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**Putting Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) into Practice: An
Australian case study**

Simon Fishwick: B Econ (Hons) Western Australia, M Sc (London), Grad Dip
Bus Admin (SA Institute of Technology)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Tasmania
(November, 2011)

CERTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

Since the publication of the Harvard Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) framework in 1984, there has been a significant volume of research on the link between the existence of HRM policies and organisational outcomes. However, there has been little development in terms of theoretical HRM models. There have also been calls for greater research into the mechanisms that link HRM policy and organisational outcomes. In particular, there is literature on the ‘what’ of SHRM but limited coverage of an integrated approach to ‘how’ SHRM can be effectively implemented.

This issue provides the research opportunity for this thesis. The study focuses the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) and its progress in developing a new HRM policy on managing performance that is centred on workplace feedback. A preliminary framework was developed based on the work of Guest (1987, 1997, 2002) that postulated four tests in a sequential approach to SHRM: linking HRM strategy to firm strategy (vertical fit); consistency across HRM policies (horizontal fit); effective implementation (managerial support) and outcomes (employee response).

The study was conducted as longitudinal embedded single case study with qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus groups gathered. Fifteen focus groups and seven individual interviews were held as part of the mid-trial review and evaluation of the workplace feedback trial. There were also thirteen key informant interviews held with executive managers, line managers and HR specialists over the period of the research.

In order to address the research opportunity, this thesis answers three research questions. The first question was: what are the relevant contextual issues for an organisation to consider in developing a new human resource policy? The answer to this question found a set of external

and internal contextual factors that influenced the TFS's approach in developing and implementing workplace feedback. The study found that the organisation's history, leadership style, and culture influenced the nature and manner of HRM policy development. The importance of maintaining a consistent approach was highlighted.

The second research question was: what are the challenges for the HR function in meeting the four tests drawn from the Guest framework? The answer to this question demonstrated the complexities and competing priorities for a HR function in seeking to achieve vertical and horizontal integration of HRM policies to achieve desired employee behavioural responses. Particular challenges identified included prioritising and sequencing of SHRM activities, obtaining consistency across HRM policies, the HR function maintaining credibility and visibility, and the importance of a consistent and sustained communication strategy.

The third research question was: how can an integrated SHRM process model assist a public sector organisation to design and progress towards implementation of a new HRM policy? The answer to this question indicated that the integrated SHRM process model can provide guidance on factors to be considered in developing a HRM policy in a dynamic environment. The longitudinal feature of the study contributed to the finding that the role of the HR function and its inter-relationships with executives, line managers and employees requires more prominence than SHRM theory has suggested.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AHRI	Australian Human Resources Institute
AMO	Ability, Motivation, Opportunity
CEDA	Committee for Economic Development Australia
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CPSU	Community and Public Sector Union
CVF	Competing Values Framework
EMT	Executive Management Team
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
HR	Human Resource(s)
HRM	Human Resource Management
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
OCB	Organisational Citizenship Behaviour
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
PDP	Personal Development Plans
RBV	Resource Based View
SHRM	Strategic Human Resource Management
TFS	Tasmanian Fire Service
UFU	United Firefighters Union
WERS	Workplace Employee Relations Survey

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 OBJECTIVE OF THE CHAPTER

The objective of this chapter is to introduce the thesis. The chapter commences with a discussion of the rationale for the thesis. Next, the broad research opportunity is noted and briefly discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE THESIS

In 1984, the first formal model of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills & Walton, 1984) was published. During the 1990s there was a significant amount of research that demonstrated SHRM's link to organisational performance. The majority of this research involved large private sector organisations, and focused on the link between Human Resource Management (HRM) policies and desired organisational outcomes (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg, 2000; Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Hueslid, 1995; Lepak & Snell, 1999). Various studies examined the link between 'appropriate HRM systems' (Chan, Shaffer, & Snape, 2004) or 'bundles of HRM policies' (Haynes & Fryer, 2000) and organisational outcomes, typically using financial measures of performance such as profit and return on investment (Wright & Kehoe, 2008). In a review of 104 studies from international, refereed journals published over the period 1994-2003, Boselie Dietz and Boon, (2005) argue that outcomes is a preferable term to performance to reflect the dependent variables utilised in the research reviewed. Quantitative research, particularly in the United States, has shown a statistically significant relationship between the application of HRM policies and practices and such organisational outcomes (Wright, Gardner & Moynihan, 2003). Additionally, evidence from qualitative reviews of the literature conclude that in almost all cases HR[M] practices are found to be at least weakly related to performance" (Wright & Kehoe, 2008:7).

Despite this research output, the review of the literature suggests that SHRM and organisational performance research has yet to make a substantial contribution to the theoretical understanding of how SHRM results in changes to organisational outcomes (Nishii, Lepak & Schneider, 2008). A large proportion of empirical studies have used cross-sectional data and single respondent questionnaires (Edgar & Geare, 2009; Perry & Kulik, 2008). This has resulted in limited theoretical development that links the disparate frameworks that can be used to develop SHRM theory, and also to put HRM policy into practice (Boselie et al, 2005; Godard, 2004; Wright & Kehoe, 2008). In particular, while there has been literature on the ‘what’ of SHRM, there is limited coverage of an integrated approach, or models, to inform the process of ‘how’ SHRM can link to organisational outcomes (Martin-Alcazar, Romero-Fernandez, & Sanchez-Gardey, 2008).

1.2.1 SHRM LITERATURE: LINKING HRM POLICY TO PERFORMANCE

Research on the linkage between HRM policy and organisational performance has raised a number of theoretical and methodological issues, three of which this thesis seeks to address. Firstly, there is the so-called Black Box problem (Boxall & Purcell, 2008), which is a description of the ‘hidden’ mechanisms between the implementation of HRM policy and the achievement of desired organisational outcomes. By their nature, the components and processes within the so-called Black Box are not well understood (Roehling et al, 2005), and this includes the respective roles of the HR function and line managers (Brandl, Madsen & Madsen, 2009; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Secondly, there is a theory-practice gap in SHRM, which understates the complexities and competing priorities for a HR function (Panayotopoulou, Bourantas, &

Papalexandris, 2003) in seeking to achieve vertical and horizontal integration of HRM policies to achieve effective implementation of a HRM policy (Gratton & Truss, 2003).

Thirdly, there is the further development of an integrated SHRM process model. A preliminary tabular framework of the linkages between an organisation's HRM policy development and its performance, drawn from the work of Guest (1987, 1997, 2002), will be developed to inform the methodological approach for data gathering and analysis. The aim is to utilise a qualitative method for exploratory theory building towards a more integrated model examining the 'how' as well as the 'what' of SHRM. The process towards development of a SHRM theoretical contribution is discussed in the next section.

1.2.2 HRM POLICY DEVELOPMENT: USING AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK TO INFORM PRACTICE

This thesis seeks to bridge the theory - practice divide by exploring the development of a new human resource policy using espoused SHRM principles found in the literature. An Australian Fire Service Organisation - the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) – specifically sought to use an 'evidence-based approach' to implement a workplace feedback system that was consistent with a broader cultural change programme and an integrated approach to the management of human resources. In order to understand the role that SHRM theory can play in the process of implementing a new human resource policy for an Australian organisation, this thesis will examine the TFS's experience over a seven year period from 2002 to 2009.

Given the opportunity to research processes in a dynamic environment, the thesis intended to examine the impact of contextual factors, competing priorities and the role of the HR function in conjunction with executive managers, line managers and employees. The TFS case is useful because it highlights the complexity of SHRM in practice, and also because it provides a lens for theory building to consider a proposed integrated SHRM process model that draws together a number of disparate HRM models/frameworks with a specific focus on the processes between HRM policy development and organisational outcomes.

1.3 BROAD RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

In line with the preceding discussion, the central research opportunity for investigation in this study is:

What factors underpin an integrated Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) approach to the development and implementation of a new human resource policy?

This broad research opportunity is designed to identify the context and roles of key actors in developing, implementing and responding to a new human resource policy. More specifically, this research in this thesis intends to incorporate several theoretical perspectives into a preliminary framework to develop an integrated SHRM model that can inform the process of HR policy development. In keeping with the necessarily longitudinal nature of this research, the impact of complexities and competing priorities with the TFS can be explored to assess their impact on the process of HR policy development and implementation.

The proposed integrated SHRM process model combines elements of the Harvard model (Beer et al, 1984); the Guest four sequential tests (1987, 1997, 2002); the Ulrich HR framework (1997, 1998); the HR competing values framework (Panayotopoulou, et al, 2003) and a causal model of employee performance (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Such an integrated SHRM framework will prove useful for other organisations in seeking to implement HRM policy in a manner that is effective and sustainable.

1.4 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis proceeds in eight Chapters. Following this introductory Chapter, the literature review (Chapter Two), which incorporates research current to January 2010, will culminate in the generation of the specific research questions to be addressed in this case. Leading on from this, Chapter Three outlines the case method used to gather the necessary data required to answer the specific research questions posed in Chapter Two. Chapter Four provides a case history of the TFS, including background and contextual material from 1979 (when the TFS became into existence). The case history is drawn from both primary and secondary data sources, and serves as the basis for the interview questions posed to the key informants, and the basis upon which the research questions will be analysed.

Chapters Five through Seven provide an analysis of the case data in terms of the contextual factors and the development and progress towards implementation of the workplace feedback approach. Chapter Five covers the period from 1979 to December 2004, and details the contextual internal and external factors that contributed to a decision to develop an organisationally specific approach. It also details the processes and outcomes of a Reference

Group established to consider and report on a preferred approach. Chapter Six covers the period between the launch of the workplace feedback trial and its evaluation (i.e. from January 2005 to October 2006). Chapter Seven covers the period from October 2006 to the end of the research period in October 2009, during which the TFS progressed towards full implementation of workplace feedback.

Chapter Eight provides a discussion of the key findings of the thesis. The common themes emerging from the interviews and focus groups are identified and triangulated between respondents. Based on the analysis of the case data, theory building is used to propose an integrated SHRM process model. This model is accompanied by a discussion of its implications for SHRM theory and research. There is also a discussion of implications for HRM policy development in practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE CHAPTER

The primary objective of this Chapter is to review the literature relevant to the central research opportunity described in Chapter One. In doing this, the Chapter examines relevant theoretical models and frameworks leading to the development of the specific research questions. In providing the context for the literature review, the case study organisation aimed to develop and implement a new HRM policy on workplace feedback, in an evidenced-based manner consistent with SHRM literature, as part of a wider culture change programme. The context shaped the scope and structure of the literature review.

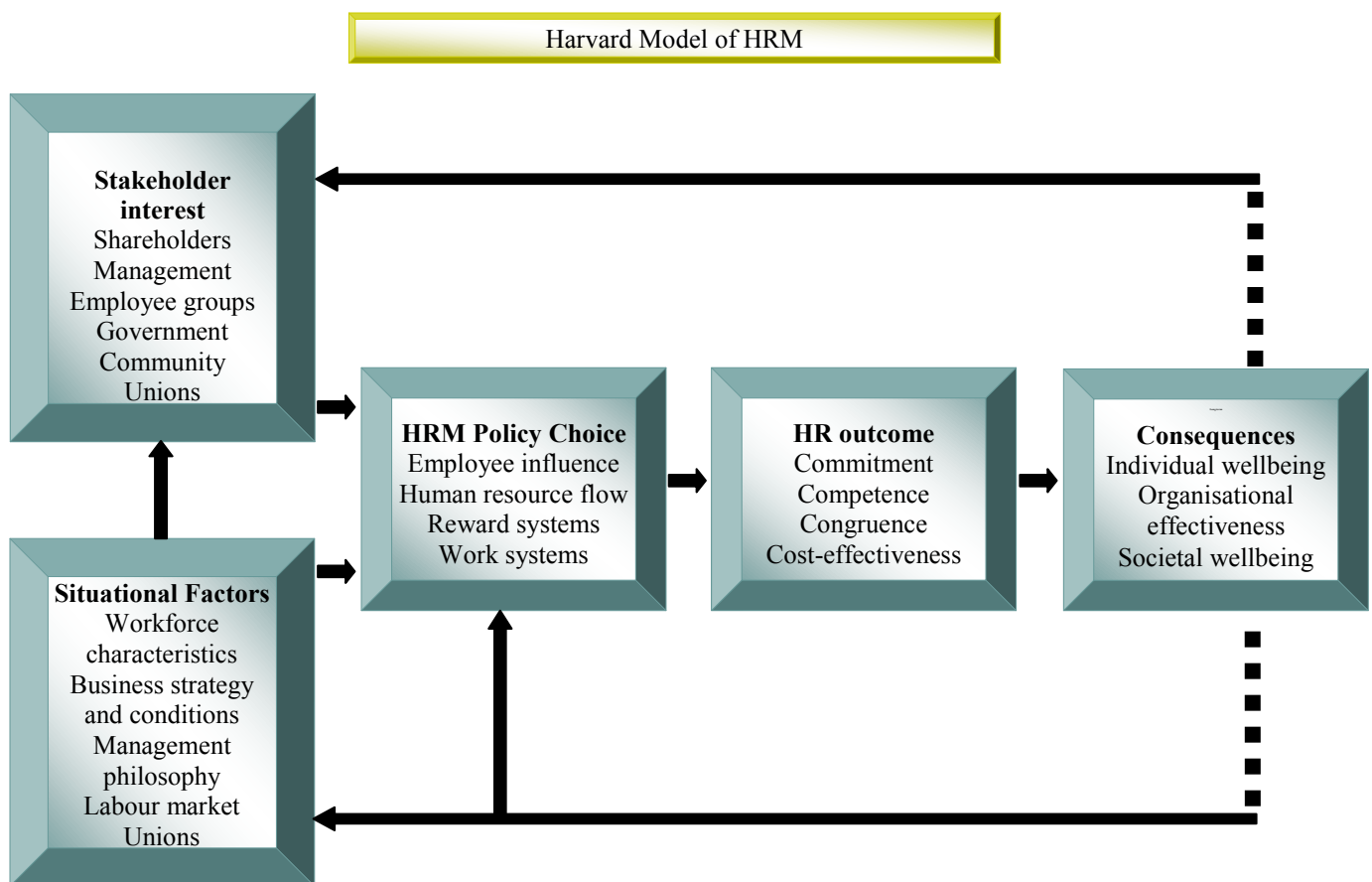
The Chapter is structured into six parts. Firstly, there is a review of literature up to January, 2010 on issues relevant to SHRM including highlighting theoretical and methodological issues in the literature. Secondly, the Chapter reviews specific contextual factors relevant to the case study organisation which include cultural factors at national, industry and firm level. Thirdly, there is a review of relevant issues for the development and implementation of a workplace feedback policy in the case study organisation.

