year – if managers can stop poor behaviour in the moment then they are more likely to resolve performance issues before they morph into being the root of a grievance in the future.

One way to make certain that employees understand that the performance review process is legitimate is to implement a 360 degree process. This means that feedback is given by both superiors as well as direct reports and colleagues (Luthans & Peterson, 2003). When possible it means bringing in feedback from clients or customers as well. If an organization is willing to invest the time, effort, and resources into creating these thorough review processes not only does the authenticity of the feedback increase, but the process itself also appears more legitimate.

Finally, no matter the style of performance appraisal that an employer may use, it is important that the approach ties into organizational goals and strategies. A performance review is the perfect opportunity to reinforce organizational values, strategy, and vision (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2013). As the saying goes, "what gets measured gets done" so if there are certain initiatives that an organization wants to see improvements in, those initiatives must be tied into the performance

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evaluation plan. The onus is on managers to help employees understand how their goals tie into their team's goals, which should in turn tie into the organization's overarching mandate – performance reviews are a perfect opportunity to ensure initiatives align.

2.7 Motivation and Incentive Practices

With public sector employee salaries being paid out of tax funds and the public closely scrutinizing the offered pay scales to make certain they are fair and equitable, employers are left with little flexibility in using financial compensation as a motivator. Employers in public sector organizations typically cannot motivate with bonuses or pay increases outside the employer's benchmarked standards; therefore, employers in public sector organizations must be creative in how they motivate and incentivize employees. The following is a list of best practices that academics champion as being important in motivating staff:

- Provide opportunities to learn and grow (Hiltrop, 1996; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010; Hiltrop, 1999; Lui et al., 2004; Pfeffer, 1995; Rothman, 2015; Tracey, Hinkin, Tannenbaum, & Mathieu, 2001).
 - Employment security and well-defined career ladders help employees project their development within an organization.
 - People learn best from stretch roles, cross-utilization and cross training and it is not only important to provide skill training, but employees must also be provided with the opportunity to use those skills.
- Trust employees and provide them with decision making authority (Hiltrop, 1996; Hiltrop, 1999; Lavigna, 2002; Pfeffer, 1998).
 - Empower employees through decentralizing decision making, and give them the opportunity to be successful on self-managed teams.
 - Sharing information helps employees feel like they are a greater part of the unit.
- Recognize and reward high performance (Hiltrop, 1996; Hiltrop, 1999; Hinkin & Tracey, 2010; Lui et al., 2004; Pfeffer, 1995; Pfeffer, 1998; Subramony, 2009).
 - Reward high performing employees with internal promotions/postings, increased wages, and generous benefits packages.
 - Rewards need to be adequate and fair and should be based on employee performance.
 - Use public acknowledgement to recognize employee effort.

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- Demonstrate organizational commitment to employee success (Hiltrop, 1996; Hiltrop, 1999; Rynes et al., 2007; Subramony, 2009).
 - Provide behavior-based feedback and help employees in achieving their objectives.
 - Employees want to see how they are contributing to the firm and want to work towards specific goals.
- Encourage employees with high levels of “Public Service Motivation” (PSM) by reminding them of the importance of their work (Kernaghan, 2001; Kernaghan, 2011; Vandenaabeele, 2009).
 - Work to develop individuals with high PSM (high commitment to the public sector, its values, and serving the community) as these employees will likely perform better in the public sector and have increased job satisfaction.
 - Develop those people whose values align with the public sector values of fairness, transparency, and equity.

While it is true that the public sector is limited in its ability to motivate using monetary incentives such as bonuses, it is noted that this might not be the most important factor in motivating employees. In fact, pay is the most replicable resource available to employers; therefore, if it is the employer’s primary source of loyalty then employees can easily look to competition for similar salaries (Hiltrop, 1999). Additionally, it is noted that pay is not a factor in employee engagement, so long as the salary is within an appropriate range of what an employee sees as fair (Rothman, 2015).

With this in mind, there are several other factors that come into play when looking for the best ways to motivate employees. People need to know what their career paths look like and need to understand what steps are required to advance. Once it is understood that a certain amount of training is required to move up in an organization, employers also must provide employees with opportunities to learn and use new skills. Cross-training and stretch roles are a way that employees can see if they are heading in the right direction and also allows them to “test drive” a position before applying for permanent roles (Rothman, 2015). Employees will be motivated by these opportunities to expand their skillsets and gain experience. Stretch assignments are particularly useful because they ensure an employee’s job security – people can try new positions while being assured that they can return to their old roles.

It is important for employers to empower their staff to make their own choices and to give them the opportunity to work autonomously and gain employer trust (Pfeffer, 1995). Decentralization not only

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demonstrates to an employee that they are a trusted part of the team, it also benefits the organization as when employees require less supervision then management is able to place their focus elsewhere, and allows the organization to operate more efficiently.

Employees require recognition to know that their efforts are appreciated (Lui et al., 2004). Even if monetary rewards are not feasible, personal recognition still greatly contributes to employee motivation. Similarly, people want to know that they are making meaningful progress towards goals. This means that in addition to providing positive recognition, employers should also ensure they provide behavior-based feedback to help employees achieve their objectives (Subramony, 2009).

Finally, a unique characteristic of public sector HRM is the concept of Public Service Motivation (PSM). This is the idea that some people can be intrinsically motivated in the public service based on their own personal values of fairness and equality, as well as their desire to provide service to their communities (Vandenabeele, 2009). PSM can be difficult to measure, and it is not a motivator for every public sector employee, however it is important to recognize its existence because tapping into an employees innate PSM means that a employer can inspire performance by targeting these values (Kernaghan, 2011).

2.8 Evidence Based Management and Academic Research Implementation

Understanding that HR academics research with the expectation that their work will be transferred to practice, it is worth investigating the ways in which academic findings translate to workplace reality. There is an ongoing narrative that academics and practitioners tend to live in separate worlds (Guest, 2007); however, it is obvious that both parties need each other.

Evidence based management (EBM) gets its roots from evidence based practice (EBP), which is a concept most readily found in health care. EBP is the notion that professionals in health care should provide care and treatment that is based as closely as possible on evidence from well-conducted studies on the effectiveness of the treatment plan, with the goal of minimizing the underuse/overuse/misuse of any particular intervention (Walshe & Rundall, 2001). Translated into the field of management, EBM is a paradigm for decision making that integrates academically researched evidence with an expert's decision making abilities, ultimately leading to a better outcome than either of these two paths would bring about on their own (Rousseau D. M., 2006). Managers who aim to practice EBM first look to the literature to see what is considered "best" and then they use their own experience and understanding of

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their organization (as well as what they have seen be successful in other organizations) to ensure attention is paid to any variable that might negatively impact the most desirable outcomes from being achieved during the implementation of a new practice.

In addition to the focus on using evidence as a part of decision making, EBM is also interested in the cause-effect relationship in practice and relies on a culture of information sharing in order to determine when practices are working and when they are not. EBM promotes ongoing continuous improvement as well as organizational legitimacy, in that when decisions are made based on “systematic causal knowledge” stakeholders are more willing to accept decisions (Rousseau, 2006, 261). To this end, it is imperative that HR specialists and managers engage in critical analysis and have the capacity to know and understand where and when to look for evidence to help in decision making (Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007). It is also essential that decision makers use their practitioner experience and intuition to create critical hypotheses and research questions that will assist in their search for evidence and answers (Gibbons & Woock, 2009).

EBM will be most successful if all stakeholders are onboard with its underlying theory. If the concept is presented to the academic community in a way that demonstrates a space for parties to engage where academics are asked to do research for practical engagement, then it is likely that the academics will be eager to support both advanced scholarship and organizational development (Gibbons & Woock, 2009). Once academics commit to the process and they publish their research in clear lists of recommended practices, they will then be better able to help practitioners also embrace EBM. When managers gather research on available practices they can look to the espoused theories and engage critical decision making skills to see if those researched practices might work in their own scenario (Briner, Denyer, & Rousseau, 2009). This critical decision making piece is integral to the EBM process as it will ultimately be up to management to create a clear and explicit hypothesis that is either accepted or rejected based on the evidence gathered. While all stakeholders are considered in this process, management has the final say after considering all variables (Briner et al., 2009).

Best practices are tools that decision-makers engage to help in determining an organization's future. By understanding what others have done in the past it allows for future mistakes to be avoided: As Peter Drucker first asserted (in Briner et al., 2009 p.21), most business problems are generic and many businesses face “the repetition of familiar problems cloaked in the guise of uniqueness.” Once organizations understand this idea it can lead to a better appreciation for both best practices and EBM.

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Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework

In 1995 Jeffrey Pfeffer created a list of 13 best practices for creating a sustainable competitive advantage through people. This list was used as inspiration to create a framework to help in understanding what HR practices today's public sector practitioners see as guiding their work and ensuring they benefit the most from their human capital. By narrowing the list down to the summary pillars of *Recruitment and Selection*, *Retention*, *Labour Relations*, *Performance Management*, and *Motivation and Incentives* this conceptual framework attempts to understand what practices are considered leading in the minds of HR practitioners. The goal is to appreciate what is deemed important by practitioners, and to determine if it is aligned with academic theories. Additionally, the research aims to understand where practitioners look for ideas that support the practices that they do implement.

3.1 Breakdown of the Conceptual Framework

The following is a sub-list of practices inspired by Pfeffer which are divided into five pillars to create the guiding conceptual framework for this report² (See Appendix B for full list of practices):

Recruitment and Selection

- Selective hiring of new personnel

Retention

- Employment security
- Promotion from within
- Self-managed teams
- Autonomy/participation/empowerment

Labour Relations

- Reduced distinctions/barriers across wage levels
- Sharing of information

Performance Management

- Regularly occurring performance reviews

² Pfeffer's practices were aimed at private sector organizations, and as such have been re-worked to meet the needs of the public sector. The themes of incentive based pay and employee ownership were not used in the creation of this conceptual framework.

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Motivation and Incentives

- Comparatively high compensation, depending on organizational success
- Extensive training and skill development opportunities
- Cross-training and cross-utilization

These basic concepts guided the research and the interview questions. By theming Pfeffer's practices, the five pillars listed above emerged as being central tenants of HR practice (labour relations is included as it is a central HR issue in British Columbia's public sector). This framework functions as a visual representation to demonstrate the points of research interest. With these guiding pillars shaping the critical incidence questions asked during interviews this paper uncovers which practices are considered "best" in relation to the above discussed topics.

Conceptual Framework for Understanding Practitioner Perception of HR Best Practices

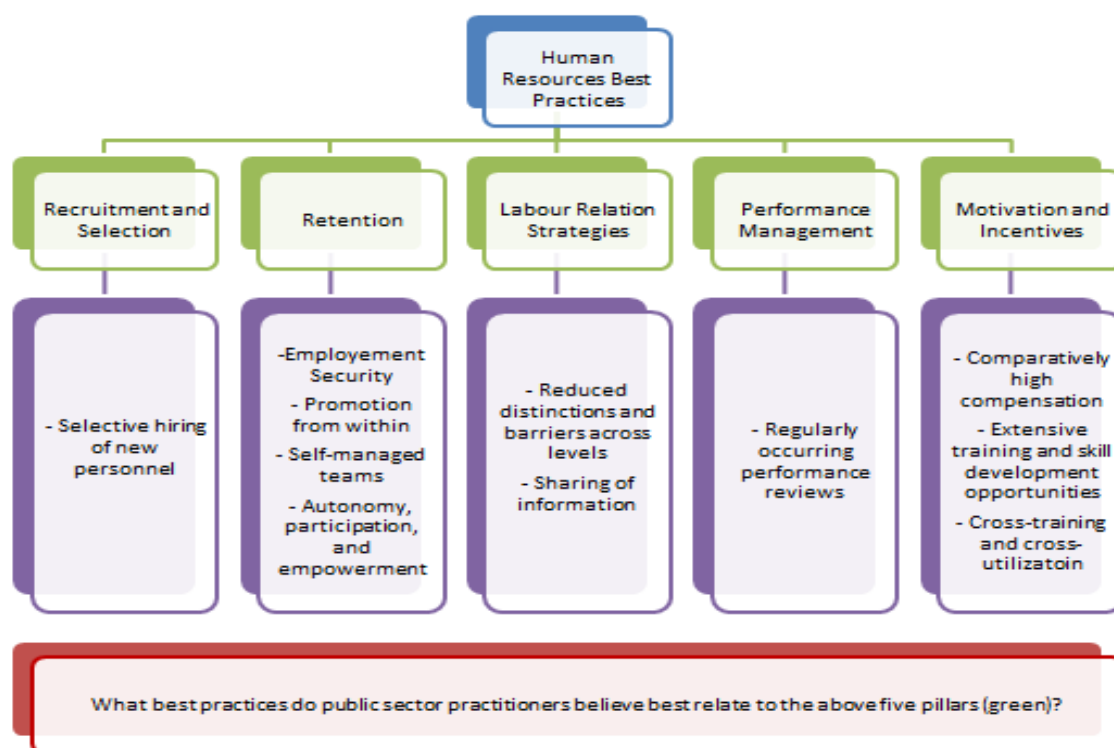


Figure 1. A conceptual framework for understanding practitioner perception of HR best practices. After examining Jeffrey Pfeffer's best practices for a competitive advantage (public sector relevant practices are summarized in purple), the above five HR areas (green) emerged as central tenants for HR practice in the public sector. These five pillars and the corresponding question (red) provided the framework for both the practitioner interviews and for this paper's overall structure.