The fourth part of the Chapter describes the roles of the HR function and line managers in the development and implementation of HRM policies and procedures. It also covers the responses of employees to those policies and procedures including the role of a communication strategy in HRM policy design and implementation. Fifthly, the Chapter integrates models and frameworks to provide a preliminary tabular framework as a summary of the literature to inform the analysis of the case study. The Chapter concludes with the research questions.

2.2 STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In 1982, Tichy, Fombrum and Devanna included Human Resource Management as a core element of effective strategic management (Tichy, Fombrum & Devanna, 1982). The concept of SHRM gained prominence following the publication of the Harvard Model (Beer et al, 1984), which presents a systems framework linking human resource management to an organisation's strategy and its performance outcomes.

Figure 2-1 Harvard model of HRM



(Source: Beer et al, 1984)

The significance of this model is that it explicitly links SHRM with organisation outcomes and places SHRM within the organisation's contexts, constituencies and strategic processes (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). Factors such as leadership and culture also influence the linkages between SHRM and organisational performance (Paauwe, 2009). Culture plays a positive role in SHRM if it supports the intended behavioural outcomes of HRM practices (Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade & Drake, 2009).

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) can be defined as “the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable the firm to achieve its goals” (Wright & McMahan 1992: 298). A feature of SHRM is an aim to produce an “...integrated set of policies and processes that improve organisational performance” (Caldwell, 2004: 202). This definition, and the Harvard model, emphasise the importance of the fit between SHRM and corporate strategy and for HRM strategies to be relevant to the organisation's context and environmental changes (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Compton, 2009). HRM, in the context of this thesis, is the totality of strategies, policies and practices enacted by organisations as part of an employment relationship. An explicit pluralist approach is taken as distinct from a normative HRM approach (Caldwell, 2004; Legge, 2005). Part of this approach is that employees should be treated fairly and with respect (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005).

Effective SHRM can produce two types of advantages for organisations. Firstly, the quality of the employees (human capital recruitment) is optimised, and, secondly, the organisation manages its people to achieve an optimal level of productivity (Chan et al., 2004). This has been expressed as being both a ‘human capital advantage’ and an ‘organisational process advantage’

(Boxall, 1996), which can be conceptualised together as the ‘human resource advantage’ (Boxall, 1996; Boxall & Purcell, 2008).

Developments in SHRM theory and research have been consistent with the concept of the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm (Barney, 1991, Boxall & Purcell, 2008; Carmeli & Tishler, 2004; Wright, Dunford & Snell, 2001) which conceptualises organisations as ‘bundles of resources’. The RBV provides a theoretical context for development and research into SHRM (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Paauwe, 2004). High-performance work systems (HPWS) that include more rigorous approaches to selection, training and development, reward and structure to enhance employee contribution can be seen as an extension of the resource based view (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). Whilst the focus for HPWS is the achievement of competitive advantage (Boxall, 2003), the concept is applicable to public sector firms who wish to use SHRM principles to help attain organisational objectives.

While HR professionals have been claiming a greater strategic role (Sheehan, 2005), organisations have been reducing the relative number of such professionals and transferring the implementation of HRM policies and practices to line managers without reducing their other roles and responsibilities (Nehles, van Riemsdijk, Kok & Looise, 2006; Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton, & Swart, 2003). Obtaining internal support for SHRM from all organisational levels can be challenging for the HR function (Caldwell, 2004).

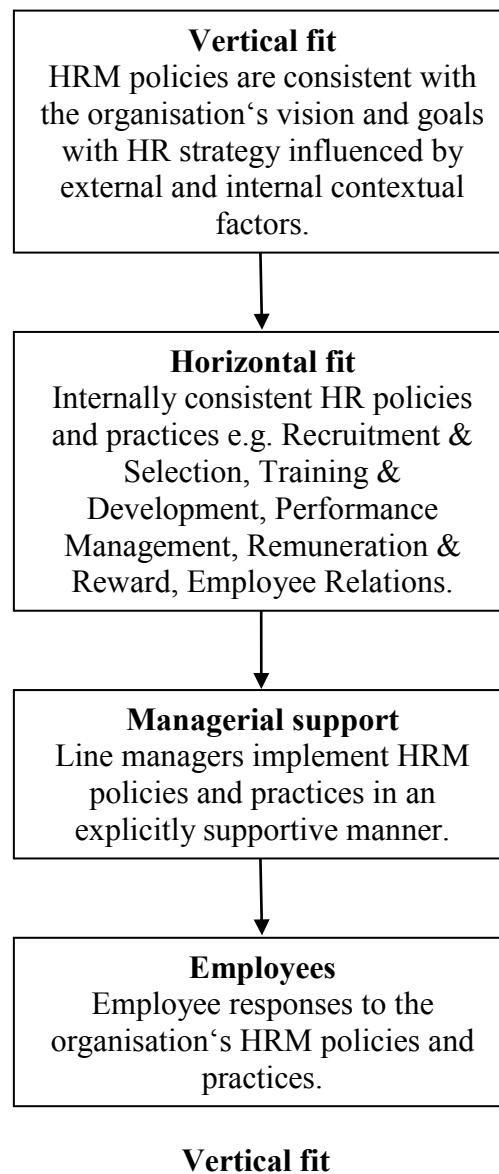
If the effective implementation of HRM policies can play a significant role in enhancing organisational performance (Gratton & Truss, 2003), understanding the roles of line managers and HRM in the context of achieving positive employee responses is of increased significance

(Stanton, Young, Bartram & Leggat, 2010). Guest and King (2004) argue that the contribution of HR professionals in providing well-designed, consistent and appropriate HR policies and practices that are easy for line managers to apply has been neglected (Meisinger, 2005; Purcell et al, 2003). It is important that an integrated approach to HRM strategies be taken (Sheehan, Holland & Di Cieri, 2006), and that there is a focus across the whole set of HRM policies and practices for consistency: concentrating on a narrow range of strategies is unlikely to deliver the desired outcomes (Compton, 2009).

2.2.1 A PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK (GUEST'S 'FOUR TESTS OF SHRM')

To provide an initial focus for the research, and consistent with the case study organisation's wish for an evidenced-based approach, a framework was developed based on the work of Guest (1987, 1997, 2002). This framework includes four key tests an organisation's has approach to SHRM. It is necessary for an organisation to undertake all four elements in this model (the four tests) currently, in a manner that is consistent (Paauwe, 2004).

Figure 2-2 Preliminary Framework



Vertical fit relates to an assessment of the integration of HRM policies with the organisation's vision, goals and strategy (Compton, 2009; Wei, 2006). For this vertical fit, or strategic unity (Pietersen & Engelbrecht, 2005), to be effective requires the HR function to be an integral component of the organisation's strategic planning process (Guest & King, 2004; Sheehan, 2005). Essentially, vertical fit is concerned with deriving HRM strategies, policies and practices from the organisation's overall goals and strategies (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Wei, 2006).

Horizontal fit

Horizontal fit relates to the level of internal consistency across an organisation's set of HRM policies (Compton, 2009; Guest, 1997; Roehling et al, 2005). The aim is to achieve a —.coherent and consistent approach to managing people” (Gratton & Truss, 2003: 75) that is intended to produce employee commitment, flexibility and quality (Legge, 2005). However, horizontal fit will have little value in the absence of vertical fit (Becker & Huselid, 2006).

Each HRM policy should be coherent (Boselie et al, 2005), easy to understand and interpret, should complement other HRM areas and be consistent with other systems (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Wood, 1999). Horizontal fit contributes to an organisation's effective and efficient use of its human resources (Wei, 2006), and effective implementation of HRM practices (Den Hartog, Boselie & Paauwe, 2004). A close fit of HRM policies and procedures was rated second in importance of twelve HRM policy goals (Caldwell, 2004). The issues for the HR function in achieving horizontal fit are further examined in Section 2.7.

Managerial support

The third test is the extent of demonstrated managerial support for the firm's SHRM approach and for each individual policy, as evidenced by their behaviour (Guest, 1987). Senior management requires a long term commitment to SHRM and may be —.the most powerful force that can work against the adoption of HRM initiatives” (Kane, Crawford & Grant, 1999: 497). There is evidence that middle and front line managerial behaviour in implementing HRM initiatives is a fundamental link between the setting and achievement of organisational goals (Boxall & Purcell, 2000; Stanton et al, 2010). Actual HRM practices are increasingly delivered

by line managers to employees and may not be what were actually required by the HRM policies (McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles & Truss, 1997; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Issues in the demonstration of managerial support are further considered in Section 2.7.

Employee response

The fourth test is the response of employees to the HRM policies and to the behaviour of the line managers (Guest, 2002). Employee perception is an area that it is argued requires increased attention in SHRM research (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). Employee responses include attitudinal and behavioural factors that influence work behaviour and work performance. There has been an assumption that organisational performance is a sum of individual performance (Boxall & Purcell, 2008). Therefore, investigating employee responses has been a key focus for research on the impact of SHRM strategies (Martin-Alcazar et al, 2008). The response of increasingly well-educated and skilled employees (Ramsay, Scholaris & Harley, 2000; Ulrich, Brockbank Johnson & Younger, 2007) to HRM policies provide the antecedents of employee performance and hence organisational outcomes (Boxall & Purcell, 2008; Guest, 2002; Guest, Michie, Sheehan, Conway & Metochi, 2000). Employee responses are further discussed in Section 2.8. The next section of the literature review will examine the research published on the impact of SHRM on organisational outcomes.

This section has discussed the influential Harvard Model of SHRM (Beer et al, 1984) and a preliminary framework (see Figure 2-2) developed from the work of Guest (1987, 1997, 2002) to illustrate the linkages between HRM policy and organisational outcomes. In particular, the preliminary framework shows the steps and the role of key actors in the process of SHRM

implementation. The discussion in this section provides a basis for examining extant literature on the impact of SHRM on organisational outcomes.

2.3 SHRM AND ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

Academic study of HRM has a focus on choices that firms make about combinations of policies and practices designed to increase organisational effectiveness, and therefore performance outcomes (Boselie et al, 2005). It has been stated that —the proposition that the quality of human resource management critically affects firm performance is a self-evident truth” (Boxall & Steenveld, 1999: 443). There is a substantial and growing body of literature covering the relationship between an organisation’s human resources policies as a mechanism to develop human capital and its performance (Guest, 1997; Wright & Kehoe, 2008). The primary question is whether, and to what extent, having a strategic and integrated approach to human resources provides a net added value to organisational outcomes (Hesketh & Fleetwood, 2006).

Quantitative research, particularly in the United States, has consistently produced results demonstrating there is a statistically significant relationship between HRM policies and practices and organisational outcomes (Wright et al, 2003). A range of studies conducted during the 1990s sought to identify which HRM policies and practices have had the most significant, positive impact on organisational outcomes (Appelbaum et al, 2000; Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Hueslid, 1995; Lepak & Snell, 1999). Indeed, a range of studies have examined the link between the existence of HRM policies and organisational outcomes (typically financial measures) as well as the most appropriate HRM systems (Chan et al, 2004) or ‘bundle’ of HRM policies (Haynes &

Fryer, 2000. For such ‘bundles’ to be effective requires employee commitment (Macky & Boxall, 2008; Wood, 1999). This is further examined in Section 2.8.1.

There are mixed views on the impact of HRM policies of organisational outcomes. There is a view that there are clear connections between HRM policies and practices and organisational outcomes including effectiveness (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Lengnick-Hall et al, 2009). It is claimed that the evidence produced in the mid to late 1990s found “there is little doubt any more that there is a clear connection between the way people are managed and organisational performance” (Purcell, 2002:1). There is an alternative view that evidence to demonstrate that HRM practices result in enhanced organisational outcomes is lacking (Guest, Michie, Conway & Sheehan, 2003). Paauwe, (2009: 133) concludes “...that HR practices, be it individually or bundles in a system, are at least weakly related to firm performance”.

Overall, SHRM and organisational performance research has not made a substantial contribution to the theoretical understanding of how HRM results in changes to organisational outcomes. This is partly because the “...causal chain may be more complex than previously thought” (Nishii et al, 2008: 504). A greater level of theoretical understanding may be obtained from using more proximal outcome indicators that employees have a greater opportunity to influence (Boselie, et al, 2005). Such outcomes include human resource capabilities, such as competence, cooperation and commitment (Roehling et al, 2005). The next section will discuss theoretical and methodological issues in the SHRM and organisational performance literature.

2.3.1 ISSUES AND TENSIONS IN THE SHRM/ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

LITERATURE

Godard (2004) in his review of the HRM and firm performance, argues that there are a range of concerns sufficient to suggest that generalised claims about the performance effects of HRM, and about research findings claiming to observe them, should be treated with a healthy degree of scepticism. Specific concerns are identified in the following sections.

2.3.1.1 Correlation and causation

Overall, researchers have not found evidence of strong causation between choices of HRM policies and practices and organisational outcomes (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Boselie et al, 2005; Wright & Haggerty, 2005). Whilst quantitative research has found correlations between the identified use of a strategic approach to human resources and organisational outcomes, the nature and direction of causation has proved to be problematic (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). Whilst a causal relationship may exist, its nature could be more complex than the statistical techniques applied can identify (Hesketh & Fleetwood, 2006). It may be that higher performing organisations are prepared and can afford to develop a more integrated HRM approach, rather than an integrated SHRM approach resulting in higher performance (Paauwe & Richardson, 1997; Wright et al, 2003; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan & Allen, 2005).

2.3.1.2 Cross-sectional and single respondent studies

A large proportion of empirical studies have used cross-sectional data and single respondent questionnaires (Cooke, 2001; Edgar & Geare, 2009; Perry & Kulik, 2008; Wright et al, 2003). It has been argued that using single respondents, including HR managers (Boxall & Steenveld, 1999; Den Hartog et al, 2004; Kane et al, 1999), has a low validity as they are unlikely to have to have sufficient detailed knowledge of HRM practices across the whole organisation (Edgar & Geare, 2009). Gerhart, Wright, McMahon & Snell (2000) found a low inter-rater reliability between HR managers, line managers and employees.

Even in identifying HRM practices, there are substantial subjective elements (Guest, 2001). This single respondent methodology can result in empirical analysis that contains —.statistical sophistication...at the expense of theoretical rigor” (Guest, 1997: 263). Lengnick-Hall et al, (2009: 77) conclude —.that single respondent measures of HR practices contain large amounts of measurement error”. HR managers may give ‘socially desirable’ responses that exaggerate the level of SHRM and its effectiveness in their organisations (Caldwell, 2008). There has been a lack of longitudinal studies (Boxall & Steenveld, 1999; Guest 2001) and there has been a call to include employee data to add their perspective on the impact of HRM policies (Edgar & Geare, 2009; Wright et al, 2003).

2.3.1.3 Focus on firm performance as the level of analysis

Much of the SHRM research has focused on the impact of HRM practices on broad organisational outcomes, whilst the implementation of HRM practices is typically done by line managers at the workgroup level (Wright & Kehoe, 2008). Because of increased levels of

interdependence between people in jobs, the interaction between people (how well they work together) is a key determinant of organisational performance. Responses by individuals to new or different HRM practices are influenced by others within their workgroup and this affects group and firm level performance (Edgar & Geare, 2009; Wright & Kehoe, 2008). This suggests that researchers include a focus on how work groups, rather than individual employees, respond to HRM practices.

2.3.1.4 Insufficient attention to qualitative research

It is argued that because of the importance of intangible resources (such as the skills of employees and the way people work together for the achievement of organisational goals) (Bartel, 2004; Riley, Ladkin & Szivas, 2002), more attention should be given to qualitative research (Wei, 2006). This is because the role of HRM policies is more significant in service industries (Batt, 2002; Hoque, 1999; Peccei & Rosenthal, 2001; Wright & Snell, 1998). There is extensive diversity across service industries (Frenkel, 2000) and the higher the level of intangibility, the more important the fit between HRM policies/practice and business strategy (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Purcell (1999) calls for an increased use of qualitative methods and Boselie et al (2005: 70) —.found only a few wholly qualitative studies...and even fewer that presented mixed results”.

2.3.1.5 Selection of performance outcomes

Historically, within many organisations, there has been a lack of systematic collection and analysis and reporting of performance related information (Pfeffer, 1995), partly because the measurement of HRM practices poses —.difficult methodological issues” (Guest, 2001: 1097).

It is argued that there has been over reliance on financial data that may include significant measurement error (Gerhart et al, 2000; Purcell et al, 2003). This has been at the detriment of measures that are more aligned with a ‘balanced scorecard’ (Kaplan & Norton, 1996) that seeks to optimise various measures rather than maximise one (i.e. profit) at the expense of others (Guest, 1997). As Boselie et al (2005) point out, corporate scandals of the early twenty-first century, (and indeed associated with the more recent Global Financial Crisis), reduce the credibility of short-term financial measures as valid indications of true organisational performance. Lengnick-Hall et al (2009:78) conclude there is “...a growing consensus...regarding the need for multiple measures of organisational effectiveness when evaluating the impact of SHRM”. This suggests the importance of utilising long term performance measures (Welbourne & Andrews, 1996) and case study based qualitative data gathered from different levels in the organisation including executives, front-line managers and employees (Purcell et al, 2003).

There are gaps in identifying the impact of individual HRM policies and practices and on individual performance, which suggests a range of performance measures at individual, group, unit and company level is needed (Boselie et al, 2005; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Guest, 1997:267). The studies generally are not clear whether it is the overall HRM system of specific practices influencing performance outcomes (Paauwe, 2009). One issue is that measuring the impact of HRM on organisational performance can be difficult (Carmeli & Tishler, 2004). The key objectives of the organisation and its prevailing strategy will influence which performance outcomes are to be seen as important and strategic (Rouse & Putterill, 2003).

There has been a growing focus in the importance of intangible measures as indications of organisational success, in particular, long term success (Ulrich et al, 2007; Marr, 2007). Research in the Israeli local government sector found intangible elements such as culture, communication and how effectively people work together have a significant effect on organisational performance (Carmeli & Tishler, 2004). Such measures chosen can be used as employee motivators to signal desired changes in behaviour (Marr, 2007). However, by their very nature, intangibles such as culture, tacit knowledge and the strengths of internal relationships are difficult to accurately measure (Boxall & Purcell, 2008; Marr, 2007).

2.3.1.6 The impact of time-lags

The literature assessing the impact of HRM policies and practices and organisational outcomes does not fully take into account the time it takes to produce improved outcomes (Haynes & Fryer, 2000; Purcell et al, 2003). Cross-sectional studies don't tend to capture when a HRM policy change was implemented or assess the span of time before measurable effects can be identified (Becker & Huselid, 2006). Longitudinal studies indicate that it can take up to two years to develop and implement HRM practices, and up to four years to obtain returns from high quality HRM policies and practices (Pfeffer, 1995; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Wright & Haggerty, 2005). The bulk of the research, to date, has identified the existence of policies and practices, either existing at the time of the performance data, or performance data lagged by a year. When such policies and practices were implemented has not been reported (Wright et al, 2003). Given that HRM practices, such as a new performance management system, may take at least two full cycles to result in changed behaviour, and therefore organisational outcomes, the

timing of when key HRM practices are implemented is a relevant measurement factor (Wright & Haggerty, 2005).

2.3.1.7 Low level of transfer from research to practice

There appears to be a low level of transfer from SHRM research to organisational practice (Nishii et al, 2008). This could be due to relative low levels of knowledge amongst HR practitioners about HRM research findings (Rynes, Colbert & Brown, 2002). Also, there is not widespread knowledge of “...how to combine, implement and refine HRM policies and practices” (Boxall, 1996:67). There are perceptions that the costs of strategic and integrated HRM policies and practices may outweigh the benefits; the design and implementation of such systems may be time consuming and costly (Harris, Doughty & Kirk, 2002). Additionally, it is suggested that within firms there is not the belief, or the will, to identify, implement, and sustain such an investment in an organisation’s HR function, policy development, and implementation (Boxall, 2003).

2.3.2 THE SO-CALLED BLACK BOX PROBLEM

A continuing question in the SHRM literature concerns the impact of SHRM on employees and their behaviour (Becker & Huselid, 2006). There has not been significant empirical research to examine the processes mechanisms between the implementation of HRM policies and performance outcomes (Hesketh & Fleetwood, 2006; Paauwe, 2004; Roehling et al, 2005). This has been described as the so-called Black Box problem (Boselie et al, 2005; Hope Hailey, Farndale & Truss, 2005; Purcell et al, 2003; Ramsay et al, 2000; Wright & Kehoe, 2008). The

so-called Black Box is represented in the Harvard model by the arrow between ‘HRM Policy choice’ and ‘HRM outcomes’ (Beer et al, 1984: see Figure 2-1).

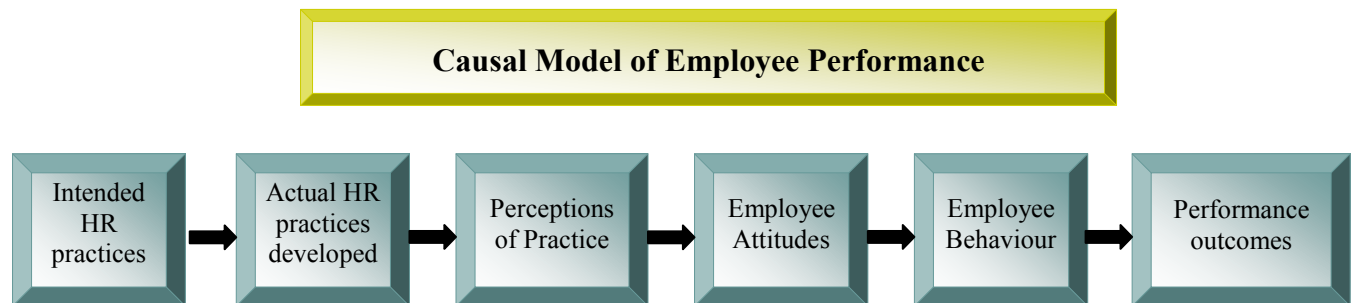
An integral component of the so-called Black Box is examining how HRM policies and practices impact on employee perceptions, motivation and organisation commitment, as these are seen as important antecedents of employee performance (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Roehling et al, 2005; Wright & Kehoe, 2008). Therefore theoretical frameworks that cover factors that contribute to employee performance can assist to penetrate the so-called Black Box. The so-called AMO framework that describes individual performance as a function of employee ability (can do), motivation (will do), and opportunity (in terms of work structure and environment) to perform in a manner that is consistent with the organisation’s goals (Boxall & Purcell, 2008; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Wright & Kehoe, 2008) provides a mechanism framework to explore the relationships between HRM practices and individual performance. In a review of the SHRM and firm performance literature, AMO was the most popular of the employee focused behavioural theories with twenty seven out of forty two examples reported (Boselie et al 2005).

An aspect of the so-called Black Box is that there are distinctions between the design of HRM practices, their implementation and how they are perceived and responded to by employees (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Wright & Nishii, 2006). Becker and Huselid (2006: 915) argue that –A clearer articulation of the ‘black box’ between HR and firm performance is the most pressing theoretical and empirical challenge in the SHRM literature”.

2.3.3 CAUSAL MODEL OF EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Purcell and Hutchinson's (2007: 7) causal model of employee performance that incorporates employee response to HRM policies and practices is set out in Figure 2-3:

Figure 2-3: Causal Model of Employee Performance



This model seeks to provide potential components of the so-called Black Box, and proposes that a series of stages occur between the HRM practices and performance outcomes. Wright and Nishii's (2006) process model of SHRM also includes the first three of the components but excludes employee attitudes. It includes a sequence of intended practices, actual practices, perceptions and employee reactions that are core aspects of the overall HRM and performance chain (Wright & Haggerty, 2005). Employees can choose their behavioural response to HRM practices (Hesketh & Fleetwood, 2006). Such responses to HRM practices in general terms, and to a new HRM practice in particular, will be shaped by factors including employees' personal experience, perceptions of relevance and fairness, levels of perceived trust and degree they feel connected to the workplace (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). Employee behaviours in the fifth of the boxes have been called HR-related outcomes (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). These intermediate outcomes are important in understanding the processes, within so-called Black Box, from HRM

practices to organisational practice (Harney & Jordan, 2008). They can include increased customer service, creativity and initiation of suggestions for practice improvements (Hesketh & Fleetwood, 2006).

2.3.4 SUMMARY OF SHRM AND PERFORMANCE LITERATURE

This section has discussed a number of inherent weaknesses in the literature dealing with the link between SHRM and organisational outcomes. There is also an argument that HR professionals and line managers may lack understanding or may be reluctant to adopt research findings into their practice (Redman & Wilkinson, 2006). These factors, as detailed above, combine to illustrate the complexities that those in the HR function, and organisations generally need to consider. This level of complexity suggests that the preliminary framework (set out in Section 2.3.1 at Figure 2-2) needs to be enhanced to reflect the level of interdependence between the major sets of actors: the HR function; senior managers; line managers; and, employees. There has been an increased focus on considering contextual factors such as sectoral factors and organisational culture as relevant variables (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Lengnick-Hall et al, 2009). Such contextual factors are central components of the Harvard model of SHRM set out in Figure 2-1 (Beer et al, 1984). The next section will explore the literature on contextual factors relevant to the case organisation in its implementation of an approach to workplace feedback.

2.4 ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS RELEVANT TO THE CASE

ORGANISATION'S HRM STRATEGY

It is important to consider the organisational context in which HRM practices operate as cultural aspects have been found to be statistically significantly correlated to HRM practices and the achievement of organisational outcomes (Carmeli & Tishler, 2004; Den Hartog et al, 2004; Edgar & Geare, 2009; Teo et al, 2008). Contextual factors relevant to organisations HRM strategy include those that are external and internal to the organisation as well individual factors (Den Hartog et al, 2004; Guest 2001; Naumann & Bennett, 2000). The reporting of the research on the impact of HRM practices has, however, tended to neglect the cultural aspects of the organisation that contributed to producing effective outcomes (Pfeffer, 1995; Purcell, 2004). Organisational context and culture impacts on the allocation and integration of human resources, design of HRM policies and practices as well as accepted forms of behaviour and management systems (Chan et al, 2004; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005).

Central to the concept of vertical fit between organisational and HRM strategy is the consistency between the organisation's espoused culture, and the context of its HRM practices (Guest & King, 2004; Sheehan, 2005). National and organisational cultures will influence which HR policies and practices are most appropriate (Milliman, Nason, Zhu & De Cieri, 2002; Paauwe, 2004; Taormina & Gao, 2009). Culture will also impact on the content and the speed in which HRM practices, compatible with organisational strategy, can be designed and implemented (Fletcher, 2001; Nankervis, 2004; Wei, 2006). Therefore, if an organisation seeks to change its focus, or the manner in which it seeks to meet its objectives, then the prevailing culture can be either an impediment or an enabler in achieving such change (Chan et al, 2004; London et al, 2004).

Much of the published research on SHRM originates from the USA and conclusions from this research do not necessarily translate to other cultural settings (Fletcher, 2001: 481; Maley & Kramar, 2007). HRM in this context, reflects a unitarist view, consistent with its intellectual roots, as it reflects aspects of the American dream – strong leadership, strong organisational culture and rugged individualism (Legge, 2005: 124). However, the analysis of the HRM and performance link is usually discussed without considering national, industry and organisational contexts (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). The differing contexts will be discussed in the following sections.

2.4.1 NATIONAL CULTURAL FACTORS

The Australian culture contains a strong element of egalitarianism and includes the concept of a ‘fair go’. This is linked to perceptions of fairness in policies such as performance appraisal (Kavanagh, Benson & Brown, 2007). Many Australians are also concerned with whether a manager is ‘a good bloke’ (there isn’t a polite female equivalent of this) (Kabanoff, Jimmieson & Lewis, 2000). In a relatively individualistic culture such as Australia, there is more emphasis on the participation of individual employees in HRM practices (Maley & Kramer, 2007) yet there have been relatively few Australian studies that have examined aspects of organisational culture that might reflect national culture (Su, Baird & Blair, 2009). In addition, there is insufficient research evidence about how culture can be managed, and how it impacts on organisational outcomes in Australian professional service firms (Teo et al, 2008). This raises the question of whether American or British results can be readily and easily transferred to other cultural contexts such as Australia (Hubbard et al, 2007; Lamond, 2002). Given the potential importance of cultural factors, international transferability of management practices has been questioned, as

attitudes towards HRM policy may significantly impact on its effectiveness in different contexts (Entrekin & Chung, 2001). Therefore, caution ought to be exercised in applying results of international research on HRM practices to Australian settings. Consideration should be given to behaviours and processes that are acceptable within the bounds of the organisational culture (Edgar & Geare, 2009).