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Chapter Four: Methodology

A survey research methodology focusing on interview data collection was used for this research. After reviewing both peer-reviewed and grey literature a specific set of interview questions were developed in order to answer the following primary research question and additional sub-questions:

- Are practitioners in the public sector engaging in what academics espouse as being “best practices?”
 - Where do practitioners look to answer questions regarding understanding and implementing best practices?
 - Is there a gap in the transfer of knowledge from academia into public sector human resource practice?

In order to uncover answers to these questions, the following strategies were implemented:

- A literature review was completed based on academic and grey literature. This literature review explains best practices and analyzes what academics have found to be best practices in various areas of HRM. It also provides a brief history of HRM and its implementation in public sector environments.
- Interviews were conducted with a variety of HR employees, managers, and union representatives from offices including the British Columbia (BC) Provincial Government and the Public Service Agency, the University of Victoria, BC Assessment, the Professional Employee’s Association, and BC Ferry and Marine Worker’s Union.
- A content analysis approach was used to sort the interview information into relevant themes.

After employing the content analysis method to uncover themes amongst the interview transcripts, recommendations are made based on a comparison between the literature that was reviewed and the emergent interview themes.

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4.1 Practitioner Interviews

Sixteen semi-structured interviews comprised of critical incidence questions were conducted as a means to document the knowledge that HR practitioners in the public sector use in their daily work. Interviews were made up of two parts – The first part focused specifically on the five pillars from the conceptual framework (Recruitment and Selection, Retention, Labour Relations, Performance Management, and Motivation and Incentives) and the second part focused on follow-up topics such as perceived important requirements in new policy implementation, ranking of the conceptual framework's five pillars in order of importance to HR strategy, and the amount of practitioner time spent researching HR policies during any given one month period (see Appendix C for interview questions). The first section aimed to understand what practitioners in the public sector deemed as being "best practice," and the second section aimed to understand how practitioners made decisions for policy implementation. Finally, questions asked throughout the interviews also aimed to understand where practitioners look to gain understanding around best practices in their fields. The interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes each. This research design was chosen as a means for identifying the HR practices engaged by various public sector entities and it helped in understanding what is considered "best practice" for the practitioners' departments and their organizations as a whole.

4.1.1 Participants. There were four different groups identified to participate in this study, however no differentiation was made in terms of the type or style of questions asked:

- Crown corporation HR employees;
- Public Service HR employees;
- Education HR employees;
- Union Representatives.

The interviewees were selected based on the criteria that they were employed (or had previously been employed) in a provincial public sector environment and were involved in HR decision making within that environment. The target population was HR managers/directors in public sector departments; however, the scope was widened to include some non-management (unionized employees) and some union representatives to ensure the data collected was well-rounded. It was

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important that all participants worked in (or with) the BC public sector because the sample needed to be working in similar fiscal environments and serving similar populations.

As mentioned above, the effort was made to survey a wide variety of practitioners in similar style roles across the public sector with a focus on management staff. Ultimately 16 interviews were conducted with 10 leaders/managers, 2 union reps, and 4 unionized employees within the public service. The questions were not altered based on role, although interviewees were informed they could skip questions if they felt they did not pertain to their expertise or job descriptions.

4.1.2 Participant recruitment. Recruitment for this research was based on a combination of cold calls and the snowball recruitment technique. The researcher initially accessed a publicly available database of email addresses for provincial public servants, and after emailing two dozen individuals who had the words “Human Resources” in their job title the researcher began to receive responses back. From here interviews began to take place and often interviewees would suggest additional individuals to contact. While this resulted in a larger number of successful recruits for the interviews, it also may have resulted in a narrower scope of interviewees. While the researcher did continue to send “cold call” emails, they were less successful in attaining recruits than the snowball technique.

4.1.3 Interview design. Interviews were conducted in a “semi-structured” manner with the interviewer going through a list of specific questions, while still allowing for diversions in conversation when and where appropriate. The conversations were recorded in addition to notes being taken throughout the process. The recordings were later transcribed to create full transcripts that were used in the content analysis. The interviews were 45 minutes in length on average, with the shortest being 22 minutes and the longest being 63 minutes. Interviews primarily took place in-person, however there were four telephone interviews conducted.

4.2 Ethical Approval

The University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) approved the application for this project August 28, 2014 (see Appendix D for approval certificate). Each interviewee was made aware of the terms of the HREB prior to their participation in this study, and, in accordance with the terms of ethics approval, they were asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview taking place. This consent form explained the purpose of the study, outlined the measures in place to ensure confidentiality, and

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clarified how data was to be collected, protected and destroyed by the researcher (See Appendix E for a copy of the consent form).

4.3 Analysis of Interviews

After interviews were conducted, the data was analyzed using content analysis. “Content analysis can be viewed as a first step to experiencing the data” and it helps in developing ideas and creating approaches to focus research (Cunningham, 2001, p.207). In content analysis one must “suspend their normative judgement” and let themes emerge from data (Cunningham, 2001, p.209). These themes often capture patterns in data and represent meaningful topics for further investigation. If emerging themes offer insight towards answering the research question then they are noted by the researcher and addressed in the researcher’s Findings.

4.4 Limitations to Research

Several limitations to research were identified.

- Self-reporting bias: The reporter, or interviewee, may answer in ways that they think the interviewer wants them to respond, or that might be viewed as favourable by others rather than answering with their actual opinion or truthful experience.
- Self-selection bias: When individuals volunteer to be interviewed for projects they may feel they have plenty of insight on the matter. This can result in individuals with stronger opinions to be the only participants in a study, and the information collected may not necessarily represent the entire population.
- Data collection limitation: Because of time restrictions and access to interview candidates this research study only collected data from 16 interviews. More interviews may have resulted in more thorough results.³

³ While the researcher recognizes that the project could have benefited from additional interview data, the general rule for determining if enough interviews have been conducted is when no new information is being added by interviewing another individual – that is to say the data has reached its “saturation” point (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data set for these interviews began to become saturated after approximately the 13th or 14th interview, which means that 16 interviews was an appropriate number in this situation.

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- Limited Empirical Data: Because the interviews resulted in qualitative data collection, the information is open for interpretation. This could result in different people interpreting and theming the same data in different ways.
- Interviewer Bias: There is a possibility that the researcher may have inadvertently encouraged particular responses by providing seemingly trivial feedback (a smile, nod, or frown) to the interviewees throughout the in-person interviews.

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Chapter Five: Findings

The following qualitative analysis is based on 16 semi-structured interviews conducted with public sector employees located in British Columbia. The interview questions were developed to better understand the perception of best practices used in these individuals' lines of work. Interviewees were asked about what they understood to be best practices in the various areas of their HR practice. The analysis and findings are arranged based on the conceptual framework pillars of Recruitment and Selection, Retention, Labour Relation Strategies, Performance Management, and Motivation and Incentives. Each section is explored to determine what public sector employees understand to be best practices in the area and what challenges are perceived in implementing the identified practices. In each section a variety of interview quotes are used as a means of demonstrating and supporting the findings. The summarized results will be compared to the literature review to identify what similarities and differences exist between practitioner and academic understanding of best practices.

5.1 Recruitment and Selection

For the purpose of this section, Recruitment and Selection relates to any acts made by the hiring team (management in conjunction with human resources) to recruit and hire potential employees. The interview questions were open-ended and asked interviewees what they considered to be best practices and further inquired about examples of how these practices were being implemented by the organization, if they were being implemented.

Table 1

Inductively Developed Themes: Recruitment and Selection

Thematic Category	Summary of Interview Data
5.1.1: Careful selection process 11/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize hiring is for the organization as a whole – not just the one position. • Have a subject matter expert involved in hiring process because they know what the job entails. • Have a clear idea about the skillset required given the chemistry of the team, and have a realistic idea of the “market” of candidates. • Do not list unnecessary job requirements as this limits your potential candidates.

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<p>5.1.1.1: Method for selection 7/16 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioural interviews – past experience predicts future performance. • Provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates. • Ensure managers have the training to complete the recruitment and selection appropriately. • Tailor the process for the position – methods can be altered to meet the needs of the job (be consistent without being rigid). • Use a panel interview technique to decrease bias. • Always check references.
<p>5.1.2: Central and Streamlined Processes 12/16 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application process needs to be easy for candidates to understand. • Onboarding needs to be a clear and understandable process.
<p>5.1.2.1: Central Hiring Centres 11/16 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a hiring centre where possible – it ensures common hiring practices amongst all work units and departments and allows for consistency in job descriptions, interview questions, and pay scales. • Use applicant tracking systems and applicant inventories/talent pools – Attempting to move away from “one vacancy one, posting” system. • Provide applicants with a single point of contact within the system.
<p>5.1.3: Fairness and Merit 5/16 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a wide range of applicants can apply, including external applicants when possible. • The process has to be fair and result in the best applicant getting the job, no matter what. • Practices have to be based on a meritorious process; if the process is not based on merit it can and should be reviewed.
<p>Theme 5.1.4: Other Points of Interest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility – Cannot discriminate under Human Rights Act and organizations should try to hire employees that reflect the citizen population (4/16).

5.1.1 Careful selection process. *11/16 interview participants mentioned the importance of a careful selection process.*

The interviewees made specific note that hiring in the public sector is an important and strategic process. *“When you are hiring an employee it is one of the most strategic things you can do because you aren’t just hiring for the role, you are hiring for the [organization] as a whole.”* Several respondents further indicated that because of this, it is important that job descriptions are clear and relevant, and do

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not *“list any unnecessary job requirements, as this limits your potential candidates.”* The recommendation was made to include subject matter experts in the hiring process as they are the most likely to understand the requirements of the job and the expectations of the potential candidates.

Several comments focused on the specific methods used (7/16). The referenced methods included both the behavioural descriptive interview process and the situational interview style. *“Past performance is the best indicator of future success... this is the best way we can think of to bring a sense of objectivity into the assessment process.”* The interview subjects also pointed to reference checking as an important method in a careful selection process. *“Reference checking is a critical component of selection... we run into issues when people don’t check them.”* Finally, it was indicated by several respondents that it is best practice to follow-up with unsuccessful candidates when possible, as it allows those who are not hired to understand what is required to be successful in future applications.

5.1.2 Central and streamlined processes. *12/16 interview participants mentioned the importance of a central and/or streamlined application and selection process.*

The majority of interviewees (11/16) noted that an HR hiring centre or centralized point of contact for HR purposes was important during the Recruitment and Selection phase of hiring new employees. A theme arose around ensuring the process was easy for the applicant, including moving away from the “one vacancy, one posting” method and moving towards the creation of applicant hiring pools. *“The hiring process needs to be streamlined... the applicant experience is important.”* *“Having an automated system that takes care of posting jobs and screening applicants makes the process easier... it also ensures consistency in hiring across the organization.”* The importance of consistency in job expectations across an organization was echoed by many, with some managers indicating that in the past there were positions in some parts of the organization that were getting paid substantially more than individuals completing the same tasks in other parts of the same organization. Managers indicated that these differences can cause grievances to arise and also creates a poor organizational image. *“Create a posting and determine exactly what is required to fill the vacancy... be consistent in your postings and have standardized methods for assessing, interviewing and shortlisting candidates.”*

Finally, there was discussion that “onboarding” also has to be a fluid process for new hires. *“You have to make sure that people are oriented properly – to the organization, and the job. They also need to receive good feedback... The probation period needs to be viewed as an extension of the hiring*

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process.” The idea behind this is that you might hire the right person, but if the onboarding and probationary period are unsatisfactory then employers may lose good staff.

5.1.3 Fairness and merit. *5/16 interview participants stated that Fairness and Merit were important considerations in Recruitment and Selection.*

“For over a hundred years, the concept of merit has been the underpinning of excellence and political neutrality in the BC Public Service. While hiring processes have changed over the years, merit has been proven to be the foundation for this non-partisan, professional workforce. The principle of merit is embedded in the legislation – The Public Service Act – which provides for public servants hired for their competence and ability to do the job, not their political beliefs or personal connections” (Office of the Merit Commissioner, 2015, para. 1).

Since the BC Public Service makes up a large portion of the BC public sector, there was a common theme that arose around the importance of merit. *“In the public service we have it in legislation that selection has to be based on a meritorious process.”* This process includes ensuring a broad range of applicants can apply, hiring based on skills and experience and not based on “who you know,” and ensuring jobs are posted externally when appropriate. If any individual feels that a candidate was hired based on anything other than merit, they can ask the Merit Commissioner to investigate the process.

5.1.4 Other points of interest. One other theme that arose relating to Recruitment and Selection was the importance of accessibility and equality relating to hiring under-represented groups when possible (4/16). *“Progressive employers should turn their minds to questions around equity... they should consider their current staff demographic when considering new candidates.”* This point is related to, but slightly different from the issues of Fairness and Merit, and it stems from the Human Rights Code. This legislation states that employers cannot discriminate based on race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation or age (Human Rights Code, RSBC 1996, c 210, ss 7-14).

5.1.5 Challenges. The most common response amongst interviewees regarding challenges in implementing best practice is the complicated processes that most bureaucratic organizations have for recruitment and selection. The general consensus (9/16) is that these organizations have a deep-seeded way of doing things that makes any change difficult, and they also indicated that many organization’s

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recruitment and selection processes have developed into time-consuming, complicated processes. *“The one vacancy one posting approach is crazy and not sustainable... There is no need to have 70 individual postings that are the same pay scale and require the same skills... we need a corporate strategy.”* One individual remarked that on average there are 20 – 25 steps to hire one person. Some interviewees noted that their organizations are attempting to move away from this system, but indicated that it was an issue that plagued them in the past, and that moving away from it has been worthwhile, but a process that required extensive change management. *“People tend to think that when departments centralize the process they are creating additional work, but really once it is done, it’s done!”*

Interviewees also quoted “Time” as an ongoing challenge when attempting to implement the above listed best practices (6/16). *“We know that checking references is a best practice, but we don’t always have time.”* There was also indication that while people understand that panel interview sessions with a mixture of behavioural and situational questions make for the most successful candidate, several practitioners agreed that for certain positions this process takes too long. *“I’m not going to do a two week process when I am just looking for an employee to file papers...”* This indicates that managers will not always engage best practice, and the deciding factor may be the experience level required for the role being filled.

The final challenge was a debate that several interviewees said they struggle with (6/16), and that is whether or not to hire internally or externally. Hiring internally allows an employer to reward an employee with a promotional opportunity, but the alternative view point shows that you want the best possible candidate in the role, and that person may be external. Additionally, sometimes external candidates can breathe life into an organization in need of change and *“it is important to try and have a mix of promoting employees from within and bringing new blood in from outside.”* A final note that was mentioned is that hiring freezes sometimes take away the option to hire externally, and this often happens at a time when the organization could really use the “new blood.”

5.2 Retention

For the purpose of this section, retention relates to efforts made by an organization to ensure they “hold onto” their valuable employees and reduce unwanted organizational turnover.

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Table 2*Inductively Developed Themes: Retention*

Thematic Category	Summary of Interview Data
5.2.1 Positive Relationships and Environment 10/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have a trusting relationship between supervisor and employee; if communication is sub-standard then employees will not stay. • People do not leave companies, they leave managers. • Maintain an open door policy. • Have fun in the workplace – conduct morning “huddle” meetings that are meant to be fun and interactive. • Use exit surveys and learn from them. • Implement and maintain health and wellness programs.
5.2.1.1: Coaching Approach 3/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a coaching approach which entails sitting down with the employee, asking questions and using active listening. • Instate a mentorship program for new employees to shadow more experienced employees.
5.2.1.2: Teamwork 4/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure employees feel they are part of a meaningful team. • Bring employees of all levels to important meetings to listen and contribute. • Consult employees on decisions that affect them and their work; you likely will not be able to talk to everyone, but you should consult when and where possible. • Create an environment and a sense of community where people are comfortable asking each other for help.
5.2.2: Advancement Opportunities 9/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help employees see that they have a clear path for opportunities to learn, develop, and advance. • Keep people engaged so they want to learn more and receive promotions.
5.2.3: Goal Setting, Learning, and Development 8/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set time aside with employees to help in goal setting. • Provide employees with a feedback rich environment and engage in open conversations about development and performance. • Learning should be tied with organization needs and goals. • Learning opportunities typically motivate and interest employees and the more training people receive the more likely they are to stay with the organization. • Use employee engagement surveys to identify problem areas and fix those areas through development.

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5.2.4: Other Points of Interest

- Extrinsic motivators will help in employee retention, including pay increases, benefit packages, and vacation time (6/16).
- Autonomy and flexibility empowers employees, demonstrates trust, and gives employees the room to manage their work and out-of-work commitments (5/16).
- Acknowledgement and recognition are important intrinsic motivators and help people feel appreciated in the workplace (5/16).

5.2.1 Positive relationships and environment. *10/16 interview participants mentioned the importance of positive relationships and a positive work environment.*

The common theme among interviewees regarding retention was that they want to be in a workplace that encourages honest and trusting relationships amongst management and staff. Two individuals both stated that *“people do not leave companies, they leave managers”* and another said that, *“if communication is sub-standard, then employees will not stay.”* Regarding relationships, the focus was split between relationships with management, and relationships amongst peers. Three individuals cited using either a coaching or a mentoring approach, which involves a mixture of giving on-the-spot feedback as well as asking questions and using *“active listening”* to help in employee development. Finally the notion of teamwork was referenced (4/16) as an important aspect of retention, in that employers must *“create an environment and a sense of community where people are comfortable asking each other for help.”*

5.2.2 Advancement opportunities. *9/16 interview participants stated that advancement opportunities are important for employee retention.*

The majority of interview subjects commented that career advancement is extremely important in an employer’s retention strategy. They stated that best practice would be to ensure that employees have *“a clear path for opportunities to learn, develop and advance.”* It was stated that *“one of the biggest reasons people leave an organization is because they don’t see a clear career path... people are very interested in their career, and they want to know they have one.”*

5.2.3 Goal setting, learning, and development. *8/16 interview participants stated that goal setting, learning, and development are important in employee retention.*

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According to the interviewees, setting time aside to help employees set goals and make plans to reach them is important in employee retention. *“Learning opportunities typically motivate and interest employees and the more training people receive the more likely they are to stay with the organization.”* It was suggested that a best practice is using employee engagement surveys or annual reviews to identify problem areas and improve them through development and training plans. The idea being that this helps with organizational need, but also provides the learning and development that is believed to be an important factor in employee retention. The training provided, however, must be relevant to the employee’s responsibilities and integrated into the employer’s overall strategy. If this does not happen then the employee may take their skills elsewhere and the employer will lose out on their investment.

5.2.4 Other points of interest. Several other conceptions of best practice in the area of retention were brought up in the interviews, including extrinsic motivation, autonomy, and recognition. Six interviewees stated that they believed that higher pay, generous benefit packages and above average vacation options are all reasons employees will stay with an organizations. Five other interview subjects stated that flexible work plans are reasons to stay because *“people need the opportunity and space to manage their work and out of work commitments, as long as they get the job done.”* Finally, five of the interviewees indicated that acknowledgement and recognition are important because if people feel welcomed and appreciated in their workplace they will be more likely to stay.

5.2.5 Challenges. The most common challenge listed by interviewees as a blockade for leading in retention best practices is resources (9/16). *“If you have the money to send people on courses and to workshops that interest them, then they’ll be more likely to stay... it is a real frustration not having the resources for conferences and training... people don’t get that jazzed up over webinars.”* It was further noted that an organization might know that something is best practice, but if the practice does not follow the strategic plan or align with organizational priorities, the funding will not allow it to happen.

Organizational sub-cultures and overall decreased loyalty to the organization is cited as another challenge to retention. It is generally noted amongst the interviewees that young people (under age 35) tend to not be loyal to any one organization early in their careers (7/16). It was also noted that clarification had to be made around whether or not “retention” meant retention within the organization (i.e. the public service) versus retention within a department or ministry, because the former would show far higher retention rates than the latter.

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A final identified challenge that was noted was the issue of communication (4/16). The most notable take away from interviewees regarding this issue is that they stated that organizations need to do a better job of “...learning from the people that are leaving... I’ve heard people say that they’ve never had anyone give feedback or recognize their work... if this is the feedback we get, we need to become better at communicating.” The majority of respondents stated that a positive environment and positive relationships make for best practice in a work place but getting communication to this level has been identified as the challenge. One respondent stated, “The reality is that people are complicated and it’s always surprising what is important to an individual... you have to put in the effort to discover that.”

5.3 Labour Relations Strategies

Labour relations strategies relates to any practices used when engaging with unions and union representatives. The open-ended interview questions asked interviewees about what they considered to be best practices when working with unions, and asked for examples when possible.

Table 3

Inductively Developed Themes: Labour Relations Strategies

Thematic Category	Summary of Interview Data
5.3.1: Proactive Approach and Respecting Roles 14/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with employees regarding issues before taking disciplinary action. If there is a dispute there are mechanisms to solve it, but make certain to follow outlined and agreed upon procedures. Be mature during negotiations to avoid bringing in arbitration. Early identification of issues decreases the need for discipline. When making company-wide changes engage the union, as it will help with employee buy-in. Use an “interest” based approach as opposed to “rights” based approach to bargaining.
5.3.1.1: Understand Respective Roles 4/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The union and employer each play specific roles – it is important to understand and respect the differences in these roles. When appropriate include unions in decision making in an effort to avoid reactionary approaches later on. Management has rights that need to be respected, and if employees do not respect those rights, then management should be able to invoke disciplinary action. Respect the union role and aim to develop positive relationships. It is ok to agree to disagree, but the effort must be made to be both pragmatic and collaborative.

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| <p>5.3.1.2: Clear Expectations
4/16 responses</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There needs to be consultation with the union, when and where appropriate. • Must be able to bargain in good faith with clear communication. • Be clear and understand the objective – unions and management are in a relationship that must be maintained. • Try to ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of the conflict before moving forward with formal proceedings. |
| <p>5.3.2: Accountability
7/16 responses</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow process and maintain documentation when engaging with unions, specifically when it relates to disputes and grievances. • Thorough documentation is a way of maintaining confidence, as it is a reminder that good work is rewarded and inappropriate behaviour is managed. • Ensure managers are following the terms laid out in the collective agreement, as it is meant to guide business processes. |
| <p>5.3.3: Alternative Dispute Resolution Processes
6/16 responses</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use mediation wherever it makes sense before using arbitration or litigation. • Hold joint “fact finding” sessions in order to understand disputes and prevent cases from going to hearings or arbitration. • Attempt to attain the best outcome – this does not have to happen via the traditional methods. |
| <p>5.3.4: Other Points of Interest</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an issue arises, use precedent where possible to make educated decisions (3/16). |

5.3.1 Proactive approach and respecting roles. *14/16 interview participants stated that respecting each other’s roles and maintaining a proactive approach to labour relations is a best practice.*

The primary theme that the majority of interviewees identified as an important labour relations practice was early identification of issues and engaging the union in any actions that may impact them. This was stated in regards to both disciplinary action as well as when organizations make company-wide changes that affect employees. It was also stated that when possible organizations should “*use an interest based approach as opposed to a rights based approach to bargaining*” as this creates a more positive and respectful environment for negotiations. Further, an effort should be made on both parties’ behalf to understand the role of their counterpart, and employers should “*work to build relationships with the unions and respect the role they play*” (4/16). A final point was the need for clear expectations (4/16) and the requirement for bargaining in good faith: “*Be clear and understand the objective – unions and management are in a relationship that must be maintained.*” In moving forward,

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especially with negotiations, everyone at the table has to have a clear understanding of the conflict/issues/agenda before formal proceedings can begin.

5.3.2 Accountability. *7/16 interview participants stated that maintaining accountability in labour relations relationships is an important best practice.*

Following process and keeping appropriate documentation is important in maintaining accountability between unions and management. *“Thorough documentation is a way of maintaining confidence... it is a reminder that good work is rewarded and inappropriate behaviour is managed.”* Documentation also helps managers follow the collective agreement – it helps guide process.

5.3.3 Alternative dispute resolution processes. *6/16 interview participants stated that using alternative dispute resolution techniques is a best practice in labour relations.*

Techniques such as mediation and fact-finding sessions were identified as good alternatives to litigation and/or binding arbitration. It was pointed out that what is most important is that management and unions *“attempt to attain the best outcome... it does not have to happen via the traditional methods.”* The focus of several interviewees was on interest based discussions and finding unique ways to solve issues without having to conduct formal procedures.

5.3.4 Other points of interest. A final point that was brought up by 3/16 interviewees was using precedent when possible to make informed decisions. They stated that for many disputes there are similar examples previously managed in appropriate ways, and organizations should look to those cases to determine the best outcomes for their similar situations.

5.3.5 Challenges. There were three primary challenges identified by the interviewees relating to implementing best practices in a unionized environment. The first was communication troubles, with 7/16 participants listing this as an issue specific to labour relations. *“The challenge is people avoid difficult conversations. You have to do it, but you have to do it in a skillful way... we get pulled into things that have festered, but we should have been involved earlier on...”* The general theme is that clear communication early on solves many problems, but there needs to be training and encouragement to get to a point where this comes naturally.