There are important social and cultural components to the design and implementation of HRM policy (Fletcher, 2001). These relate to the social and motivational aspects inherent in dominant cultural relationships and attitudes concerning roles and behaviours of managers and employees (Groeschl, 2003; Paauwe, 2004). The nature and interpretation of employee feedback has organisational and wider cultural implications that can extend from a reluctance to seek feedback, to a failure to provide feedback being seen as a violation of employees' psychological contracts (Fenwick, De Cieri & Welch, 1999). Consequently, it has been argued that organisations should focus on developing a culture conducive to a supportive feedback environment that is positively associated with desired organisational outcomes (Anseel & Lievens, 2007; Steelman, Levy & Snell, 2004). Feedback methods are also culturally important, with qualitative feedback methods indicative of a more open and supportive management style (Anseel & Lievens, 2007). This suggests the use of location specific criteria that are perceived as being fair and equitable (Borkowski, 1999; London, Mone & Scott, 2004).

In Australia there is a strong emphasis on the developmental aspects of performance review rather than on performance outcomes and on an increased strategic focus (Compton, 2005; Maley & Kramar, 2007; Nankervis & Compton, 2006). For a developmental approach to be effective requires a supportive organisational culture that includes significant levels of trust

between employees and managers which can be developed by organisations consulting with employees on how performance should be assessed (Anseel & Lievens, 2007; Marr, 2007). Such trust can facilitate more honest communication and also enhances a sense of ownership by employees and managers in the performance management system (Chan et al, 2004; Fletcher, 2001). In Australia, approximately three-quarters of performance management systems are designed using internal expertise such as HR specialists and project teams (Compton, 2005). This approach is consistent with organisations in Europe (de Waal & Counet, 2009).

A relevant factor concerns employee preferences for management styles and how these may affect the nature and methodology used in a performance management system (Deery & Jago, 2001). The structure and level of formality that is desirable can be influenced by organisational and national cultural characteristics (Groeschl, 2003). In Australian organisations, there has been consideration of a preferred style that has been characterised as ‘captain-coach’ leadership where the leaders are part of the team (on the field of play), yet leading and coaching at the same time. (Hubbard et al, 2007: 147). This has similarities with the concept of ‘Level 5’ leadership that has a focus on long term success of an organisation where the leader’s style is one of encouraging employees rather than driving by force of personality (Collins & Porras, 1998). In hospitality organisations in Australia, a preference for a decisive management style was found (Deery & Jago, 2001). In the Australian organisations profiled in the book ‘The First XI’, people factors that were argued as important for success were: clear HRM processes, behavioural norms which are underpinned by strong organisational values, people taking responsibility for the performance of their part of the organisation, and getting open and direct feedback about what is and is not working (Hubbard et al, 2007).

2.4.2 SERVICE INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC SECTOR CONTEXT

In service industries, the role of HRM policies is more significant (Batt, 2002; Frenkel, 2000; Hoque, 1999; Peccei & Rosenthal, 2001; Wright & Snell, 1998). This is due to the importance of making use of intangible resources such as the skills of employees and the way people work together for the achievement of organisational goals (Bartel, 2004; Lengnick-Hall, 2009; Roehling et al, 2005). A high level of intangibility can make it more complicated to achieve a strong and consistent HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Teo et al (2008) found that an important component that impacted on the performance of professional service firms, located in Australia, was the alignment between structure, culture and HRM. In the Australian service context, there is a view that employees seek a personal relationship with their supervisors and to be involved in the pursuit of goals that they view as making a positive contribution (Hubbard et al, 2007).

Public sector reforms, that have occurred in a range of countries including Australia, have increased the focus on organisational performance, and hence, on HRM factors (McAdam, Hazlett & Casey, 2005). Australian research suggests such reforms can enhance the HR's function towards a more strategic role (Teo & Crawford, 2005). However, there is relatively little research that tests —.empirically the relationship between organizational elements and the performance of public sector organizations” (Carmeli & Tishler, 2004: 1259). This may be because defining goals and desired employee behaviours is more complex than in private sector environments (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Factors of intangibility and complexity of defining desired employee behaviours can increase the difficulty of implementing SHRM due to the

requirement to —.consider policy, practice and people in an integrated manner” (McAdam et al, 2005: 258).

Changes in the complexity of the operating environment of organisations, accountability requirements and expectations from customers and the general community, have resulted in public sector organisations having to demonstrate systems for monitoring performance and effective performance management approaches (Lawrie, Cobbold & Marshall, 2004; McAdam et al, 2005). There is contention as to the extent to which public sector organisations are able to adopt private sector performance management approaches, in part due to restrictions on the use of performance related remuneration in the sector (McAdam et al, 2005). Additionally, there is an argument that performance appraisals in the public sector could undermine ‘public service values’ (Redman & Wilkinson, 2006). Decisions on which HRM practices to adopt are shaped by balancing specific organisational demands and legislative requirements rather than adopting a private sector performance model (Yetano, 2009). Bartram, Stanton, Leggat, Casimir and Fraser’s (2007) findings showed significant differences in perceptions on SHRM between senior managers and HRM managers in Australian public health organisations. This also has implications for choosing appropriate theoretical frameworks to inform performance management research in the public sector (McAdam et al, 2005).

In Government owned organisations, the predominant culture can be described as bureaucratic with middle and senior leaders demonstrating characteristics of being —.risk adverse, conservative and mechanistic in outlook” (Compton, 2009: 86). It is argued that employees in the public and the not-for-profit sectors tend to be more motivated by intrinsic factors such as

commitment to the mission, individual development, and involvement in decision making, than are employees in the private sector (Akingbola, 2006).

2.4.3 EMERGENCY SERVICES FOCUS

Emergency service organisations are required to operate twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week, in an environment that necessitates time critical decisions (Bartolo & Furlonger, 2000; Waugh & Strelb, 2006). Such requirements, when combined with current organisational practices of decentralisation, a flatter hierarchy, and the use of a team focus (Caldwell, 2004), mean that the direct supervisor may not be in the best position to evaluate and provide direct feedback on an employee's performance (Williams, 2002). As a consequence, there has been an increase in the focus on drawing performance information from multiple sources (Nankervis & Compton, 2006). Linked to changes in public sector management has been an increase emphasis on the workforce of emergency service organisations reflecting the diversity of the community that they serve (Akingbola, 2006).

Whilst there has not been published research on HRM in Australian Fire Authorities, there is some material on Australian Police Organisations. Efforts by police organisations to impose performance management on police officers have been met by cynicism and passive resistance at both front line and supervisory levels (Gillespie, Sicard & Gardner, 2007: 170). There is higher union membership in the public sector that means that the introduction of new HRM strategies may need to be negotiated with employee representatives (Akingbola, 2006; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Teicher, Holland & Gough, 2006). Therefore, getting support for a new performance management approach, in a climate of cynicism, can arguably be enhanced by using a trial or

pilot process as recommended by the 1997 Wood Royal Commission into the NSW police force (Gillespie et al, 2007). In NSW, the first post 1997 performance appraisal system was not very successful whilst the WA Police Force ‘Developing People for Success’ program has not been fully or consistently applied (Gillespie et al, 2007). These results can inform the nature and process of developing a new HRM policy.

This analysis of the literature suggests that the case study organisation consider implications of cultural factors prior to implementing an HRM policy such as workplace feedback. Such factors include: historical cultural factors balanced with the current strategic direction; the core business of responding to emergency situations requiring time critical decisions; changing expectations of managers and employees towards a more inclusive approach to leadership, and awareness of relevant Australian cultural values.

2.5 WORKPLACE FEEDBACK AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The case study organisation originally planned to develop and implement a new performance management strategy. Performance management is a key HRM policy that can show the processes from SHRM to organisational outcomes as it is an area which directly involves line managers, requires skills and consistent implementation and is related to other HRM policy areas (McGovern et al, 1997). The proposition is that performance management is a HRM practice that aims to positively impact on employee attitudes so as to alter performance behaviour consistent with the organisation’s intentions (Gardner, Moynihan, Park & Wright, 2001). Employee job performance has been the most widely studied single factor in HRM and organisational behaviour fields (Bommer, Johnson, Rich, Podsakoff & Mackenzie, 1995).

However, after a review of organisational contextual factors, consistent with the content of Section 2.4, a decision was taken by the TFS to develop an approach to workplace feedback as a pre-condition to a full performance management strategy. For the purposes of the research, workplace feedback consists of day-to-day feedback on matters related to work performance primarily provided between supervisors and subordinates (Steelman, Levy & Snell, 2004). It is therefore distinguished from formal performance appraisal feedback that is typically provided on an annual basis (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). The detail of this process is outlined in Chapter Four: Case History.

Workplace feedback can enhance employee ‘line of sight’ between their individual or group behaviour and performance (Boswell, 2006; Lengnick-Hall, 2009; Wright et al, 2003). Feedback can positively impact on employee motivation (Taormina & Gao, 2009). Whilst most of the focus on performance management is on the individual focus, it can equally be used for team performance (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008). Feedback is at the core of social processes within a HRM system (Levy & Williams, 2004). Effective feedback facilitates organisational responsiveness and is a necessary feature for effective performance management (Teo et al, 2008; Wright & Snell, 1998). Feedback can be either one way from manager to subordinate, but is increasingly seen as a two way process (Anseel & Lievens, 2007). Feedback is an event that occurs in the context of working interpersonal relationships between a manager and employee and involves a complex array of perceptions (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; Davis & Fedor, 2002).

Bradley and Ashkanasy, (2001) argue that the provision of regular feedback to employees is one of the most important skills in managing employees. The giving and receiving of constructive feedback requires skills that can be developed (Lansbury, 1981). Regular feedback using a

coaching style permits smaller and more frequent alterations to behaviour, and feedback is more accepted when it is perceived as regular, timely and accurate (Maley & Kramar, 2007). From the organisation's perspective, feedback aims to maintain and stimulate levels of effort directed towards the organisation's goals (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). From the individual's perspective, feedback satisfies the need for information about how an employee is performing against expectations and potentially against other employees (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004).

A key component of the link between feedback and performance is that employees have an understanding and have information about how their work contributes to the organisation; that is, they have a 'clear line of sight' (Boswell, 2006) between their performance and organisational performance (Kaplan & Norton, 2004). Clear line of sight involves both understanding organisational objectives and how individual behaviour can contribute to achievement of those objectives (Lengnick-Hall et al, 2009).

Informal feedback can be utilised to resolve uncertainty, and can support a positive and supportive working environment that contributes to motivating individuals and teams (Connell & Nolan, 2004). However, a 1996 meta-analysis of feedback research found variable affects with up to one-third of cases of feedback producing negative results (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Canadian research in the finance sector found that the quality of the feedback system, together with the quality of communication between managers and employees, had significant impacts on performance by different branches (Bartel, 2004). Seventy-eight percent of Australian employees in healthcare multi-nationals expressed dissatisfaction with feedback received, and ninety-five percent indicated a lack of follow up after the feedback had been received (Maley & Kramar, 2007).

Positive aspects of providing feedback include that it can increase job satisfaction and reduce stress that had developed due to uncertainty (Teo & Waters, 2002). Feedback contributes to employees' perceptions about the organisation (Lavelle, McMahan & Harris, 2009). Understanding how people respond to differing types of feedback is a key element in the design of feedback systems (Davis & Fedor, 2002).

Prior to responding to feedback, employees have to accurately understand the nature of the feedback, its context, and the motives behind the feedback, and to decide on their level of comfort with the feedback (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004). The level of trust in the working relationship is a key factor in employees' assessment of the motives behind workplace feedback, and will also impact on the employee's willingness to seek additional feedback by way of clarification, or in future work settings (Levy & Williams, 2004). The greater the level of trust and openness in the supervisor/employee relationship, and between employees and the HRM department, the less likely is the employee to seek retaliation against the source of negative feedback (Marr, 2007; Risher, 2002).

Connell and Nolan (2004:54) drawing from fifty-two interviews of Australian managers and employees found that "...within both companies interviewees expressed a need for more informal feedback concurrent with the belief that some managers would not have the skills to dispense effective feedback". This suggests that organisations assess managerial feedback skills and provide appropriate skill development, if required, prior to implementing a performance management policy. HRM policy development can be described as a set of iterative steps with the HR function, line managers and employees all playing key roles (Paauwe, 2004).

This section has discussed the nature of workplace feedback and its relationship to the more general area of performance management. It has highlighted relevant considerations and the role of the various actors in the effective provision of workplace feedback. The next sections will discuss the roles and perspectives of each of these groups.

2.6 THE ROLE OF THE HR FUNCTION

This section links with the discussion in Section 2.2 as it covers strategic and operational aspects of the HR Function's roles that relate to the preliminary HR framework (Guest 1987, 1997, 2002), and as set out in Section 2.2.1. It is also the first of three sections that cover the roles of key actors in the framework: being the HR function, line managers and employees.

2.6.1 ISSUES IN VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL FIT

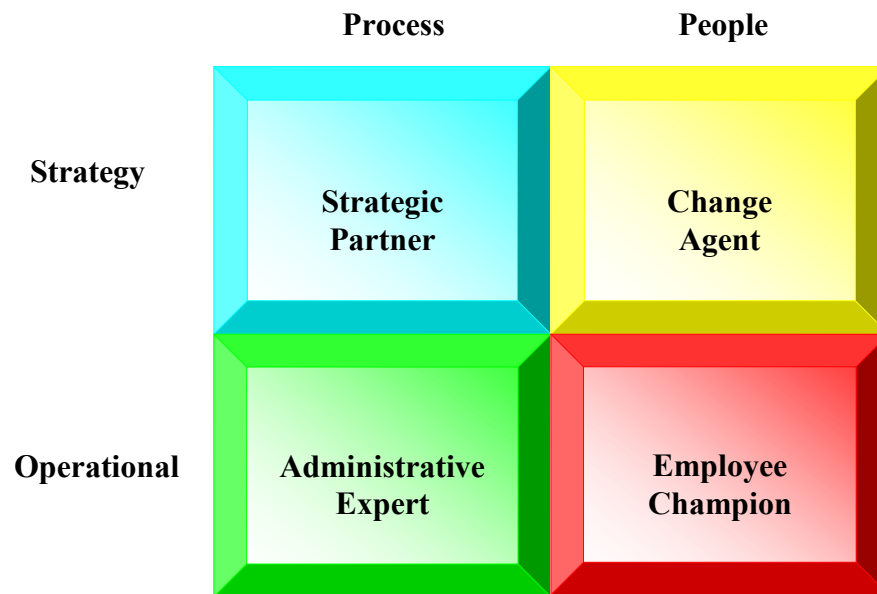
As SHRM is a construct designed to guide practice, it —.requires interpretation and adaptation by HR practitioners to ensure the most suitable alignment of fit between HRM and business strategies and plans” (Compton, 2009: 83). Effective implementation of HRM policies creates a set of internally consistent employment policies intended to produce employee commitment, flexibility and quality (Gratton & Truss, 2003; Guest, 1997; Legge, 2005). Such consistent HRM practices are argued to more effectively impact on employee performance than individual HRM practices (Wright & Kehoe, 2008). HRM practices need to be coherent, easy to understand and interpret, and complement rather than undermine other HRM areas (Gratton & Truss, 2003). HRM policies also need to be consistent with other organisational systems (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Wood, 1999).