A second identified challenge was that issues are not always “black and white” (7/16). One interviewee asked, *“What is more important... best practice, or getting the job done?”* This sentiment

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was echoed by several other participants. It was also pointed out that *“the collective agreement is intended to provide this nice rule book... but the people who write it cannot think of everything that can possibly come up...”* This fact can create a grey area that leads to tension between the two groups.

Finally the issue of organizational and union culture was addressed by 6/16 participants. Several people identified that while there is a perpetuating culture of mistrust between unions and management, it really needs to be a culture of openness instead. The difficulty is *“...If you have always done things one way... it can be difficult to move on and try new methods.”* Another individual pointed out that the relationship can become like a game, and *“you can get caught up in winning, and forget that you are actually dealing with people’s lives.”* The deeply entrenched adversarial culture between unions and management is a challenge that many organizations must continue to work to overcome.

5.4 Performance Management

Performance management relates to improving an employee’s performance, be it through reviews, development plans, coaching etc. The open-ended interview questions asked interviewees about what they considered to be best practices when working to develop and evaluate employees.

Table 4

Inductively Developed Themes: Performance Management

Thematic Category	Summary of Interview Data
5.4.1: Trusting Conversations and Relationships 13/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Performance management is about the relationship between supervisor and employee and at the centre of that relationship is conversations.” • Performance is best managed through <u>regular</u> check-ins. • Transparency and clear expectations are important; employees need to know what is expected and what is measured. • Engage in a 360 degree process.
5.4.1.1: Coaching Approach 7/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching conversations lead to higher engagement, productivity, retention, and career development. • Just-in-time conversations provide on the spot coaching.
5.4.1.2: Documentation 3/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and track performance to allow the employer to assist in helping employees meet their potential.
5.4.2: Setting Clear, Measureable Goals, and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use performance management to guide employees and help them meet their goals; write goals down, talk about how they can meet them and determine what success will look like.

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| Follow-Up
10/16 responses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be consistent and clear in performance evaluations and reviews. • Refresh and remind people of their goals. • Employees need to be involved in making their own goals. • Link individual employee goals to the goals of the organization. • Use different sources for assessment – supervisors, mentors, clients, stakeholders, etc. • Provide letters of expectations so staff are clear about goals. • Performance development plans (PDPs) provide opportunity to write down goals and follow-up (when used appropriately). |
| 5.4.3: Use Performance Management Strategically
9/16 responses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementation of a performance management plan cannot be random. There is no “cookie cutter” approach so the appropriate approach must be thoughtfully developed. • Performance reviews must begin in a proactive manner; they used to only be done with problem employees, but now reviews are seen as a proactive tool for development. • Use letters of expectation strategically as a reminder of what is expected and as a way to correct inappropriate behaviour. • Use a performance management system to remind managers to document conversations within a given time frame. • Be objective when possible in rating an employee’s performance as it is important when performance reviews are used in determining promotions. • When implementing new or changing old performance systems try using “baby steps” while gaining buy-in. • Use technology where possible – e-performance systems help keep track of performance reviews. |
| 5.4.4: Other Points of Interest | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders need to have the tools and training to conduct appropriate performance reviews and to help employees overcome any resistance to the process (8/16). |

5.4.1 Trusting conversations and relationships. *13/16 interviewees believe that trusting conversations and relationships are an important aspect of performance management.*

The majority of interviewees stated that performance is best managed through a transparent process of regular check-ins and conversations. *“Performance management is about the relationship between supervisor and employee, and at the centre of that relationship is conversations.”* The concept of “coaching” is also popular with 7/16 interviewees stating that it was considered best practice to hold these quick educational and developmental conversations. It was also noted that in addition to these conversations it is important for documentation to occur in follow-up. 3/16 participants noted that

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documenting and tracking performance helps in holding both employer and employee accountable and assists in ensuring employees meet their potential.

5.4.2 Setting clear, measurable goals, and follow-up. *10/16 participants indicated that setting clear, measurable goals with consistent follow-up is a best practice in performance management.*

The majority of interviewees indicated that performance management should be used to *“guide employees and help them meet their goals...they should write goals down, talk about how they can meet them and determine what success will look like.”* Evaluations should be clear, and should be used as an opportunity to remind people of their goals. It was also indicated that best practice involves *“linking individual employee goals to the goals of the organization”* as this allows both employee and employer to grow together. Finally, it was stated that performance management does not have to come strictly from managers, but rather can be an inclusive process that involves supervisors, mentors, clients, and stakeholders. Receiving feedback from multiple sources can give an employee additional perspective.

5.4.3 Use Performance management strategically. *9/16 participants believe that performance management should be used strategically.*

The majority of participants agreed that performance management should be done proactively and with all employees. It was noted that in the past it was primarily a tool used for *“problem”* employees, but moving forward best practice would indicate that *“performance reviews must begin in a proactive manner... they are a tool for development.”* It was added that performance management plans cannot be *“cookie cutter”* but have to be thoughtfully developed. Several participants stated that technology is useful in performance management, as it helps keep track of reviews and records of past performance. This allows for a more strategic approach to performance management moving forward and lets data be collected for determining employee performance across the organization.

5.4.4 Other points of interest. A final theme that arose from the performance management section was the need for leaders to be provided with *“the tools and training to conduct appropriate performance reviews and to help employees overcome any resistance to the process”* (8/16). Leaders and managers need to have the skills to conduct useful performance reviews and as such they need to be trained on what it means to be *“good”* at this process. Participants noted that it is best practice to ensure leaders are equipped to give beneficial performance reviews.

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5.4.5 Challenges. Organizational culture and resistance to feedback, issues with management, and time were all noted as challenges organizations face when attempting to implement performance management best practices.

The culture of an organization is difficult to change, and if it is a culture that does not want to embrace performance management it is going to be difficult for management to bring in the process (12/16). *“People don’t like change... there might be a new review system in place, but unless they are forced to use it, supervisors simply won’t... it is really hard to sit down with your employees if you haven’t had these conversations in years, if ever!”* Additionally, people are typically conflict adverse, and like to avoid problems. *“People become fearful... if they hear that someone else had a bad review they think theirs will be the same... people still see performance reviews as disciplinary... and are uncomfortable giving and receiving feedback.”* It was additionally noted that there are many “old school” managers and supervisors who prefer discipline over coaching, and this indicated a challenge, as you need *“buy in from all the players and if you don’t get it, it can be very difficult.”*

Related to issues of culture are issues with management. *“In some cases people may be scared to ask for help, or to be honest in their struggles.”* If the environment is not perceived as safe, people will have trouble listening to their supervisor and participating in creating a performance plan. Additionally, there may be situations where managers are not comfortable disciplining their employees, and they may be *“afraid, conflict adverse, and/or lacking confidence.”* Some managers are fearful to be perceived as unfair, and some *“don’t want to scare the rest of the staff...and find it difficult to dismiss people whose performance is lacking.”* Many of these difficulties come from a lack of training and awareness about performance management.

A final theme that emerged as a challenge is time. *“People run out of time... it is impossible to have a 30 minute coaching session with 50 employees every week... there physically isn’t enough time.”* Several participants noted performance management and performance reviews are a good theory, but the process is often too “chunky” and *“people aren’t doing it because they become confused by the level of required documentation.”* The interviewees stated that the process is too timely, and often managers do not see the benefit of putting in the effort.

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5.5 Motivation and Incentives

Motivation and incentive practices encourage employees to best complete their jobs through the use of both intrinsic and extrinsic means. The participants were asked open-ended questions about what they believe to be best practices in motivating employees.

Table 5

Inductively Developed Themes: Motivation and Incentives

Thematic Category	Summary of Interview Data
5.5.1: Making Progress Towards Meaningful Goals 9/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure employees know their opinions matter and show them how their work contributes in a meaningful way. • Make certain effort is not wasted because of duplication. • Provide staff opportunities to develop their areas of interest
5.5.1.1: Provide opportunity for engagement 4/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The best incentive is to keep people engaged, challenged and interested in what they are doing. • Co-create goals that lead to meaningful work and allow people to see how that work connects to the big picture.
5.5.2: Upward Mobility, Promotion, and Professional Development 9/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use courses, conferences, stretch assignments etc. as a way to reward and motivate employees. • Participation in employee to employee mentorship program helps develop skills and helps future generations of employees. • Support staff in applying for new positions or temporary roles • Training helps develop skills which can lead to promotion.
5.5.3: Benefits, Vacation, and Paycheques 7/16 responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People will be motivated to stay with an organization if their benefits and pay increase with organizational seniority. • Wages must increase at least with cost of living, or else employees will look elsewhere for opportunities. • Provide staff with the opportunity for flexible work schedules. • Offer desirable health care benefits and pension plans.
5.5.4: Other Points of Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give people a purpose and the room to accomplish goals – management’s job is to create a comfortable environment in which employees can do their work successfully (6/16). • Public sector employees see value in serving the citizens in their communities, therefore it is important to nurture that desire to have an impact on society (3/16). • Recognition through celebration, signs of appreciation, and positive feedback helps motivate employees (6/16). • Successful teams drive motivation; when teams are not working it is important to address the issues quickly (4/16).

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5.5.1 Making progress towards meaningful goals. *9/16 participants stated that making progress towards meaningful goals is important for motivation.*

According to the interviewees, it is important to *“ensure employees know their opinions matter and to show them how their work contributes in a meaningful way.”* Knowing this means that it is a best practice to understand what areas employees are interested in, and provide opportunities to grow in those areas. A sub-theme that emerged in this area is the need to provide employees with the opportunity for engagement (4/16). *“The best incentive is to keep people engaged, challenged, and interested in what they are doing.”* This can be done by co-creating goals that lead to meaningful work.

5.5.2 Upward mobility, promotion, and professional development. *9/16 interviewees indicated that upward mobility and professional development are important motivators.*

The practitioners stated that it was best practice to develop employees and provide them with educational opportunities to encourage motivation. *“Training gives people the opportunity to develop skills which can lead to promotion.”* Employers should support staff in applying for new positions or temporary assignments, as such opportunities help employees grow and sustain organizational loyalty.

5.5.3 Benefits, vacation, and paycheques. *7/16 interviewees specifically mentioned benefits and paycheques as being motivating for employees.*

Several participants state that *“wages must increase at least with the cost of living,”* or else employees will look elsewhere for opportunities. Additionally, employees will be motivated to stay with their organization if they are offered benefits such as flexible work schedules, telework, and desirable health benefits. Competitive wages are important, as *“people will be motivated within an organization if their benefits and pay increase with organizational seniority.”*

5.5.4 Other points of interest. Purpose was mentioned as an important aspect of a motivating job (6/16). Participants stated that people need to be comfortable in their environment which allows them to work more successfully. Similarly, being recognized in specific ways (celebration, signs of appreciation, and positive feedback) were noted as important motivators (6/16). Teamwork and success in teams also motivates people to stay with an organization and complete their work to the best of their ability (4/16). When people know that their work impacts their teammates, and they care about their team, they are more inclined to produce excellent work. It is important for managers to take note of when teams are not working, and they must address these situations in a timely manner.

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A final factor that was brought up in 3/16 interviews was the idea of the intrinsic motivation that employees in the public service feel when they *“see value in serving the citizens in their communities.”* When people are motivated in this way it is important to help them continue to see how their work impacts society’s greater good.

5.5.5 Challenges. Several challenges to motivation were brought up in the interviews, including feeling “lost” in the organization, a lack of resources, and the organization’s culture.

Several participants noted that in large organizations it can feel as though the work being completed is *“not making a difference or impacting anyone”* (4/16). This can make it challenging for management to motivate employees. Similarly, an organization’s culture can dictate whether or not an employee feels motivated (5/16). *“Some supervisors don’t see it as their jobs to motivate employees, and some employees don’t want to be motivated.”* One participant indicated that *“it does take a lot of commitment from management to work at what is going to motivate people, and this can be difficult.”*

Finally, the most frequently cited challenge is the lack of resources. Many of the participants stated they would like to see all their staff receive pay raises and they would like to send everybody on courses, but the resources are not available to do this. *“There isn’t a lot you can do in times of fiscal restraint – you can’t give them time off and you can’t give them more money...we are lacking the ability to compensate for work well done.”*

5.6 Strategic Human Resource Management

A final concept that emerged throughout the interviews was one that ties into the evolution of the HR field: the practice of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM). Four of the 16 interviewees made specific references about how their responsibility as an HR practitioner was to look at the organization and *“try to predict what is going to be needed for human resources in the future.”* This means not only ensuring that the organization is appropriately staffed, but also looking to make sure that the people in place have the right skills to complete a given job. It was indicated that this responsibility is a challenge, because an organization needs access to well-trained, effective employees, but there is also a continuous need to condense and “lean.” The interviewees indicated that this is an integral reason why HRM needs to be a part of the strategic plan – HR leadership must understand overall organizational goals, and they also need to inform other leaders of what is feasible given employee status at any given time. *“We need to act strategically – especially when looking at succession*

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planning and leadership development.” The practitioners indicated that in order to appropriately complete these specific functions they must have an understanding of the organization as a whole – what direction are we going, are we staffed appropriately, what is our budget, and can we develop from within or do we need to hire externally? It was also pointed out that there can be situations where the senior HR leadership becomes *too distant* from the frontline HR staff – “[they] get too busy and don’t have a chance to stay current as to what is going on.” What was noted as being important, and as best practice for organizations wishing to implement SHRM, is that information in these settings needs to flow both ways. Senior HR leadership must be a part of the overall organizational strategy in order to ensure the HR function is integrated into all other functions; however, they must also maintain a local level presence and listen to their frontline HR staff as these individuals will provide the feedback about personnel morale, training and development requirements, and overall capacity to execute the organizational strategy.