A coherent set of HRM policies and practices is socially complex (Hesketh & Fleetwood, 2006). They include linkages between senior management, the HR function, line managers and employees in an organisationally specific configuration (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Harris et al, 2002). It would be appropriate for firms to carefully consider the content, development and implementation of an individual HRM policy area such as performance management to maximise the level of vertical and horizontal integration (Gratton & Truss, 2003). Achieving vertical and horizontal fit can increase the strength of an organisation's HRM system. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) argue that a 'strong' HRM system will have characteristics of distinctiveness (which fosters the extent to which employee attention and interest is obtained), consistency (across policies, time and in how behaviour is rewarded or otherwise), and consensus (which incorporates agreement among HR decision makers and the extent to which employees perceive the practices are providing fairness and justice).

2.6.2 THE ULRICH HRM FRAMEWORK

A framework for examining the role of the HR function was proposed by Ulrich (1997, 1998), and identifies four sets of roles, or quadrants, in all of which the HR function needs to perform effectively at the same time. The framework can be expressed in Figure 2-4 below:

Figure 2-4 Representation of Ulrich Framework



(Based on: Ulrich, 1997, 1998)

Top left quadrant: HR as a strategic partner

The strategic partner role recognises a full vertical integration (i.e. vertical fit) between the organisation's objectives/strategies and HRM policies and practices and links to the first of Guest's challenges (1987, 1997, 2002), as described in Section 2.2.1. In this role, HR managers work with line managers to link organisational strategy to HRM practice (Compton, 2009). In other words, "...HRM managers need to be part of the strategic planning mechanism so there is a match between HRM policy areas and strategic business initiatives developed at the senior committee level" (Sheehan, 2005:194). In this view, the HR managers/executives need to earn a position at the senior committee level by convincing organisational leaders they can deliver at the strategic level (Meisinger, 2005; Mithen & Edwards, 2003). For this to occur, HR Managers generally require direct access to the Chief Executive (Sheehan, 2005), an effective informal

network with key senior executives, as well as having the requisite competencies and motivation to undertake a full strategic partner role (Pietersen & Engelbrecht, 2005).

The extent to which the HR function has succeeded in becoming a strategic business partner is the subject of debate. One element of achieving this status is having the necessary knowledge of the business (Armstrong, 2005; Ulrich et al, 2007), as well as contributing —.to the conversation around the strategy table” (Meisinger, 2005: 190). For vertical fit to be effective requires the HR function to be an integral component of the organisation’s strategic planning process (Guest & King, 2004; Sheehan, 2005). The strategic partner role has become the most popular of the four roles for the majority of HR specialists (Francis & Keegan, 2006). However, the capability of HR specialists to be an effective strategic partner will normally require a reduction in operational activities (Caldwell, 2008).

In the UK, Caldwell, (2008) found that organisations with more than 1,000 employees and those undergoing significant change were more likely to report the HR function acting as a strategic business partner. In Australia, a joint report by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) and the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) found that for HR professionals to be more accepted as strategic business partners required the HR professionals to demonstrate stronger understanding of the key drivers of the business (Mithen & Edwards, 2003). A survey of HR professionals in Australia found 49 per cent of respondents indicated that the HR function is actively involved in organisational strategy (Sheehan et al, 2006). Australian case study research into professional service firms found a partial adoption of the strategic partnership role (Teo, Lakhani, Brown & Malmi, 2008).

Top right quadrant: Change Agent

To assist the organisation to adapt to altered circumstances and to contribute to cultural change, the HR function also requires change agent capability. This is a strategic role that has developed in conjunction with the growth in emphasis in SHRM (Caldwell, 2004). It is often argued that the HRM system within organisations is hard to change quickly due to inertia and not being able to devote sufficient resources to new or amended HRM policies. HRM policies and procedures also take time to impact on employee behaviour and hence organisational outcomes (Purcell et al, 2003). While HR professionals have a role in facilitating organisational changes, they provide support rather than actually undertaking the change (Caldwell, 2004).

Bottom right quadrant: Employee Champion

Ulrich (1997, 1998) referred to the role of employee champion that, in part, became called the role of credible activist in the HRM Competency Model developed later by Ulrich et al, (2007). The role of the employee champion is focussed on employee commitment and competence (Caldwell, 2004). This role blends a face-to-face employee focus with operational problems (Francis & Keegan, 2006). A key aspect of the employee champion role relates to providing a mechanism for employee voice; however, in UK research, a low percentage of HR specialists identified with, or wished to be seen in, employee champion roles (Caldwell, 2004). This suggests that the concept of employee champion may not transfer well to organisational settings outside the United States.

The Employee Champion role has a focus on responding to and resolving operation problems of employees (Paauwe, 2004). One key outcome of HR specialists becoming effective problem

solvers that result in fair and dignified treatment of employees is the development of personal credibility (Francis & Keegan 2006; Meisinger, 2005). The problem solving role extends to issues between groups of employees and between employees and managers. It therefore includes traditional industrial roles (Paauwe, 2004). For the purposes of this thesis, this HR role will be referred to as ‘_Problem Solver’ to more accurately reflect the role played by the HR given a pluralist employees relations environment in Australian (Hubbard, Samuel, Cocks & Heap, 2007; Sheehan et al, 2006; Teicher, Holland & Gough, 2006).

Bottom left quadrant: Administrative Expert

The final area of the Ulrich framework is that of administrative expert, which involves the use of technical HRM knowledge and the provision of well designed and internally consistent HRM policies, procedures and systems that that are easy for line managers to understand and apply (Purcell et al, 2003). Effective delivery of HRM services is a pre-condition for the HR function being able to make a strategic contribution to the organisation (Meisinger, 2005). In their 2005 meta-review of published journal research, Boselie et al (2005: 74) —. found little attention paid to the quality of the implementation of HRM as a necessary condition for its effectiveness”. Additionally, the implementing processes for human resource policy are not well researched (Cheng, Dainty & Moore, 2007).

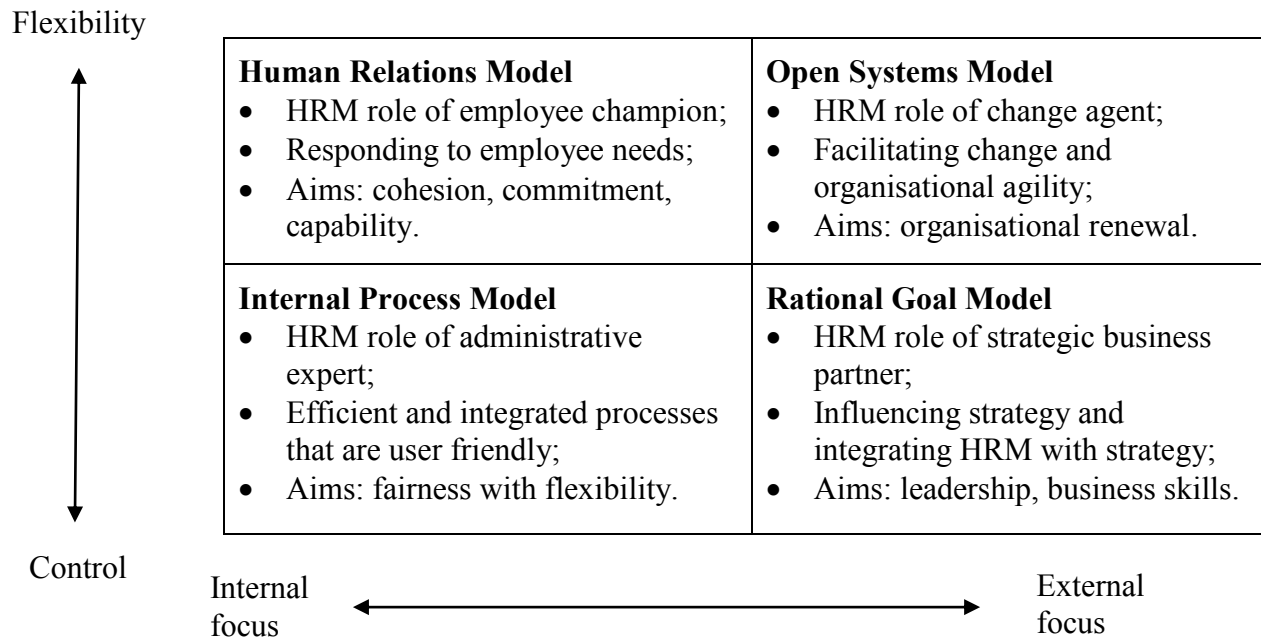
Ulrich’s framework has been critiqued, particularly by European writers, as being unitarist and sweeping, thus underplaying of the conflict between the demands of the different roles (Caldwell, 2004). In UK qualitative research, HR specialists found it difficult to increase their strategic focus due to operational constraints and insufficient influence on strategy (Caldwell, 2003). The Ulrich (1997, 1998) framework was further extended by Panayotopoulou et al,

(2003) who integrated the four quadrants with the Competing Values Framework (CVF) proposed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983). The CVF is explained in the following section.

2.6.3 THE COMPETING VALUES FRAMEWORK

The role of the HR function includes seeking to balance the interests and values of a range of internal and external stakeholders (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Francis & Keegan, 2006; Ulrich et al, 2007). The CVF postulates that organisational effectiveness depends on the ability to address multiple goals simultaneously based on four value sets, consisting of responses across two dimensions: flexibility versus control and internal versus external focus (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). The CVF assists in identifying key competing challenges for HR specialists (Boselie et al, 2005). Despite the claims of Ulrich (1997, 1998), there remains potential conflict between HR being a strategic partner and problem solver as there are likely to be occasions when the role of HRM specialists in meeting organisational objectives may be to the detriment of employees (Guest, 2001; Sheehan et al, 2006). There may also be conflicting goals across HRM policies (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). The CVF framework can be represented by Figure 2-5 below:

Figure 2-5 Competing Values Framework



(Adapted from Panayotopoulou et al, 2003)

The CVF suggests a dynamic and adaptive approach to HRM and in such an environment, effective communication between the HR function and executives, and also between managers and employees, is increasingly important (Boselie et al, 2005). The changing role of the HR function to take a more advisory role increases the importance of effective communication (McGovern et al, 1997). Environmental change, together with larger organisations and greater complexity of operations, increases the pressure on the HR function to work with senior management to develop HRM policies that balance consistency between departments/functions with flexibility and responsiveness (Panayotopoulou et al, 2003). Line managers can be under conflicting pressures and constraints from senior managers, the HR function and from service delivery demands (Townsend, Wilkinson, Bamber & Allan, 2009). The CVF contributes to theory building by explicitly including consideration of competing factors such as resources and the timing of HRM initiatives into the process of SHRM implementation.

2.6.4 HR'S RELATIONSHIP WITH SENIOR MANAGERS

A key function of the HR professional is to influence senior management as to the appropriate set of HRM strategies and to convince line managers of the value of HRM practices (Boselie et al, 2005; Compton, 2009). The working relationship between HR specialists and senior managers was rated the most important HRM factor in UK research (Watson Maxwell & Farquharson, 2007). An Australian survey of HR professionals found that in 2005, 68% of organisations had HR representation on the senior executive committee (Sheehan et al, 2006).

Increased devolvement of HRM activities to line managers changes the mix of roles for the HR function (Nehles et al, 2006). UK research suggests that line managers believed that deficiencies in HRM policy result in poor HRM outcomes (Renwick, 2003). SHRM can be more easily implemented when there is a strategic relationship between the HR function and line managers, rather than there being a focus on individual HRM policy areas (Becker & Huselid, 2006). The extent to which HR managers have effective relationships with the most senior people in the organisation will influence the level of resources provided to HRM activities (Armstrong, 2005; Meisinger, 2005; Wei, 2006). The nature of organisational values, and how they influence senior managers' behaviour towards the HR function, influences line manager and employee responses to HRM practices (Watson et al, 2007). Part of the role of the HR function is to influence the various interest groups in organisations, and minimise the constraints imposed on the development and implementation of HRM policies, which can involve designing and/or delivering training for managers and employees (Kane et al, 1999; McAdam et al, 2005). HR managers can also increase their influence by increasing visibility through visiting operational parts of the organisation (Watson et al, 2007; Nehles et al, 2006).

A lack of management support (including not having a key organisational member appointed to have ownership of the system), can result in insufficient resources provided for implementation and maintenance of the HRM practice (de Waal & Counet, 2009).

2.6.5 CREDIBILITY OF THE HR FUNCTION

For the HR function to be effective in contributing to the strategic management process, both its status and influence are critical factors (Teo et al, 2008). The credibility of the HR function requires sustainable and trustworthy relationships with all levels in the organisation (Paauwe, 2004; Watson et al, 2007). The capabilities and credibility of members of the HR function influences the organisation's ability to develop and implement an effective strategic and coherent HRM system (Ulrich et al, 2007; Wei 2006). Being able to provide responsive and cost-effective HRM systems is a key component of the credibility of the HR function (Caldwell, 2004). Being visible and communicating directly in managers' workplaces contributes to increased credibility (Watson et al, 2007). Additionally, HR function's credibility is affected by a lack of responsiveness to requests for advice or in following up outcomes from performance management and career planning (McGovern et al, 1997).

In summary, the literature suggests that working effectively with senior executives and line managers is essential for HR specialists to plan and develop HRM policies. Providing advice and support in the implementation and the way policies are sustained is also central to an effective HR function. At the end of the literature review, the frameworks and models will be consolidated.

2.7 THE ROLE OF LINE MANAGERS

As discussed earlier, effective implementation of HRM policies and practices requires close cooperation between the HR function and line managers (Becker & Huselid, 2006; McGregor, 1960: 24). Using the preliminary framework outlined in Sections 2.2.3, —.the third aspect of integration therefore concerns the attitudes and behaviour of line-managers” (Guest, 1987: 512). Major barriers to line managers effectively implementing HRM practices are —.heavy workloads and short-term job pressures” (Watson et al, 2007: 44).The manner in which line managers implement HRM policies and practices reflects both their understanding of and commitment to, a focus on the people management aspect of their roles; and this level of commitment is variable at best (Redman & Wilkinson, 2006). In simple terms managers need to —...teat their people well‘ (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005:27). For this to occur, line managers need to have the capability, motivation and support from both senior managers and the HR function (Hope-Hailey et al, 2005). A SHRM approach implies a more inclusive style of management including activities such as coaching and guidance to support the implementation of new HRM policies (Caldwell, 2003; Watson et al, 2007). The HR function has a role in the development of leadership practices to support management styles conducive to the effective implementation of HRM practices (Becker & Huselid, 2006).

Less than half of the managers, surveyed by McGovern et al (1997) in their seven-company study, considered implementation of HR policies to be an important factor in the assessment of their performance. Further, within firms there are likely to be variations in how line managers actually implement HRM policies (Wright & Haggerty, 2005). How HRM practices are implemented by line managers influences employee behaviour and hence organisational

outcomes (Harney & Jordan, 2008). If line managers deliver HRM practices such as performance reviews poorly, it can result in employees becoming demotivated (Milliman et al, 2002). It is part of the role of HR function to provide a clear value proposition to line managers about changes to their HRM role (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008: 142). This can be difficult in organisational environments of short term managerial pressures (Francis & Keegan, 2006; Harney & Jordan, 2008; McGovern et al, 1997). Nehles et al (2006) argue that these issues require further research.

The responsibility for implementing HRM policies is an increasing part of the role of all managers (Brandl et al, 2009; Edgar & Geare, 2009; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Redman, Snape, Thompson & Yan. 2000; Renwick, 2003; Ulrich, 1998). The major reasons for this devolution of HRM responsibilities to line managers include providing a timely and comprehensive approach to HRM, locating HRM accountability with managers responsible for people, and to quicken decision-making on HRM issues (Renwick, 2003: 262). The results of the UK's 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) indicate an increase in the direct communication between line managers and employees (Kersley et al, 2005). This direct communication can lead to increases in both the responsiveness and capacity to reflect local (or workplace) conditions (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). However, there can be complexity in the relationships between managers and employees that also impact of the effectiveness of HRM practices (Stanton et al, 2010). Francis and Keegan's (2006) research based on interviews with UK HR Specialists suggests mixed results about the effectiveness of devolving of HRM practices to line managers.

Line managers demonstrating their support for HRM strategies and policies is a fundamental link in the process of the achievement of organisational outcomes (Brandl, et al, 2009; Boxall &

Purcell, 2000; Wei, 2006). However, there is evidence that the devolution of HRM duties can be resisted or given a low priority by some line managers (Brandl et al, 2009; Currie & Proctor, 2001; Nehles et al, 2006). McGovern et al (1997: 12) found that line manager behaviour may "...distort, and possibly even undermine, the contribution which HR policies are supposed to make...". How line managers implement HRM practices impacts on the employees' perceptions of what is important to the organisation (Naumann & Bennett, 2000; Perry & Kulik, 2008).

Line managers' willingness to perform HRM duties can be positively affected by support from the HR function providing timely technical advice and in providing effective HRM policies/procedures (Nehles et al 2006; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Perry and Kulik (2008) in an Australian case study on performance management found that HR specialists providing advice and technical expertise to line managers, during the early stages of the policy implementation, increased line manager competence and their support for the HRM practices.

Personal motivation was found to be the highest ranked factor influencing line manager involvement in HRM activities, such as performance management in research based on seven case studies of UK organisations (McGovern et al, 1997). Detailed and specific training for managers in the organisation's HRM policy content and implementation strategy together with support from peers, managers and the HR function are important components for the policies to be consistently applied and to be effective (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008; McGovern et al, 1997; Nehles et al 2006). There is a requirement for effective mechanisms to make line managers accountable for the HRM component of their role (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Paauwe, 2004).

This section discusses the literature on the role of line managers in the delivery of HRM practices to employees. It illustrates the relevance of the third test in the Preliminary framework (see Figure 2-2). The importance of the relationships and respective responsibilities of line managers and the HR function in implementing HRM practices was highlighted. The discussion contributes to theory building by providing support for including relationships and roles in a developing an integrated SHRM process model.

2.8 EMPLOYEE RESPONSES

The fourth component of the preliminary framework (see Section 2.2.1) is the response of employees to HRM policies and to the behaviour of line managers (Guest, 2002). The knowledge and attitudes of employees towards HRM in general, and to individual policies in particular, will directly impact on the success of HRM policies in achieving organisational outcomes (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Wei, 2006). HRM policies produce subjective perceptions from employees, which precede both the attitudes and the behaviours that result in employee performance (Nishii et al, 2008; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Giving employees the capabilities and confidence to work effectively is a core objective of SHRM (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). Employee behaviours are influenced by the effectiveness of SHRM strategy implementation (Becker & Huselid, 2006). Francis & Keegan, (2006) argue that the SHRM literature underestimates the complexity of the impact of HRM practices on employee outcomes.

However, there can be a gap between HRM policies as developed and as perceived by employees (Lengnick-Hall et al, 2009; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). The causal model discussed in section 2.4.3 provides a theoretical explanation of the discrepancies between intended HRM practices

and how they are perceived by employees (Harney & Jordan, 2008). To paraphrase Legge (2005), there remains a gulf between the rhetoric and realities of actual HRM strategies (Compton, 2009). In a UK survey across seven organisations, only twenty percent of 4,500 employees responded positively towards the proposition that their HR function had ‘a clear strategy guiding its activities’ (Gratton & Truss, 2003: 74). In general, research on employees’ experience of HRM practices has been the subject of limited research (Boselie et al, 2005). The next sections will discuss aspects of employee responses to HRM policies as delivered.

2.8.1 EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

Organisational commitment is the strength of an employee’s identification and involvement with their employing organisation, and is said to have three major components: “...a belief in and acceptance of goals and values, a willingness to exert effort, and a strong desire to maintain membership” (Wright & Kehoe, 2008: 9). Commitment is a key HRM outcome in the Purcell and Hutchinson causal model (see section 2.3.3) and links to flexibility and the achievement of organisational outcomes (Caldwell, 2003). There is evidence from an assessment of prior research that HRM policies and practices can have a positive influence on employee commitment (Wright et al, 2003). This has been seen, for example, from an Australian manufacturing industry study (Su et al, 2009); an Indian study on software professionals (Paul & Anantharaman, 2004); a South African study of front-line employees (Browning 2006); a multi-industry study of mature workers in Canada (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008), and research on white collar workers in Singapore (Teo & Waters, 2002).

Commitment is an important antecedent of improved performance (Peccei & Rosenthal, 2001; Purcell et al, 2003; Redman & Snape, 2005). An individual may have multiple commitments that are internal and external to the organisation while work behaviours are more influenced by commitments to people who are closer and have more frequent contact (Redman & Snape, 2005; Townsend et al, 2009). The level of commitment to colleagues or the direct supervisor can impact on commitment to the organisation (Wright & Kehoe, 2008). Employee attitudes are at least partly influenced by factors shared by workgroup members who reflect their common experience in how the line manager implements HRM policies/practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Guest & Conway, 2004; Nishii et al, 2008). In high contact service organisations, local commitment to colleagues and line managers is particularly important (Harney & Jordan, 2008). Low employee commitment from such factors as perceptions of injustice or unfair treatment can reduce employee willingness to accept and respond to HRM policy implementation (Cheng et al, 2007; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). Commitment to those communicating HRM practices can influence employee perceptions and responses, particularly where there is a perception of mixed messages (Townsend et al, 2009).

2.8.2 ORGANISATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR (OCB)

Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) was originally conceptualised as behaviour where employees go beyond minimum requirements in performance or behaviour (Organ, 1988). It has since been more tightly described as contextual performance (Motowidlo & van Scotter, 1994; Organ, 1997; Wright & Haggerty, 2005). Contextual performance covers a range of behaviours such as —.cooperation, dedication, enthusiasm and persistence” (Fletcher, 2001: 475) that are outside the narrow confines of a job description, and are beyond the basic employment contract

(Fox, 1974; Wright & Haggerty, 2005). OCBs are behaviours consistent with those the employer may seek to elicit from introducing new or varied HRM policies and practices (Nishii et al, 2008).

OCBs by their nature are better examined at the individual and unit levels (Nishii et al, 2008). It is also argued that committed employees, because they feel a positive emotional attachment to the organisation, are more likely to respond with OCBs, and thus commitment is an antecedent of OCB (Nishii et al, 2008; Redman & Snape, 2005). US research suggests that OCB is a more important factor for higher than for lower performing employees (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). A sustained level of trust between managers and employees is an important factor in influencing OCB behaviour (Cheng et al, 2007; Sharkie, 2009). Organisations aiming to encourage OCBs should try to increase the levels of employee commitment to both supervisors and colleagues (Redman & Snape, 2005).

Emergency service workers face unpredictable situations and rely on members of their team to respond appropriately (Fletcher, 2001; Waugh & Strelb, 2006). There is greater reliance on employee behaviours that fall outside the strict boundaries of role definitions (or job descriptions), and therefore fall within the scope of OCB (Den Hartog et al, 2004; Nishii et al, 2008). In times of organisational change, because roles are altering, employee preparedness to engage in OCBs is important in achieving desired organisational outcomes (Lavelle et al, 2009). Therefore, employee response to HRM practices are a relevant factor in whether they are prepared to engage in OCB behaviour that will contribute to the achievement of organisational outcomes.

2.8.3 EMPLOYEE ACCEPTANCE OF HRM PRACTICES

Employees will respond attitudinally and behaviourally largely based on how they view management's purpose in implementing the HRM practices that are delivered to them (Nishii et al, 2008). In broad terms, the employee response will be based on whether the employees perceive that HRM policies are treating them like assets or like costs (Boxall & Purcell, 2008; Nishii et al 2008). The success of an organisation's approach to performance appraisal/performance management can be significantly affected by the level of employee acceptance, which can be a product of their previous experience (Den Hartog et al, 2004; Taormina & Gao, 2009; Wright & Kehoe, 2008). How employees perceive HRM practices will be affected by their past experiences with the organisation. This can result in them being sceptical of the intent and value of HRM policies (Kane et al, 1999). In a study of the US military, for example, it was found that the nature of the performance appraisal system, its tools and techniques, as well as employee levels of motivation and trust, were important factors in employee acceptance of performance management (Hedge & Teachout, 2000).

User acceptability can be enhanced by involving employees in developing the organisation's approach to managing employees (Taormina & Gao, 2009). Organisations that specifically incorporate employees in decisions about the methods of managing performance, and treat employees with respect, are likely to increase employee acceptance (Wright & Kehoe, 2008). The effect of HRM policies on employees (Ramsay et al, 2000), and the response of increasingly well-educated employees to these policies, has been raised, particularly in the UK (Boxall & Purcell, 2008; Guest, 2002; Guest et al, 2000). Research sponsored by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has found that organisations which implement HRM

practices that are 'people centric', tend to have employees who are more satisfied and committed, which in turn results in positive productivity, quality, and financial performance outcomes (Guest et al, 2000). Such responses impact on employees' causal explanations of the firm's motivations for implementing HRM practices (Nishii et al, 2008).

How organisations actually implement HRM policies and practices impacts on employee perceptions of the level of fairness demonstrated (Lavelle et al, 2009). The use of hard performance measures can undermine trust between employees and managers (Marr, 2007). Using steering committees or working parties consisting of managers, HRM professionals and employees, that actively encourage employee input, can contribute to the acceptability of the final process (Lansbury, 1981). This is because employees perceive they have some ownership rather than being merely consumers of a HRM product (Hope Hailey et al, 2005).

The way in which line managers deliver HRM policies to their employees can influence the level of employee commitment to their job and to their employer (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). It is argued that there is a positive link between the extent to which employees believe they are seen by their employer as an asset and their view of the employment relationship, which in turn has an impact on their willingness to reciprocate with increased behavioural commitment (Nishii, et al, 2008). A further factor is the employees' perception of the level of support they receive from their workgroup or team (Lavelle et al, 2009).

Within medium and large organisations it is likely that HRM practices will be viewed differently by different individuals and groups of employees (Nishii et al 2008). These differences may be

influenced by past experience with the organisation, work level, or work location, particularly if it is distant from 'head office' (Wright & Kehoe, 2008).

2.9 COMMUNICATING HRM PRACTICES

Employee communication is increasingly viewed as a core component of effective SHRM (Caldwell, 2004). A component of a strong HR system is that employees hear the message as intended and choose a desired response (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Townsend et al, 2009).

Timely and clear communication is an important component of general feedback to employees about how well the organisation is performing (Panayotopoulou et al, 2003). Such communication can impact on employee perceptions about the organisation's approach to managing people (Wright & Kehoe, 2008). It can also contribute to developing and maintaining employee line of sight to the organisation's SHRM objectives (Boswell, 2006; Lengnick-Hall et al, 2009).

With increased organisational complexity and accountability requirements, effective internal communication becomes more difficult (Lawrie et al, 2004). Line managers are in a strong position to decide which information about HRM practices is communicated and the manner in which that communication is delivered (Townsend et al, 2009). Inconsistent or conflicting communication, either directly from the HR function, or from line managers who are implementing the HRM policy, can result in confusion, disillusionment or similar negative reactions (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Cheng et al, 2007; Kavanagh et al, 2007; Sharkie, 2009). How line managers communicate to employees impacts on employee behavioural responses and organisational outcomes (Townsend et al, 2009; Watson et al, 2007).