5.7 Visual Summary of Research Findings

Expanded Conceptual Framework for Understanding Practitioner Perception of HR Best Practices

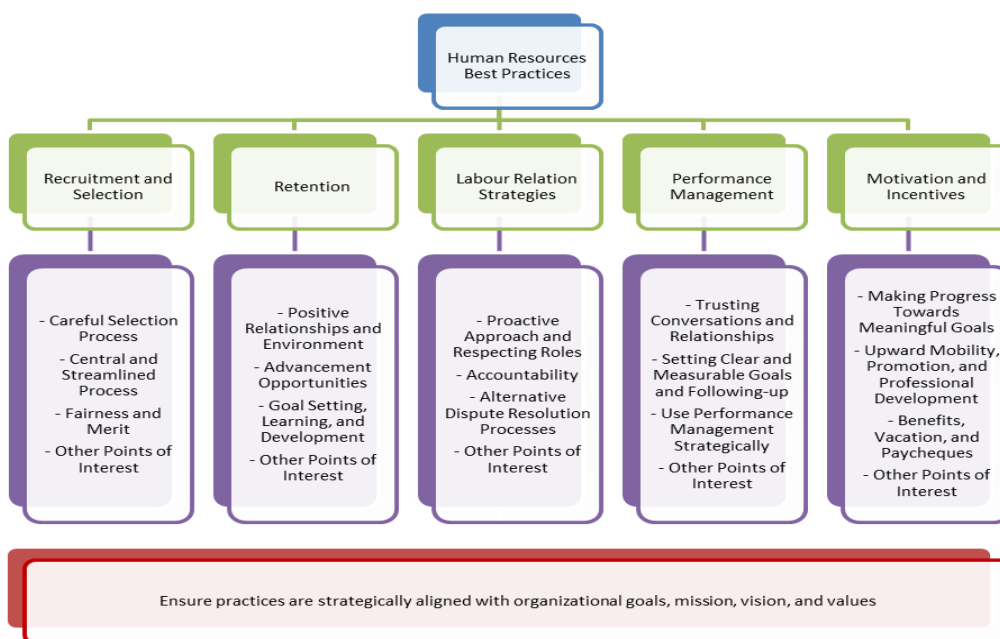


Figure 2. Expanded conceptual framework for understanding practitioner perception of HR best practices. This figure illustrates the themes that emerged via the public sector practitioner interviews in relation to the five pillars that were developed earlier for this paper’s conceptual framework. The developed practitioner-specific themes have enhanced the boxes that originally held Jeffrey Pfeffer’s research (purple), but the overarching pillars remain the same (green).

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5.8 Practitioner Research Findings

Questions around research and education were asked in an effort to understand how practitioners educate themselves on the policies, procedures, and practices being engaged in their field. The following is a summary of the responses.

Table 6*Practitioner Research Findings*

Question for Interviewees	Interviewee Response
How often do you read academic journals/articles/conference reports etc. related to your work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average response 8.4 hours per month. • Highest response was 40+ hours per month. • Lowest response 0 hours per month. • Removing outliers, 6.2 hours per month.
When you do read HR related literature what resources are you looking to? (Only 13 interviewees responded to this question).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference Board Reports (4/13). • Brown and Beatty (or Canadian Labour Arbitration) or CANLII (3/13). • HRMA Conference Reports (5/13). • HR People Talk (2/13). • Academic journals (1/13).
What percentage of your implemented HR policies and procedures do you feel are based on academic research and best practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average response was 30% of practices are based on written research and 70% are based on what other organizations or departments are doing. • Three individuals stated they look first to the collective agreement for policy choices.
Where else do you look for information pertaining to your job? (Only 13 interviewees responded to this question).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleagues/mentors (6/13). • Personal Experience (6/13). • Other organization's success (8/13).

As indicated in the table above, the interviewees were asked questions regarding where they look for information and how they go about making choices around changes in practice and policy. The results varied, however the general consensus was that while practitioners may look to academic literature on occasion it is more likely that if they do look to written work it will be primarily practitioner-based resources such as Conference Board and HRMA Reports (5/13 who responded). Some (3/13) tend towards more legal and precedent-based approaches to conflict resolution such as

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Brown and Beatty or the organization's collective agreement(s). These legal options ensure that organizations are law-abiding and they decrease the likelihood of organizational grievances; however, they do not necessarily increase morale or promote best practice. The practitioners had a tendency to agree that personal experience or relations were the leading source of consult in making HR related decisions (6/13). This might come in the form of personal experience or discussions with a mentor or a colleague, but the findings were that when discussing problems or initiatives practitioners tend to turn to experience for answers. Finally most of those who responded (8/13) stated that they will regularly look to what other organizations, both in the private and public sector, do to make their HR practices successful. They will look for these examples of success by engaging consultants, searching the internet, or looking to lists such as "Canada's Top Employers."

Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 The Research Practice Gap

According to Rynes et al. (2002) most organizations do not purposely employ researched HR best practices because practitioners do not see the research as relevant to their work. They see the literature as being too technical and find it discouraging to keep up with the findings. This paper set out to determine whether or not the research is still being disseminated amongst practitioners, despite this apparent lack of cohesion between the two worlds.

Rousseau (2006) further indicates that management in any given organization (public sector or otherwise) does not readily read academic literature with only one per cent reading on a regular basis. This percentage was reaffirmed in this study, with only one out of 16 interviewees claiming to read academic work on a regular basis, and the rest indicating that they read information from sources such as Conference Board reports, HR People Talk and other Human Resource Management Association (HRMA) materials. Additionally, many interviewees indicated that they read information related to HR best practices only on a semi-regular basis, with the average spending approximately 6 hours in a month engaging this material. There were several explanations for this including not having time, not having it be relevant, and an indication that the information is overly academic.

There is an established mindset amongst many practitioners that (HR) management is an “art” and therefore once in the field experience trumps academic practices – these beliefs can decrease motivation to keep oneself updated on research (Rousseau, 2006). Additionally practitioners do not work in isolation, and often there are multiple stakeholder opinions about what practices need to be implemented. These opinions compounded with the conviction that management is an art means that often decisions are made based on a combination of external factors (stakeholder opinion, mentors advice, past experience, organizational limitations, budgets etc.) and academic research is not necessarily considered.

Finally, management and HR practitioners are not *required* to belong to any type of licenced organization the way many other professionals are (Rynes, Giluk, & Brown, 2007). Engineers, doctors, nurses, lawyers etc. are required to belong to licensed bodies that regulate their actions and ensure decision making meets a certain standard – managers have no such regulating body. The existence of a regulating authority forces professionals to follow rules and regulations, and also standardizes processes

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in many areas – processes that are likely based on evidence developed through research and testing. There are many reasons why management practitioners do not necessarily go to academia directly for answers, however the argument can be made that if a regulatory body existed for managers it would likely lead increased consultation with the evidence produced by the academic community.

6.2 Discussion of Findings

Best practices were thoroughly discussed in both the literature review as well as the findings section of this report: This table compares the understandings of the respective groups.

Table 7

Comparison of Practitioner Interviews to Corresponding Academic Research

(Note: a ✓ indicates that there were similarities between academic and practitioner best practices; an X indicates that one group mentioned it as an important factor but the other group did not).

Practitioner Interview Themes	Academic Research Themes
<i>6.2.1 Recruitment and Selection</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careful selection process ✓ Central and streamlined processes ✓ Selection process method (behavioural interviews, providing feedback, reference checking, etc.) ✓ Fairness and merit ✓ No corresponding information provided X 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be specific about the desired qualities, competencies, and values ✓ Recruit continuously and create a talent pool of applicants ✓ Use of structured interviews/formal testing ✓ Hire individuals that meet the essential qualifications required for the role and assess candidates in relation to the merit criteria established ✓ Create a strong brand and organizational reputation to attract the best candidates X

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6.2.2 Retention

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive relationships and environment ✓ • Advancement opportunities ✓ • Goal setting, learning, and development ✓ • Conduct exit interviews to understand why people are leaving ✓ • No corresponding information provided X | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a high level of quality leaders that ensure open communication and a culture of commitment; create an organizational culture that celebrates success ✓ • Demonstrate with clarity what a career path will look like; Build trust through employment security ✓ • Help employees feel like their skills are being utilized while also providing them the opportunity to continue to grow ✓ • Exit interviews should be conducted to learn about improving experiences ✓ • Give employees autonomy, empowerment, and decision making authority X |
|---|---|

6.2.3 Labour Relations Strategies

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of ADR processes ✓ • Accountability ✓ • Proactive approach and respecting roles X • No corresponding information provided X | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive, employee-focussed dispute resolution techniques – specifically mediation practices ✓ • Show that the organization aims to be fair, transparent, and respectful; there should be equality in negotiations and bargaining ✓ • No corresponding information provided X • Encourage information exchange and opportunities for explanation, collaboration and cooperation X |
|--|---|

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6.2.4 Performance Management

- Trusting conversations and relationships (coaching)✓
- Open communication is a key aspect of performance management, as employees and managers must feel comfortable talking about performance issues and successes; There should be no surprises in the formal performance review, as there should be coaching and communication on an ongoing basis ✓
- Setting clear, measurable goals and follow-up ✓
- Communicate organizational objectives and vision with employees, set clear goals, conduct performance appraisals, and identify opportunities for development; Ensure employees understand how they are being evaluated ✓
- Use performance management strategically ✓
- Be consistent and transparent about organizational goals and help employees understand how they fit into the strategy ✓
- Leaders need the tools and training to best conduct performance review✓
- Managers need an appropriate level of training on conducting performance reviews, so there are reduced errors ✓

6.2.5 Incentives and Motivation

- Making progress towards meaningful goals ✓
- Employees want to see how they are contributing to the firm and want to work towards specific goals ✓
- Upward mobility, and professional development ✓
- Employment security and well-defined career ladders help employees see how they can grow within an organization ✓
- Benefits, Vacation, and Paycheques ✓
- Reward high performance via internal promotion, desirable wages, and generous benefits packages; Rewards must be fair and based on employee performance ✓

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- Public sector employees see value in serving their communities; this desire should be nurtured ✓
- No corresponding information provided X
- Public Service Motivation is the relationship between an individual's performance and their commitment to the public sector –individual's with high PSM will likely perform better in the public sector ✓
- Empower employees through autonomy and give them the opportunity to work on self-managed teams X

6.2.1 Recruitment and Selection. Practitioners understood that a centralized and streamlined selection process is important in ensuring the best candidates are brought into an organization. This aligned with the theories presented in the research, which stated that it is important to be specific in job descriptions, and also underscored that continuous recruitment creates talent pools to pull from as new positions arise. Both academics and practitioners indicated that some selection process methods (ex. structured behavioural interviews) are better for applicant selection than others. Where the two factions differed was regarding the practitioner's insistence on fairness and merit as an important aspect of selection. This concept stems from the public sector values, and while it was addressed briefly in academia it was specific only for public servants and was not identified as a best practice across all industries. Additionally, the literature stated the importance of creating a strong reputation and brand, such that candidates are attracted to the organization. This process is typically more in-line with private sector organizational marketing, therefore it is not surprising that it was not a theme brought up by the interviewees; however, it is worth their noting as ultimately all employers are fighting for the best employees across both private and public sectors.

6.2.2 Retention. The messages around retention practices were consistent between the interviews and the research – both referencing the importance of positive relationships and environments, the provision of opportunities to advance, and the use of goal setting, learning, and development to improve workplace culture. The research did delve deeper into the notion of autonomy and empowerment – however once again these values line up better with the private sector and do not account for the hierarchical layers of oversight typically present in a public sector organization. That being said, it is an area where public sector HR managers might look to private organizations for ways to further improve practices. The other point that was brought up more in the research than the interviews was the concept of exit interviews. Only three interviewees mentioned exit interviews, and

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one mentioned it only in explaining that their organization did not use them. This practice was exclaimed in the literature as a means to continually improve organizational effectiveness.