Clarity of communication that is integrated with HRM training and development activities can increase employee perception of fair and equitable treatment (Lavelle et al, 2009). When communication programmes are perceived as being unsuccessful, a common attribution is there was a lack of genuineness in the organisation's intentions to involve employees (Chan et al, 2004). UK Public Sector research demonstrated that a lack of a comprehensive communication programme undermined the effectiveness of the performance management approach that was implemented (McAdam et al, 2005). HRM practices that specifically include, in an integrated manner, employee communication tend to assist organisational responsiveness and change capability (Chan et al, 2004). Regular and consistent communication can assist in maintaining the momentum of the implementation of HRM practices (Lengnick-Hall et al, 2009; Watson et al, 2007). Therefore, communication that contributes to employee understanding of the intent and content of the new HRM policy plays an integral role in whether the HRM practices are accepted and effective.

2.10 IMPLEMENTING SHRM

There have been calls for extending SHRM theory to focus on effective implementation of strategy to better explain the contribution of SHRM to organisational outcomes (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Paauwe, 2009). The development of HRM practices is iterative and includes feedback loops; hence, looking at the process of implementation necessitates a longitudinal approach (Paauwe, 2004). As linkages between SHRM strategy and practice are complex, the manner by which HRM policies are implemented influences organisational outcomes (Caldwell, 2004). Research in the UK suggests that implementation processes present challenges and can be more important than the quality of the HRM policy itself (Cheng et al, 2007). A further issue is

that the time and resources required implementing and maintaining effective HRM practices can be underestimated by organisations (Williams, 2002). In implementing SHRM, factors such as culture, climate and leadership shape the design, pace of change and level of acceptance (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Paauwe, 2009). SHRM theory should incorporate contextual factors as well as seeking to explain the processes within the black box (Harney & Jordan, 2008).

Intended HRM practices may be different from actual HRM practices as experienced by employees, which strengthens the need for a focus on implementation issues (Lengnick-Hall et al, 2009). Such implementation issues include the degree of common perception amongst line managers and how the HR function, and line managers, contribute to maintaining employee line of sight to the objectives of the HRM practices (Lengnick-Hall et al, 2009). Becker & Huselid (2006: 919) argue for future SHRM research to consider “...the role of line managers in implementing a workforce strategy”.

2.11 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review has discussed SHRM theory and research literature relevant to the case organisation's Australian context. The impact of SHRM on organisational outcomes, and theoretical and methodological issues, has been covered. The roles and inter-relationships between the HR function, line managers and employees in the development of a new HRM policy have been discussed. There have been calls for more comprehensive models or frameworks to be developed so as to enhance examination of the impact of SHRM on firm performance at different levels of analysis (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Wright & Kehoe, 2008).

The Harvard model (Beer et al, (1984) has been used to discuss the contextual elements of SHRM, with a preliminary framework, based on the work of Guest (1987, 1997, 2002), providing a basis for discussing the major steps in and tests of SHRM. Ulrich's Framework (1997, 1998) and the Competing Values Framework (Panayotopoulou et al, (2003) have been used to discuss the relevant roles of the HR function and its relationships with senior managers, line managers and employees. The Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) causal model of employee performance has been discussed as a contribution to uncovering the processes within the so-called Black Box and to further examining the 'employee response' element of the preliminary framework. Each of these models/frameworks contributes to examining the process of SHRM and its outcomes. To move towards a more comprehensive framework that is able to inform the process and implementation of SHRM in practice, a preliminary tabular framework has been developed. A key element of this tabular framework is a focus on the interaction between organisational culture, organisational strategy, the level of complementarities between individual HRM policies, and the manner in which they are developed and implemented (Carmeli & Tishler, 2004). It also reflects the network of relationships and interdependencies between the actors in achieving desired organisational outcomes from the development and implementation of HRM policies. The review of the literature highlights the importance of including both line manager and employee behavioural responses in research on the relationship between HRM practices and organisational outcomes (Harney & Jordan, 2008).

Figure 2-6: Preliminary tabular framework

Key roles			HRM roles	Employee Roles
Executive	Line Managers	HRM function		
Strategic Direction	Influence on culture and direction	Strategic partner & change agent	Vertical fit: ‘context’ HRM policies consistent with organisation’s context, vision, goals and objectives	Perceptions of senior management intent
Resources & Support for HRM function	Implementing HRM policies & practices	Administrative expert	Horizontal fit: ‘consistency’ Internally consistent HR policies and practices	Perception of HRM policies
Modelling behaviour and managing the line	Providing opportunities for employees	Change agent & problem solver	Managerial support: ‘implementation’ Line managers implementing HRM policies and practices in an explicitly supportive manner	Attitudes such as commitment and trust
Modelling behaviour and consistency of approach	Day to day feedback	Administrative expert & problem solver	Employee responses to HRM policies and practices	Performance including OCBs

The purpose of this preliminary tabular framework has been to inform and examine the development, and commencement, of a workplace feedback HRM policy (Chan et al, 2004), and to contribute to the development of the research questions and to the methodology for the research.

2.12 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research opportunity involved the use of a longitudinal case study approach to investigate the interrelationship between contextual factors and the relationships between the HR function, line managers and employees in the development and implementation of a new HRM policy. It thus involves further explicit integration of an approach informed by relevant literature as summarised in previous sections. The research also aims to bridge the theory-practice gap by examining the development and implementation of SHRM in practice, by exploring the manner in which a HR function managed relationships and competing priorities. It is intended, thus, that light may be shed inside the so-called Black Box. The research questions derived from the literature review are:

Research Question 1: *What are the relevant contextual issues important for an organisation to consider in developing a new human resource policy?*

Research Question 2: *What are the challenges for the HR function in meeting the four tests drawn from the Guest framework?*

Research Question 3: *How can an integrated SHRM process model assist a public sector organisation to design and progress towards implementation of a new HRM policy?*

2.13 CONCLUSIONS TO LITERATURE REVIEW

This Chapter has reviewed relevant literature on strategic human resource management (SHRM), its contribution to organisational outcomes. It has reviewed the role of workplace feedback in a contemporary approach to the implementation of SHRM. As the focus of this thesis is a single case study, the literature review also discussed contextual factors relevant for an Australian public sector service organisation.

The Chapter commenced with a preliminary conceptual framework that was enhanced by including additional factors in the process from HRM policy development, through implementation and to organisational outcomes. The roles of the key actors and the interdependence between the HR function, line managers and employees were highlighted. Drawing on calls for a greater focus on employees, was a consideration of research and other literature that described aspects of the employee response.

The literature review highlighted a range of conceptual and methodological issues identified in the HRM policy and organisational outcome link. These issues suggest that considering factors in a longitudinal manner, exploring both strategic and operation aspects, and obtaining data on the perspectives of the key actors may lead to greater understandings of the contents of the so-called Black Box and contributing to the ‘_how’ as well as the ‘_what’ of SHRM. Consequently, the research methodology as described in the next chapter was developed to address these methodological issues and to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 OBJECTIVE OF THE CHAPTER

The objective of this chapter is to explain the research methodology adopted in this thesis. Consistent with the aims of the research, this thesis undertook a longitudinal approach, which accommodated theory building based upon existing knowledge and postulated relationships, yet remaining sensitive to any patterns or phenomena that may have emerged. This chapter explains the rationale for, and process of, a longitudinal single embedded case study inquiry, and details the methodological principles and procedures that were engaged in to investigate the research questions posed at the end of Chapter Two.

3.2 RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The broad research opportunity for this thesis was the ability to use a longitudinal approach to examine the development and implementation of SHRM in practice. The focus was to examine the process (the ‘_how’) of SHRM as well as the content (the ‘_what’). The aim of this research was to examine factors that underpin a SHRM approach in the context of the development and implementation of a workplace feedback policy in the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS). The literature review emphasised the need to understand the complexities of external and internal contextual factors relevant to the TFS and the roles played by executive management, the HR function, line managers, and employees.

A number of methodological issues in the SHRM literature were addressed in section 2.3.1 and the research design sought to address these issues. A longitudinal single case study permitted gathering of detailed data from respondents at all employment levels within the TFS. This addresses, in part, the issue of single respondent studies addressed in section 2.3.1.2. A

predominantly qualitative approach enabled respondents to provide detail of their views and perceptions on the content and process of HRM policy development. It also allowed intangible elements such as culture, communication and cooperation to be examined. A longitudinal case study enabled examination and analysis of competing priorities and time lags in policy development and implementation. A key feature of the methodological design was to examine, in part, the process mechanisms between HRM policy and outcomes: the so-called Black Box problem.

Given the complexities in the above issues, the investigation required a research process that was not only capable of discovering the relevance of the behaviour of the various parties in the TFS case, but was also able to penetrate the rationale behind those behaviours. The research process was able to examine the complexities of, and influences on, SHRM in practice which facilitated the process of theory building.

The case study involved three primary phases: firstly, identification and exploration; secondly design and implementation involving research and analysis; and, thirdly, synthesis and conclusions. It involved a largely iterative process with literature reviewed at all stages, the seeking of feedback from key informants, and adjustments to timing and data gathering as organisational imperatives caused delays to the case study.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given, the complexity of tracking the process of developing and implementing a new HRM policy, and given the phenomena under investigation, (i.e. workplace feedback), a decision was taken to employ a single case study method. Yin (2003: 38) suggests that single case study research is a suitable method for the development and testing of theory:

To confirm, challenge, or extend the theory, there may exist a single case, meeting all the conditions for testing the theory. The single case can then be used to determine whether a theory's propositions are correct or whether some alternative set of explanations might be more relevant.

Yin (2003) suggests that single case studies are ideal where the case is a revelatory one, that is where access to a single case study has been found and obtained, that previously had not been accessible (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The TFS case is potentially revelatory as it provided an opportunity to gather information from the key organisational areas identified by the summary of theoretical models at critical stages in the development and implementation of the workplace feedback policy. The level of access and gathering of data over a protracted period from people across all levels within the TFS makes this research suitable for examining the processes within SHRM from multiple perspectives.

In addition, Yin (2003: 13) recommends using the —.case study method because you deliberately want to cover contextual conditions – believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study”. The TFS is a publicly owned organisation that operates under legislative and policy requirements for managing its people. It sought to introduce workplace feedback as a component of a broader organisational change strategy, and, therefore, the single

case study is a particularly appropriate research method. The justification for the use of a case study method is examined in more detail in section 3.4.

3.3.1 ACCESS TO THE CASE STUDY ORGANISATION

Entry to and acceptance into the organisation are critical to the success of the research and organization-based research (if one is not actually employed in the organisation) is dependent to a great degree on the goodwill of managers” (Baird, 2004: 437). To this, one would also add the employees. In this case, entry was initially through the Director of Human Services. Following a presentation to the Executive Management Team, access was provided to a Reference Group which was to consider and recommend a performance management approach based on workplace feedback. This exposure assisted with both familiarity and credibility for the researcher. However, it did create a tension for the researcher in maintaining an appropriate level of independence and objectivity. In such circumstances, Baird (2004) advises expressly focussing on the sources of information and giving them weight based on the information provided, rather than the status of the person providing the information.

Given the longitudinal aspect of the research, the provision of continuing access was facilitated by the continuing tenure of the Chief Officer and the Director Human Services. While the Chief Officer retired six months prior to the completion of the data gathering, by that stage the project was established and accepted. This contributed to the development and maintenance of formal and informal support during the research period.

3.4 THE CASE STUDY AS A RESEARCH METHOD

Case studies comprise a single unit of analysis based upon depth that is both holistic and exhaustive (Ball, 2004), and which retains the meaningful characteristics of realistic events. Thus, a case study as defined by Yin (2003: 13) is an empirical inquiry that "...investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". Miles and Huberman (1994:25) view boundaries as the critical issue in the struggle to define case studies; they employ a simple definition that "...we can define a case as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in the bounded context". According to Hakim (1987:61), case studies:

...take as their subject one or more elected examples of a social entity – such as communities, social groups, organisations, events, life histories, work teams, roles or relationships – that are studied using a variety of data collection technique... [which]... allows a more rounded, holistic study than with any other design.

Similarly, Yin (2003) suggests that case studies are not a specific research technique as such, but rather a way of organising social data to preserve the unitary character of the phenomenon being studied. Being amenable to accumulating data from various sources holistically, case studies have been widely applied to research into the impact of human resource policies (for example, see Baird, 2004; Peccei & Rosenthal, 2001; Purcell et al, 2003).

3.4.1 THE PURPOSES OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Hakim (1987) suggests that the case study method is not, in and of itself, a prescribed research technique, but rather an amalgam of approaches that often overlaps with other research designs, thus offering their combined and complementary strengths. This eclecticism not only provides

power and flexibility to the research effort, but also as Stake (2000:236) explains, it allows the study's design to be directed by what it is that can be learned from the case itself.

Case study [research] is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied. We choose to study the case... as a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used.

Thus, a researcher's purpose in studying a given case determines the methodology to be employed. As a method for descriptive research, the purpose of a case study is to produce a register of facts from which the researcher gathers evidence concerning some given phenomenon (Yin, 2003). From this contextual data evidence, the researcher may then interpret the evidence for the purposes of theory building (Peshkin, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The data collected also contributes to the explanatory purpose by identifying the causal links that may be present (Yin, 2003). By studying the subject's perception and reporting on the issues at play in that reality, a detailed portrait of social phenomena is potentially available (Hakim, 1987). Aamodt (1991) suggests that the detailed and multi-faceted portrait that is developed represents a 'thick description' of social experiences vital to a naturalistic inquiry. By identifying and describing social phenomena as they evolve over time, longitudinal case studies allow the researcher to "...retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2003: 3). Although the exploratory purpose of the research is concerned with the discovery of theory from data, this study does not seek to generate grounded theory in which prior inquiry or the investigator's perspectives are excluded from the interpretive process.

As noted, a purpose of the case study method is to examine the social reality of the actors' experiences, as outlined by Ball (1985).

The analysis of case study is essentially concerned with interpretation. That is, the translation of raw data into a coherent portrayal of an institution and of institutional processes. The process of interpretation involves the data coming to stand for and represent a field of reality as the basis for a „theoretical’ (or some other kind of) account of the setting (cited in Hammersley, Scarth & Webb, 1985: 50).