6.2.3 Labour Relations. There were few differences between what practitioners and academics stated as best practice in the area of Labour Relations. There was a consensus that proactive approaches and respect were key factors in maintaining a positive relationship between management and unions. Accountability was also stated as an important aspect of the relationship, meaning that each party should be able to hold the other accountable to ensuring actions are fair, transparent, and equitable. The literature indicates that there should be fair negotiating and bargaining practices engaged at all times, and the practitioners echoed this sentiment. Both indicated that when it comes to grievance proceedings and engaging in conflict resolution the goal for all involved should be to avoid escalation and litigation when possible and use employee-centric alternative dispute resolution techniques. The literature did take the concept of proactivity and accountability one step further indicating that there should be more information exchange and collaboration between union and management. The interviewees did reference that this would be a reasonable practice in theory, but most gave reasons as to why it would not work if implemented long-term – saying, *“you can’t give away the farm”* and *“in some cases management needs to be able to just make the decisions that meet both the employees’ and the organization’s needs.”*

6.2.4 Performance Management. In the area of performance management the general consensus amongst both academics and practitioners is that the process needs to be proactive and positive. The conversations have to be trusting, authentic, and aimed at development. The term used most often by practitioners was “coaching,” which implies a sense of learning and growth. There was also an agreement that performance management should be ongoing and conducted in “real time” in addition to being formalized with an annual or semi-annual review. Goals should be clear and measurable and there needs to be ongoing discussion as to how one’s job is structured to meet the specific goals. Additionally, all parties agree that goals should be strategic and help the organization meet its overarching vision and mandate. A final practice that appeared regularly in the literature that the practitioner’s also agreed with is the concept of management training. Both indicated that managers must be adequately trained on how to conduct performance reviews, as an inappropriately conducted review can lead to issues such as leniency errors (where managers are not strict enough in their evaluation).

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Based on interviewee responses, it appears as though the formal performance management as it is implemented today is a new approach for much of the public sector. In the past, for the majority of the people interviewed, performance management measures were only implemented in a disciplinary way. With this knowledge it appears as though the practitioners are working to be in a place where they understand the importance of appropriately training managers in conducting reviews, although the current focus is on solidifying their organization's approach to the performance management process.

6.2.5 Motivation and Incentives. The top three themes identified by practitioners as best practice in motivation – making progress towards meaningful goals, professional development, and generous benefits and pay – were all also identified in literature as important practices. Employees want to see how they contribute to their organization and they want a well-defined career ladder that allows for growth. Vacation time and generous pay were identified as important factors; however, the interviewees indicated that budgetary restrictions posed a barrier in this area. With this in mind, it is important to reiterate that while competitive wages are important, if an organization is depending on pay as its only advantage it will likely not be enough to keep the best employees, especially if another organization can “outbid” them (Hiltrop, 1999). For this reason, when looking at motivation, public sector practitioners should emphasize the ability to offer benefits that a private sector employers may not – such as increased job security, defined career paths, and generous health care benefits.

Two additional points that the literature review addressed that were not a focus in the interviews were the concepts of autonomy and public service motivation. According to the research empowering employees by giving them decision making authority both demonstrates trust, and also creates a more efficient organization as management can focus energy elsewhere and not micromanage. As was mentioned previously in the 6.2.2 *Retention* section, this may be more of a private sector perspective as it does not account for the organizational structure that most public sector organizations have. The concept is a worthwhile consideration, however, for public sector organizations looking to modernize via new best practices. The other motivator that is regularly cited in literature on the public sector, but was only briefly mentioned in interviews was the concept of public service motivation (PSM). PSM is the relationship that exists between an individual's performance and their commitment to a public service organization. The theory indicates that many public servants are motivated by the idea of giving back to the citizens that they serve, and this level of motivation cannot come from any other extrinsic means (Kernaghan, 2011). While PSM cannot be given or “awarded” the

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same way that a paycheque or benefit package can it is worth noting as the concept can still be used for motivation. Demonstrating to employees how the work they are doing is improving lives in the communities being served is a way of motivating those individuals who have a high sense of PSM.

6.3 Interviewee Perspective

After speaking with the interviewees around their perceptions of best practices and their ability to implement them in their roles it became obvious that budgetary restrictions are at the forefront of many of these individual's minds. There was much discussion that showed practitioners knew what best practices were but when dialogue around implementation occurred the responses were often negative:

"We would love to send more people on courses, but that would leave the office understaffed"

"Sending people to conferences costs too much, we wish we could provide everyone with the opportunity to attend educational seminars but it is not an option."

"We can't compete with the wages and bonuses that are offered by the private sector, so we lose a lot of employees, especially the young ones, to those jobs."

"It is a real frustration not having the resources for conferences and training... people don't get that jazzed up over webinars."

There were rarely any suggestions on how to improve practice to overcome budgetary restrictions, and the problem seemed to provide a "full stop" for the interviewees when it came to practices that they thought would be costly. Another source of doubt in practitioner responses around implementing new policies or procedures was the belief that their institutions were "too big" to change.

"The nature of the organization is that it is quite diverse in many ways... all structured differently and all at different stages of being able to accept or take on new projects."

"[There are]...over 27 thousand employees and some areas are just better aligned for best practices than others..."

The findings typically showed that many of the practitioners were able to identify best practices and made note that potential changes could be made in their *specific* operations but there was hesitation around whether or not it could occur across the organization. This was particularly true when looking at performance management and performance reviews. Most practitioners appreciated the

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concept of proactive performance management, coaching, and real time feedback to employees, but 12/16 interviewees stated that it would be very difficult to implement consistently across their institutions. A fear of organizational siloes was evident, with individuals indicating that their own departments were working at improving performance management, but there was a hesitation to speak to the organization's progress as a whole. This identifies an issue around practice implementation in large bureaucratic organizations – a pointed effort must be made at the most senior level to push any major policy changes. As one interviewee indicated, *“When you try to make a shift in this culture it pretty much takes a burning platform.”* If a “silo” feels they are the only ones making a change they might be less inclined to continue with the level of effort required.

This same concern surfaced with regards to dispute resolution techniques and the idea of implementing interest-based conflict resolution models. If an organization is adamant that they have “always done” one thing then it will be difficult to make a major change without the full support of senior leadership. This can be a challenge in the public sector – specifically in the public service where elected senior leadership can and often does change with elections cycles. Notably, however, in this specific situation there seemed to be buy-in from the majority interviewees regarding the importance of interest-based conflict resolution (many referencing the support the process had from their various senior leaders), which indicates that while change may be challenging, it is not impossible.

Many of the concerns brought forward by the practitioners point in a direction that encourages the further development of SHRM. This is particularly true when looking at both the issues of siloes and the requirement of top-down support. As previously mentioned, SHRM is systematically interconnected to the strategic requirements of an organization, and aims to both help meet organizational need while meeting the needs of the employees (Schwind et al., 2013). If these organizations commit to a strategic approach to HRM it would mean increase support from the top in implementing organizational HR practices, as any implemented initiative would receive endorsement from most, if not all, departmental executives. HR directors would be involved in shaping the corporate strategy, and thus would be able to connect with other departments to share ideas, discuss implementation, and move forward in a strategic manner. It allows organizations to better clarify the direction they are going and the required resources, training, budget, and support required in getting there. SHRM means that when overarching initiatives are discussed there is somebody at the top who can clarify the necessary staffing levels and supports required in having those initiatives be successful. It means that the people who know the most

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about HR best practices are able to inform the other departments about those best practices and help line managers learn how to appropriately support their staff. SHRM also helps break down siloes as the intention is to implement HR practices in a way that helps the institutions meet their cross-departmental strategic objectives. Any implemented practices are not only supported by HR, but are deemed by all departments to be requisite in reaching success.

6.4 The Future of Academic Research

A notable observation that was made throughout this research is that despite indicating that they do not often look to literature for answers, practitioners do conduct research before making decisions. Typically organizations will look to other similar industries or colleagues in similar roles to determine the viability of a practice. This information leads to educated decisions based on other organization's outcomes. This then begs the question, "Does the literature matter?" If "no one" is looking at it but rather practitioners look to each other for answers, then are the articles written in academic communities worth the time it takes to write them? After completing this report, the answer would be yes, it is still worthwhile.

The reason it is important that academics continue to conduct and publish their research is because there *are* still individuals who look to the information. If public sector organizations look to consulting groups to help in problem solving, then these professionals may rely on the academic articles to help direct their own work. Additionally there are some practitioners who read academic literature and will bring that knowledge to their workplace. If the interviews conducted in this paper provide an indicator of the level academia that is brought into practice then on average 6.25% of managers will participate. If the other 93.75% looks to the 6.25% for advice, then the academic research is still being disseminated. Further, even if the managers did not identify academic sources as the primary point for their personal reading, many identified secondary sources or practitioner-focussed publications such as Conference Board Reports and published works from HRMA like People Talk. The articles in these reports will still pull from academia, so practitioners still receive the information – despite not reading the original articles.

Finally, as indicated by the diagram in Appendix A, academics are also responsible for collaborating information across organizations, industry, and sectors. They look at *all areas* for information to create and back up their theories; therefore their research is collective and well-rounded. The intention is that academics study and summarize their observations around best practices and

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publish to ultimately provide practitioners and consultants with the most comprehensive information available – should they choose to use it.

6.5 Evidence Based Management and the Research Practice Gap

Evidence based management (EBM) was previously discussed in Section 2.8, and it is a theory that indicates that it is possible to develop a deeper relationship between academics and practitioners. This field aims to educate managing practitioners on the importance of research, and it also aims to encourage more evidence-based decision making. There is a general hesitation to implement wide-scale change without a “*burning platform*” and reassurance that the change will work based on experience. Often case study experiences are used as proof when attempting to sway stakeholders on the decision to implement new policies. What EBM allows for is management to still bring “proof” to the table, but that evidence comes from academic studies. Tax payers, public watch dogs, and public service employees are just a few examples of individuals who want reassurance that any new practice will succeed, and using EBM as a guiding principle can help in developing stakeholder confidence.

One option for bridging academia into practice is the creation of a long-term collaboration between any party that can contribute to organizational decision making, including practitioners, academics, and consultants. Such a collaborative would bring skilled people together to drive best practice. A joint partnership would help in identifying important questions in practice and find ways to apply evidence in real world problem-solving (Rousseau, 2007). The most difficult step is finding the best way to disseminate the research so that it becomes accessible to practicing users – which could be where consultants help bridge the divide. It is a well-known fact that the most helpful information is high quality information that appears at exactly the time that it will be most useful (Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007). With this in mind, the creation of such partnerships is a step towards giving practitioners useful information “on call” with the goal being to have the research intuitively organized and easily accessible. Similar to that of the Cochrane Collaboration⁴, managers, and more specifically Human Resource managers, require a central source where they can look for answers as needed. Additionally, through ongoing consult between stakeholders the collaboration would have continual updates that ensure it is presenting the most current best practices. Practices change and evolve, and

⁴ Cochrane is a global independent network of researchers, professionals, patients, carers and people interested in health. The information gathered in this collaboration can then be applied in health care decision making (The Cochrane Collaboration, 2015).

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the benefit of an EBM system and a central collaboration is that these changes can be documented. This active learning technique involves being mindful and aware of what real-world conditions are changing that could affect the practices being held up as “best” (Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007). Rousseau (2007) indicates that she believes science can compete with consultants but this paper would argue that there is no need to compete, but rather all parties need to be informed contributors to the common set of best practices.

The argument may be made that the point of best practices is to ensure an organization has the “edge” over the competition – so why would you share the information in a broad manner? While this argument may hold weight, in the public sector the point is not necessarily to beat out competition, but rather to ensure the best environment is provided for employees so that the best service is given to the citizens. Additionally, sharing organizational knowledge and being recognized as a leader in best practices can be a source of pride for many organizations and may be used as its own sort of recruitment technique.

There are challenges that would come with an EBM system, including finding ways to educate practitioners on its benefits and deterring decision-making based on intuition alone. Many individuals avoid EBM because it creates accountability and requires evidence to back up decisions – which in turn takes time to research (Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007). Without a shared knowledge base, licensing body, or peers to influence the use of EBM there also remains a challenge in implementation. Knowing this, the initiation will likely have to come from an academic push whereby researchers approach practitioners with the concept and an outline of how a collaboration would work to benefit all involved. Researchers and consultants likely already understand the benefit of creating such a collaborative as it would provide them with greater access to the research subjects and clients; therefore, the next important step is receiving buy-in from practitioners. This means communicating the long term benefits that a central collaboration would provide in the form of assisting in answering organizational problems via academically researched solutions. The buy-in, education, and bridge-building needed between academia and practice can and should be done in various ways including the use of both hard copy and online media, sabbaticals, joint projects, government commissions, research councils and connections via consultant groups (Guest, 2007). The ultimate goal being the creation of a community that encourages ongoing discussions, provides opportunities to research new practices, elucidates new business strategies, and inspires a problem-solving mindset that improves HR practices across the public

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sector. Evidence does indicate that companies who have HR professionals that read academic research demonstrate improved fiscal performance over those who do not (Terpstra and Rozell in Rynes et al., 2002); therefore, it is in an organization's best interest to develop an easy to access collaboration of researched best practices.

A final question to ask after reading about HR best practices, EBM, and the gap between practice and research might be, "What does this mean for HR departments?" The HR department, as discussed in the opening of this paper, is responsible for overseeing and supporting a company's human capital. Because of how important human capital is to an organization's operations, and understanding the various pillars that the HR function is responsible for, an argument for SHRM and an integrated human resource function can be made. HR managers and directors need to be updated on best practices (from both literature and practice) and they must understand how to best make decisions through engaging this knowledge. They must also be privy to a company's overall directive, because the HR department is responsible for helping departmental managers understand how their roles, responsibilities, and staff fit into organizational goals.

HR departments are also responsible in many cases for "leading by example." As many of the practitioners said throughout the interviews, "*My department does this well, but that's because we have to... we have to set the standard for everyone to look to.*" Most HR employees know what best practices are and try to implement them in their roles; however, the difficulty lies in penetrating other departments with said practices. The ability for HR departments to influence the rest of an organization can often be the reason why new initiatives fail or flourish – if the HR team is not able to communicate the importance of a new practice to the highest organizational level as well as to the front line employees then the implementation is more likely to be unsuccessful (Rothman, 2015). By having a thorough understanding of best practices the HR department can be better prepared to move forward when they are recommending a given change.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice

7.1 Conclusion

Human resource offices are important centres for creating, developing, and implementing practices that impact an organization's human capital. If a company champions the notion that their "people are their most important assets" then it is critical that the HR department ensure that practices are in place to back up this statement. This paper reaffirmed that one way an organization can ensure they are meeting the needs of their staff is through implementing HR best practices. Best practices can be identified either by reviewing other organization's successes or by examining the literature after academics have conducted research relating to the topics in question.

The overarching research question that this paper looked to answer was, "Are practitioners in the public sector engaging in what academics espouse as being best practice?" The results have indicated that the answer is "when possible." In the discussion section 23 themes emerged between the five pillars, and these were compared between the literature and practice. This analysis found that there were only five cases where the two sources did not agree. An important caveat is that the practitioners seemed to *know* all the same theories that academics discussed, but there was difficulty in implementation. There were multiple incidences where interviewees indicated that they understood what best practice was, but gave examples of why it could not be implemented in their organization. An important outcome of this might be the re-emphasis that best practices are not intended to be "one size fits all" but rather require both discussion and adaptation to ensure they meet the needs and restrictions of an organization.

The second research question investigated by this paper was, "Where do practitioners look to answer questions regarding understanding and implementing best practices?" The overwhelming response to this question was "colleagues," "other organizations," or "consultants." Of the 16 interviews conducted only one individual was enthusiastic about academic articles, while the majority referenced "experience" as their primary source of information. These results are not particularly surprising however it is interesting to note that despite not regularly referencing the literature the information from academia is still appearing in practice. This could be because of consultants, practitioner-based publications, or it could be that the "1 of 16" practitioners who read the literature is able to transfer the information to their colleagues in an effective manner.

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This leads to the third and final question: “Is there a gap in the transfer of knowledge from academia into public sector human resource practice?” The gap does not appear to be in the *transfer of the knowledge*, but rather in the *implementation of theory*. Most practitioners were able to reiterate, to some extent, the same best practices as academics espouse – the issue is in putting that knowledge to practice. It could be that practitioners are not appropriately adapting the best practice as their organization requires, or it could be that researchers have missed critical variables in their theories. For this reason, the idea of evidence based management and an academic-practitioner collaborative continues to be a worthwhile concept to consider. If academics are better able to interact with public sector practitioners and consultants they can better develop theories that are relevant to practice. It also provides practitioners with the opportunity to engage their critical thinking skills as they take information from research and determine what adjustments need to be made in putting theory to use.

7.2 Recommendations for Practice

The literature and interviews revealed several opportunities for increasing the understanding and use of best practices in the public sector. The following recommendations are made based on the comparison of practitioner interview data with researched academic literature on best practices. The information can and should be considered by both HR managers as well as consultants who work with public sector HR employees.

Recommendation One. Management staff generally, and HR managers specifically, need the opportunity to understand best practices and how they can be engaged in an organizational setting. It is the norm for difficulties to arise with implementation, therefore it is important that management thoroughly understand that these initiatives are not meant to be “one size fits all.” When working to implement a change it is important that managers understand their organization’s vision, mission, values, and culture, and are able to communicate this information effectively. These tools will guide decision making and help the organization (and consulting team if applicable) understand where failures may occur. If changes can relate back to the overarching organizational mandate they are more likely to succeed. It is important that managers use their critical thinking skills as well as their historical understanding of their organization to help guide practice implementation.

Recommendation Two. When beginning the process of implementing best practices, find ways to access the most senior decision makers and engage them in discussions. It was found in many cases that resistance to implementation came from not having the direction come from the top – or similarly,

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if implementation was successful it was credited as having the backing of senior management.

Understanding where decision making authority lies, and having the knowledge that no changes will be made unless there is “top down” support helps in directing any change in process.

Recommendation Three. The initiation of a collaborative between public sector management, academics, and consulting professionals should be a considered and, if feasible, initiated. Researchers can provide information to the collaborative, consultants can help form the data into understandable reports, and practitioners can use the information in the field. Additionally, practitioners can help guide the research so that it is more focussed and practically relevant. Through this process researchers can better understand the broader industry needs, and consultants and practitioners can work together to scope out organization specific issues. The ultimate result is the implementation of practices based on accessible research and informed decision making. This process helps improve organizational legitimacy as decisions are made based on “systematic, causal knowledge” (Rousseau, 2006, 261).

Recommendation Four. In any interaction with practitioners, information must be easy to read, concise, and accessible. The majority of interviewees indicated that a lack of time inhibits their ability to research and implement many best practices. For this reason, strategies and recommendations for practice as a whole must be communicated succinctly. Managers tend to be prone to “management gurus” over academic papers because the style in which the information is presented is more appealing – if academic writing was more accessible, it would likely be implemented more often (Guest, 2007).

Recommendation Five. It is recommended that when successes occur in relation to an organizational change in practice they be celebrated – especially in bureaucratic organizations where changes typically occur at a slower pace. In these interviews there were discussions around movement to central hiring centres, implementation of performance management plans, and a move from rights-based to interest-based dispute resolution strategies. These examples demonstrate that change and implementation of best practice strategies can be successful, and organizations need to hold them up as examples for future changes. Additionally, for the purpose of learning, if these change strategies were not flawlessly executed it is also important to make note of challenges and how they were overcome.

Recommendation Six. Human resources should be viewed as an important part of an organization’s strategy and all decisions relating to human capital should be dictated by the organization’s vision, mission, and values proposition. This means that any choices related to hiring

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practices, training and development, and performance review metrics should be driven by the organization's strategy. Human resource executives need to be involved in decision making at the top organizational level, and they need to use their expertise to help the other departments understand what will be required from an HR perspective when designing a business strategy. Human resources are intertwined in every aspect of an organization therefore having experts who know about organizational need, industry best practices, human resource capacity, and budgetary restrictions involved in decision making is essential to success. Additionally, human resource executives can both bring ideas from their own department to the conversation, and they can also learn about successes in other departments and bring those back to their area. As was previously discussed, large organizations can often feel "siloed", with the HR function being one of the few that is cross-departmental; therefore, having an executive learn about other department's practices and bring them back to their own improves the likelihood of successful best practices being implemented across the board.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Several questions arose while researching this paper that would be worth further investigation. The following is a list of recommendations for future research.

Question One. *Would this play out differently in the private sector?* The public sector brings with it a unique culture including fiscal restraint, public oversight, a hierarchical decision-making structure, and the overarching merit requirement. Many of these issues do not impact private sector organizations. Would private organizations be better able to implement best practices because there is a less bureaucratic structure? Does the public sector actually have an advantage in implementing best practice because there is a tendency to want to do what is "best" in order to be a leading example for citizens? Do managers in the private sector spend more, less, or equal time researching best practices?

Question Two: *How do public sector staff and employees (outside of HR) view these practices?* This paper focused on HR practitioners in the public sector. There were two union representatives interviewed as well, but they remained in the grouping of HR practitioner's as they were looking at the interest of the organization's staff. If the same questions regarding best practice were asked of employees outside the HR setting, how would the answers have changed? Would there have been as much knowledge about best practices? Would the answers be more or less pertinent to academics with regards to directing future requirements for research?

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Question Three: *Would an overarching management regulating body be a worthwhile consideration?* When discussing the implementation EBM and the requirement of evidence in decision making the discussion arose regarding the lack of a body for management oversight. Doctors, engineers, nurses, realtors, and many other professions have oversight to ensure they follow the best practices/regulations in place in their fields, but this does not exist in public sector management. Should it be that when managers reach a certain level in a public sector organization they become accountable to a specific body, or is having the Merit Commissioner, union representation, and general public scrutiny enough? Would such a body be able to regulate and question practitioner decision making? Is it important to have such a body in place if you are looking to implement a process like EBM?

Question Four: *Does the research/practice gap need to be bridged?* There might be some benefit to having a gap in the knowledge transfer from academia to practice. Academics tend to be forward thinking and more abstract in their theories, but it could be that this style of research is what ultimately moves practice forward. If practitioners told researchers what information they require, then it would limit the scope of study, and it is possible that forward progress and theory development would decline. What if by having separation between the two worlds means that researchers give practitioners something to strive for?

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Appendix A

The Development of Best Practices by Practitioners and Researchers

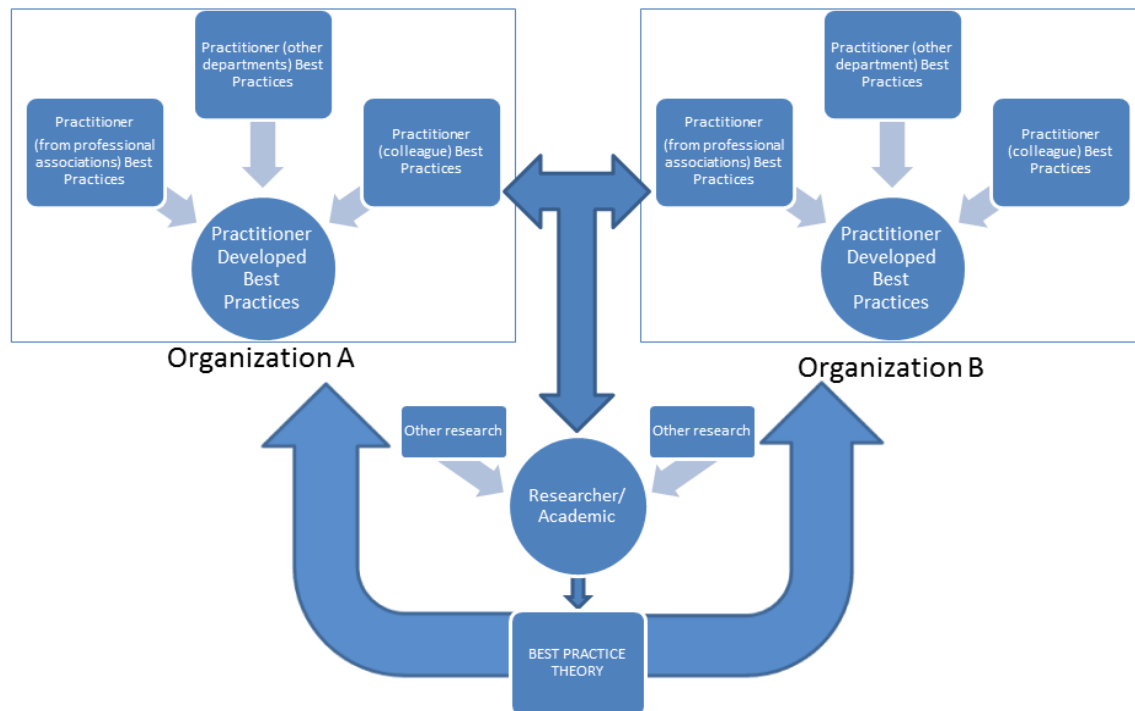


Figure 3. The development of best practices by practitioners and researchers. This diagram was developed based on the information gathered from the literature review and the answers provided from the practitioner interviews. It demonstrates that typically a practitioner will look within their own organization to gain an understanding of best practices, while occasionally looking to literature and other organizations to supplement knowledge as needed. It also demonstrates that academic researchers pull information from all organizations as well as other researchers in order to develop their best practice theories. Academics will study and summarize their observations around best practices and publish them with the intent on having practitioners use the information.

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Appendix B**Jeffrey Pfeffer's 13 Practices for Creating a Sustainable Competitive Advantage**

According to Jeffrey Pfeffer (1995) the following 13 practices are thought to be essential in using people to create a sustainable competitive advantage.

1. Employment security – demonstrates a long-term commitment from the organization to its workers and workforce.
2. Selective recruiting – if you are to “secure” employment for your workers you must ensure that the staffing choices initially made are correct.
3. High wages – if you want to both recruit and retain talented employees paying more is helpful (although not absolutely necessary).
4. Incentive-based pay – While people are motivated by more than just money, people will want to be rewarded if their effort leads to improvements in organizational performance and profits.
5. Employee ownership – If people have ownership in their company there is less likely to be conflicts between owners (capital) and labour.
6. Information sharing – If people are to be used as a competitive advantage they must be given the appropriate information to ensure they are successful.
7. Empowerment – Encourage autonomy and decentralization of decision making to empower employees to take control of their own processes.
8. Self-managed teams – Teams are typically more successful than the sum of their parts, as individuals monitor each other and peer pressure helps make sure everyone carries their portion of the team’s load.
9. Training and skill development – People are likely to be more committed to organizations that provide them with training; however, they must be given the opportunity to use their newly developed skills.
10. Cross-training – Cross training helps peak employee interest and keep them engaged as variation in a job description helps keep staff interested. Cross-training has the added benefit of improving processes as if people enter a new role and see a better way to complete it then the organization as a whole benefits.
11. Symbolic egalitarianism – It is important to break down barriers so different levels of a hierarchy feel comfortable communicating with others.
12. Wage compression – By compressing wages an organization can de-emphasize the importance of pay, and enhance the other areas of satisfaction, such as the inherent enjoyment of the work. The goal is create a culture that is less “calculative” and better embraces the work as a whole.
13. Internal promotion – Promotion from within helps in encouraging training and skill development and also adds to the building of trust across the various hierarchical levels. It also provides the added incentive for performing well, as people see promotions as rewards for doing their jobs well.

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Appendix C

Practitioner Interview Questions

SECTION ONE: Interpretation of Best Practices

I. Recruitment and Selection

This set of questions relates to the question of recruitment and the practices that you engage when looking for new employees in your organization.

- 1.) What are the best practices you know about relating to recruitment?
- 2.) Where have you heard about these practices? Have you read about them? If yes, where?
- 3.) Do you implement them in your role?
 - If you *do* implement them, can you give me some examples of how?
 - What are the challenges (if any) that you face? (And rank from least to most challenging)
 - If you *do not* implement them, what is inhibiting you?
- 4.) On a scale from 0-10, with 0 being no relation and 10 being total agreement, how often does your organization follow what you understand to be the best practices associated with recruitment?

II. Retention

Once you have actively recruited new employees, the next phase of the HR process is to select and retain your recruits. This set of questions relates to the practices you employ during this phase.

- 1.) What are the best practices you know about relating to selection and retention?
- 2.) Where have you heard about these practices? Have you read about them? If yes, where?
- 3.) Do you implement them in your role?
 - If you *do* implement them, can you give me some examples of how?
 - What are the challenges (if any) that you face? (And rank from least to most challenging)
 - If you *do not* implement them, what is inhibiting you?
- 4.) On a scale from 0-10, with 0 being no relation and 10 being total agreement, how often does your organization follow what you understand to be the best practices associated with selection and retention?

III. Labour Relations Strategies

In working in the public sector you undoubtedly are faced with a unionized environment. If you are not (for example publicly funded non-profits that are not unionized) we will skip this question; but assuming you are, this set of questions is interested in what strategies you appreciate with regards to labour relation policies.

- 1.) What are the best practices you know about relating to labour relations strategies?
- 2.) Where have you heard about these practices? Have you read about them? If yes, where?
- 3.) Do you implement them in your role?

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- If you *do* implement them, can you give me some examples of how?
- What are the challenges (if any) that you face? (And rank from least to most challenging)
- If you *do not* implement them, what is inhibiting you?

4.) On a scale from 0-10, with 0 being no relation and 10 being total agreement, how often does your organization follow what you understand to be the best practices associated with labour relations strategies?

IV. Performance Management

Performance management relates to the way in which you manage and evaluate an employee's performance. This set of questions looks at the practices that you either engage or wish to engage in managing your employee's performance and career development.

1.) What are the best practices you know about relating to labour relations strategies?

2.) Where have you heard about these practices? Have you read about them? If yes, where?

3.) Do you implement them in your role?

- If you *do* implement them, can you give me some examples of how?
- What are the challenges (if any) that you face? (And rank from least to most challenging)
- If you *do not* implement them, what is inhibiting you?

4.) On a scale from 0-10, with 0 being no relation and 10 being total agreement, how often does your organization follow what you understand to be the best practices associated with performance management?

V. Employee Motivation/Incentives

Finding ways to motivate or incentivize in the public sector or when managing public funds can be difficult. This set of questions looks at the practices you either engage or admire when trying to motivate employees.

1.) What are the best practices you know about relating to motivating employees?

2.) Where have you heard about these practices? Have you read about them? If yes, where?

3.) Do you implement them in your role?

- If you *do* implement them, can you give me some examples of how?
- What are the challenges (if any) that you face? (And rank from least to most challenging)
- If you *do not* implement them, what is inhibiting you?

4.) On a scale from 0-10, with 0 being no relation and 10 being total agreement, how often does your organization follow what you understand to be the best practices associated with employee motivation/incentives?

SECTION TWO: Follow-up Questions

I. How often do you read journals or articles that relate to the HR work that you do? (Hours per Month)

0-1 hours 2-3 hours 4-5 hours 6-7 hours 7+ hours

II. How often can you implement the ideas you learn from the journals/articles/periodicals you read?

Never Almost Never Sometimes Often Always

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III. Of what you consider to be your organization's top ten most prominent HR policies, approximately how many would you say are based on academically researched best practices?

1-2 2-34-5 6-7 8-9 All

IV. Of what you consider to be your organizations top ten most prominent HR policies, approximately how many would you say are based on best practices demonstrated by other organizations?

1-2 2-34-5 6-7 8-9 All

V. If your policies are not based on academic best practices or organizational best practices, do you know where else you may gain information to base your organization's policies and practices on?

VI. Please rank the five categories we discussed above in order of how important each is to your organizational strategy, with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

(Recruitment and Selection, Labour Relations Strategies, Performance Management, Employee Motivation/Incentives)

1.)

2.)

3.)

4.)

5.)

VII. What is the most important consideration you make when you implement new HR policies? Please rank

1.) Employee reaction

2.) Ease of implementation

3.) Research dedicated to determining the policies legitimacy

4.) Cost and/or cost savings

5.) Other organization's (or department's) successes

6.) Other (Please indicate)

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Appendix D



Human Research Ethics Board
Office of Research Services
Administrative Services Building
PO Box 1700 STN CSC
Victoria British Columbia V8W 2Y2 Canada
Tel 250-472-4545, Fax 250-721-8960
ethics@uvic.ca www.research.uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Leta Young	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER: 14-234 Minimal Risk - Delegated
UVic STATUS: Master's Student	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 28-Aug-14
UVic DEPARTMENT: PADM	APPROVED ON: 28-Aug-14
SUPERVISOR: Dr. J. Barton Cunningham	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 27-Aug-15
PROJECT TITLE: An Analysis of the Practical Application of Academic Human Resource Policy Research	
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER: None	
DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: None	
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL	
<p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.</p> <p>Modifications To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.</p> <p>Renewals Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.</p> <p>Project Closures When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.</p>	
Certification	
<p>This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.</p>	
<p>_____ Dr. Rachael Scarth Associate Vice-President Research Operations</p>	

14-234 Young, Leta

Certificate Issued On: 28-Aug-14

Appendix E



Faculty of Human & Social Development

MA in Dispute Resolution Program

Participant Consent Form

Human Resource Best Practices: Academic Research in Use

You are invited to participate in a project entitled “An Analysis of the Practical Application of Academic Human Resource Policy Research” that is being conducted by Leta Young.

Leta Young is a Graduate student in the department of Public Administration at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email at lgyoung@uvic.ca or telephone at 250-418-0660.

As a graduate student, Leta is required to conduct a research project as part of the requirements for a Master’s degree in Dispute Resolution. This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. J Barton Cunningham, who can be contacted at bcunning@uvic.ca. The client for this project is Mr. Jim Kempling, a local consultant who is interested in the results of this paper to help him in his future consulting projects that deal with public sector human capital issues.

Purpose and Objectives

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The purpose of this research project is to help develop an understanding of what best practices practitioners believe to be important in their human resource management (HRM) roles, and compare this information against what academics are promoting to be the best practices according to their research projects.

By looking at several aspects of human resources we are aiming to understand what enables or encourages you as practitioners to use best practices, and alternatively, what inhibits or holds you back from engaging in certain initiatives. Additionally, we are interested in identifying any practices that you feel are not helpful, despite academic research demonstrating that they are worth employing.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because academics spend years conducting research in the field of Human Resource Management, only to have their research published in academic journals that may never reach the hands of the individuals who can truly engage the concepts. This project looks at the gap between academia and practice, and tries to better understand it. By understanding where practitioners look for HR advice and by looking at where academics are publishing their most recent research we are trying to find options for a better alignment of the two groups.

Participant Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a manager within the public service and you hold HR responsibilities in your role. Whether or not you are a HR manager is not a pre-requisite for participation, as what is important is whether or not decisions you make (relating to recruitment, selection and retention, labour relations, performance management, and employee incentives) directly affect your staff.

What is involved?

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your responsibilities will include participating in an interview that is approximately 45 minutes to one hour in length. This interview will be audio recorded and I will be taking notes throughout in order to ensure the information you provide me with is accurately interpreted. Post-interview an anonymous and confidential transcript will be made and saved in a password-protected encrypted file on a password-protected computer.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including time taken away from your work to complete the interview. Choosing to complete the interview outside of work hours is also an option that can be arranged with the researcher. If you choose to complete the interview before or after work the researcher will cover any costs associated with this inconvenience including cost of transportation, cost of childcare, and/or the cost of a beverage or snack if you choose to complete the interview in a café. These arrangements will be made after the interview is scheduled. If you choose to pull your data or withdraw from the process at any time, full compensation will still be provided.

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Risks

The researcher recognizes that some hesitation may occur when discussing workplace practices. In order to account for these risks there are several confidentiality measures in place. All interviews will be one on one and completely confidential (unless otherwise agreed upon). Pseudonyms will be used in place of true participant names, and data collected will be blended together so no identifying features remain. Further while interviews are assumed to be occurring at your place of work during working hours, you can elect to interview privately and offsite if preferred, so that colleagues and employees are not aware of involvement in the project.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include a better understanding of best practices and how they help in day to day HR responsibilities. Additionally, you will be helping further academic and practitioner relationships as you assist in helping us understand the gap between research and practice.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study you can choose to either have the data you have provided be destroyed, or you can elect to let the researcher continue to use the current contributions, but not contribute any further.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

While you may or may not have a former relationship with the researcher, depending on how you were contacted for this study, every effort is to be made to ensure this potential relationship does not influence your participation. To help prevent an undue influence on your decision to participate, the researcher has only sent out generic emails informing you of this study, and it is up to you to contact the researcher directly if interested in participation. Through this impersonal contact method the researcher cannot influence participant choice.

Anonymity

As mentioned above no names or identifying information will be provided in any report that results from these interviews. That being said, due to the nature of recruitment for some participants (i.e. referral to from previous participants, or future referral of other individuals) some others may know that you contributed. As previously mentioned, there are very few risks associated with providing information for this project, but the researcher understands the desire to remain anonymous, therefore every effort possible will be made to protect participant identity. If a participant is concerned about anonymity it is recommended that interviews take place offsite and after work hours and these individuals should not refer others to the researcher.

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Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data you provide will be protected by keeping all audio files on a password-protected, encrypted flash drive. The paper notes will be transcribed and saved as an encrypted, password-protected Microsoft Word file and will be shredded after this process is complete. A transcript will be made of the interviews, and this will also be password-protected and encrypted. For participants who wish not to be identified, pseudonyms will be used, and any other identifying information will be changed.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: 1.) The dissemination of the Master's project presentation to both the client and the School of Public Administration. 2.) The online scholarly site for UVic entitled "UVicSpace, which is accessible by the public. 3.) The report and recommendations will be made available both to Mr. Jim Kemppling at Vortex Consulting, as well as to any participant who wishes to read the final draft.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of five years after the researcher presents her project (April 2020). The purpose for keeping it for the extra five years is to leave time for the researcher to potentially co-write a paper with her supervising professor (if consent is given by the participants for their data to be used for this secondary purpose). At this time, any electronic data will be erased using an appropriately secure data erasure program, and any paper notes will be destroyed using a shredder.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

Leta Young (Researcher)

Email: lgyoung@uvic.ca

Telephone: 250-418-0660

Dr. J. Barton Cunningham (Supervising Professor)

Email: bcunning@uvic.ca

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

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Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant *Signature* *Date*

Future Use of Data

PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT:

I consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I **do not** consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I consent to be contacted in the event my data is requested for future research: _____
(Participant to provide initials)

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.