Given the interpretive nature of case study research, the researcher is able to advance propositions from the evidence accumulated, and as such, provides an excellent vehicle for the inductive development of new theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Peshkin, 1993; Yin, 2003). As a method for explanatory research, case studies enable the researcher to investigate data to determine the nature of the relationships between phenomena present in the case (Hartley, 2004). A longitudinal case study also enables the examination of the processes as they develop over the period of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

A case study, according to Yin’s (2003) definition, is a type of empirical enquiry that investigates a real life contemporary phenomenon in a situation where the boundary line between the phenomenon and its context are, at best, ‘fuzzy’ and where multiple sources of data are gathered and analysed. It can be further defined as ‘...an in-depth contextual analysis of a few events or conditions’ (Cooper & Schindler; 2003: 152) which the researcher reasonably believes exhibit the operation of some identified significant theoretical principles. Through a real life situation, the case study can add value to theoretical aspects of SHRM implementation by showing the impact of complications, delays, personalities, and external factors on the original plan and its timetable. There are questions of — purpose, process and outcome, and the case study is well equipped to answer them” (Baird, 2004: 435) by using multiple sources and methods, and not necessarily a purely qualitative or quantitative approach. Single industry case studies have added to understanding of organisational process, and the complexity of achieving

outcomes including elements of unintended positive consequences (Nelson, 2002; Wickham, 2007).

3.4.2 CRITICISMS OF THE CASE STUDY METHOD

Although case study research is considered to be of benefit in advancing social inquiry, the method has been criticised as an approach to research methodology. The major criticisms surround three points of contention: the lack of a standard case study design (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 1993), measures of reliability and validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Stake, 2000), and verbose reports (Davey, 1991).

The first major criticism is that the efficacy of case study research is constrained by the absence of a definitive, routinised design through which to conduct social research. The argument is that case studies are *ad hoc* research methods that lack rigour, and therefore, inter-research comparability (see Hamel et al, 1993). This criticism contains two assumptions: firstly, case studies should be required to follow a certain formula, and secondly, that researchers need *ex ante* formulations in which to elicit socially constructed information. In response to the first claim, Patton (2002) suggests that critics confuse the case study method (as a design), with the type of data collected in the research itself, and therefore advise that the holistic nature of the case study method needs to be distinguished from the specific data gathering techniques used by the researcher.

The lack of a precise format can be considered as strength of the case study method, as it is this characteristic that provides the researcher with the opportunity to vary the approach according to

the purpose of the study itself. As Eisenhardt (1989) states, case study research aids in the development of theories, rather than the testing of rigid hypotheses, and as such provide "...an empirical genre appropriately flexible, eclectic, and capable of creating surprises" (Walker, 1983: 155). Hakim (1987:63) agrees, stating that having the freedom to choose the method of inquiry is not an impediment, but rather a strength that makes case studies "...one of the most powerful research designs".

The second major criticism of case study research relates to the properties of reliability and validity, which relate to the measures used to judge the quality of the data collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003). The two concepts originate from experimental research, where systematic error is controllable by research design (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Reliability refers to how accurately a measure yields the same result on repeated trials amongst other things (Yin, 2003). Validity refers to the degree to which the data collected accurately reflects the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure (Yin, 2003). Without the agreement of independent observers able to replicate research procedures, or the ability to use research tools and procedures that yield consistent measurements, researchers would be unable to satisfactorily draw conclusions, formulate theories, or make claims about the generalisability of their research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Stake, 2000).

In quantitative research analysis, reliability is gauged by the consistency of the research instruments over repeated applications. Replication is impossible in a single case study because "...the operations involved depend upon the particular circumstances and events that occur within the case" (Bresnen, 1988: 47). Marshall and Rossman (2006:148) suggest that researchers should strive for reliability through notes of their work, enabling:

...others to inspect their procedures, protocols and decisions...by keeping all data in well organized, retrievable form, researchers can make them available easily if the findings are challenged, or if another researcher wants to analyze the data.

Validity refers more specifically to “...the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research” (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 41). Yin (2003) proposes three approaches to assessing the validity of information obtained from case study research: construct validity, internal validity, and external validity.

According to Babbie (2007), construct validity is achieved when the measure of a particular concept correlates with the measures of other relevant concepts in a theoretically expected manner. Yin (2003) offers three tactics to increase the construct validity in case study research. Firstly, Yin (2003) directs that a researcher, where possible, should use multiple sources of evidence so as to achieve a sufficient level of data triangulation. Secondly, the researcher should establish a chain of evidence that links the question asked, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn. Thirdly, the researcher should use the key informants to review the draft report, and provide comment where required to ensure the report's accuracy in portraying case events. These three aspects were explicitly incorporated into the design and conduct of the research.

Internal validity refers to the extent to which the observed effect in a case study is causal in nature (Babbie, 2007). In qualitative research, and particularly that undertaken in case studies, internal validity, remains particularly susceptible to contamination by researchers who allow their own perceptions to influence their interpretation of the data (Krathwohl, 1997; Neck, Godwin & Spencer, 1996; Yin, 2003). Therefore, researchers undertaking a case study approach need to be vigilant in seeking deficiencies in their case work by scrutinising the data where doubt

may be justified, and triangulation and/or explanation-building to strengthen the accuracy of interpretation (Eisenhardt, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Livingston, 1987; Yin, 2003).

External validity refers to the generalisability of a study's findings to other populations and to other environmental conditions (Yin, 2003). Although critics such as Tellis (1997) have claimed that case study research results lack external validity, Yin (2003) argues that such results may be generalised to a wider population provided that the case study is conducted rigorously. Yin (2003) continues to argue that the case study method is not simply undertaken to seek universally applicable results about populations, but rather to offer plausible and generalised findings to theory development. As such, generalisability of conclusions to other situations may not be an expected outcome of case study research.

The final major criticism of case study research surrounds the notion that such studies often result in desultory, wordy, and rather unfocused reports (Davey, 1991). Miles and Huberman (1994), Morris, Fitz-Gibbon and Freeman (1987), and Yin (2003) each warn researchers to pay attention to the careful and rigorous process of description required by the case study method. They suggest that case studies should 'create reality' by describing it parsimoniously, thereby making "the implicit explicit, the intuitive self-evident, and the abstract concrete" (Walker, 1983: 163). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the researcher, through the skilled use of written communication, to reconstruct the composite issues inherent in a case study in a clear and concise form to the reader. In terms of this research inquiry, the above criticisms of the case study method (and their responses) required the researcher to incorporate a number of specific measures to ensure the reliability and validity of the data gathering and analysis process. The following section details these measures.

3.5 THE SUITABILITY OF THE CASE STUDY METHOD IN THIS INQUIRY

The adoption of case study methodology in this inquiry was governed by two factors. The first of these was the research opportunity (outlined in Section 1.3) to study the development of a new HRM policy over an extended period of time. The second was in order to address the methodological issues identified in the literature review (particularly in Section 2.3.1).

3.5.1 THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review indicated that there has been little longitudinal research on the development, and process towards implementation, of a specific HRM policy in a case study organisation. As this study required a research methodology that accounted for exploring an integrated SHRM framework, together with the roles of key actors, a flexible approach that is receptive to emerging themes, unexpected relationships and new issues was necessary. The case study method enables these qualities to be studied effectively (Eisenhardt, 1989). By using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the research design was consistent with embedded case study research (Scholz & Tietje, 2002).

Yin's (2003) definition of the single case study method underscores its particular suitability in the investigation of the TFS's development of the workplace feedback approach. It allows the investigation of the phenomena (an integrated human resource approach), within the real-life context (the development of the workplace feedback approach), when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear (as will be shown in the case history presented in Chapter 4).

3.5.2 THE TFS AS A UNIQUE CASE STUDY

The TFS presents as a unique Australian case, in terms of its geographic and economic location, its history, and a desire to adopt an approach to the development and implementation of a human resource policy based on evidence from SHRM theory and research. These factors combined create a “...rare or unique event” Yin (2003: 44) for which the case study methodology is a highly appropriate research design. The strategy of the TFS involved: establishing a consultative approach; undertaking a trial; developing workplace feedback policy in conjunction with other organisational initiatives, and working towards an inclusive management style. This cannot be considered as a single episode capable of being researched in a cross-sectional manner. The history and context of the TFS contributed to the decision to use workplace feedback as a key step towards an integrated approach to employee development and management. This meant that the interlocking series of events and perspectives would only be meaningfully assessed by a longitudinal inquiry (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001).

The capture of longitudinal data in this case enabled the researcher to track the development of the workplace feedback policy; see how it was integrated with a broader approach to people management, and assess how this impacted on the perceptions and actions of the actors within the case over time. Rose (1991) suggests that case study design is ideal for longitudinal research, as it is amenable to both historical and processual aspects of investigation. Rose (1991: 454), highlighting the work of Pettigrew (1973) and Littler (1982), stated that:

...a methodological principle underlying [case study] design is the belief that theoretical concerns of a processual form require a longitudinal research design, thereby enabling a social system to be explored as a continuing system with a past, a present, and a future.

An issue with longitudinal research, however, is that the potentially large and diverse number of variables present in the case history could have necessitated the omission of certain important contextual factors (Field & Morse, 1985). Notwithstanding these points, as the interaction with the TFS occurred over a seven year period and data was gathered in a series of stages over nearly five years, there was a capacity to monitor the research and minimise the likelihood of factors being omitted. One factor that contributed to the protracted period of the research was the impact on operations during the peak fire season period from November to March. This meant that implementation could only effectively occur for about seven months of each year. Also, the organisation experienced a significant (for it) level of industrial relations disputation during the commencement of the implementation phase of the policy that further delayed implementation. As an instrument through which the phenomena of an episode are exposed (Cavana et al, 2001), the descriptive component is clearly the foundation of case study research. Having identified the phenomena of the TFS case, the researcher could investigate the dimensions, manifestations, and relationships of those phenomena.

3.5.3 SUMMARY OF THE SUITABILITY OF THE TFS AS A CASE STUDY

Whilst the research focussed on the development and implementation of a workplace feedback approach as a component of performance management, the TFS single case is appropriate for theory building in SHRM. The longitudinal and qualitative methodology enabled identification of the processes and inter-relationships relevant to the implementation of SHRM. The methodology was a key component in theory building towards an integrated SHRM process model.

3.6 CONDUCT OF THE RESEARCH

The plan of this investigation was based on Yin's (2003) model for case study research. The processual order and content of this inquiry was modified to allow for the study's exploratory emphasis, and to accommodate the single case method. The research sequence will now be described.

3.6.1 THE SELECTION OF THE CASE

Three major factors influenced the selection of the TFS as the focal case in this thesis. Firstly, by being part the Government sector, the case organisation was required to develop a performance management approach (State Service Commissioner, 2002). Secondly, the TFS sought to be informed by the theory and research from academic and practitioner literature. Thirdly, there was an opportunity to collect data over an extended period. The combination of these factors meant that researching the TFS meets the criteria advanced by Pettigrew (1973):

...given the limited number of cases which can usually be studied, it makes sense to choose cases such as extreme situations and polar types in which the process of interest is "transparently observable". Thus, the goal of theoretical sampling is to choose cases which are likely to replicate or extend the emergent theory (cited in Eisenhardt, 1989: 537).

3.6.2 A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Three major research questions were proposed with regard to the implementation of a new HRM policy. The first concerned the extent to which contextual factors may impact on the design and implementation processes. The second concerned the degree to which existing SHRM frameworks could help to guide HRM policy development. The third concerned how the research

could contribute to theory building in the implementation of SHRM. The examination of these topics defined the units of analysis and the appropriate methodology.

3.6.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASE STUDY PROTOCOL

A case study protocol documents the procedures employed when conducting case research. As well as describing each phase of the inquiry, the case study protocol assists in future considerations of the case by enabling other researchers to fully understand the methodology used. Yin (2003: 63) suggests that a case study protocol is an essential element of the case study method, because it is “...a major tactic in increasing the reliability of case study research, and is intended to guide the investigator in carrying out the case study”. As the case study protocol was an essential tool in identifying critical elements required in the planning and execution of the thesis, it was devised prior to the beginning of the research activity. This case study protocol (detailed in Appendix A) was used to determine the design of the research, the nature of the data gathering process, and the basic form of the thesis itself.

3.6.3.1 Combining the research purpose with the research questions

By considering the research questions within the descriptive, exploratory and explanatory purposes of the study, a suitable method of data collection and examination was constructed. This provided the investigator with a ‘research map’, upon which the data were gathered and analysed. The case study employed both primary and secondary data collection. The data were managed in the following manner. Firstly, in preparing the case history, secondary data sources including annual reports, and existing human resource policies were examined, and this was supported by preliminary key informant interviews with two members of the TFS Human

Services Department. This preliminary data was used to map the research design and to evaluate whether the case was an appropriate example of putting SHRM into practice.

This is consistent with the recommendations of Fear (2001: 174), who stated that what is required of preliminary data:

... is a careful, accurate reconstruction through archival research of the firm's objective situation, the key players, their perceptions of the situation, their reasoning in favour of one path or another, and contemporary statements explaining why they considered the chosen path to be the correct one.

The secondary data and key informant interviews aided in the construction of the interview and focus group questions, and in the survey design. As such, although the core interview questions remained consistent across all respondents, due to the nature of the interviewee or focus group, additional and follow up questions were used to confirm or to develop responses to the key areas under investigation. Explanation of the phenomena was achieved by posing ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, as they can access the links between certain phenomena within a case specific context (Yin, 2003). This interrogative process was applied to each piece of information as it emerged during the data gathering and analysis stages of the case study research. Some information demanded only a single focus of inquiry, whereas other information was multidimensional in nature; that is, it displayed elements that combined descriptive, exploratory and explanatory elements. Each piece of information was analysed accordingly.

3.6.3.2 The unit of analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) speak of the focus of the study surrounded by an indeterminate edge of the case marking the boundary of what will not be studied. This problem of case boundary is reflective of Peshkin's (1993) point that descriptive analysis is inevitably selective. Within the flexibility of case studies, boundaries of relevance are sometimes elusive and elastic. Exploratory case studies are susceptible to ill-defined boundaries until issues emerge. Simultaneously, case studies are opportunistic (Peshkin, 1993) and permit the investigation to pursue new directions as the need arises, thus redrawing the boundaries. As the selection of the units of analysis is dependent on the "...way the initial research questions have been defined" (Yin, 2003: 22). The primary unit of analysis that emerged from the research question in this thesis is the whole TFS organisation of 460 employees.

The interpretation of the data from the various actors to some extent relied upon an understanding of the attitudes, values, and behaviours of the other actors involved. Yin (2003) terms the use of multiple units of analysis in a single case study as an "...embedded case study design" (2003: 41). Yin (2003: 44) explains that multilevel units of analysis:

... incorporate subunits of analyses, so that a more complex - or embedded - design is developed. The subunits can often add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case.

3.6.3.3 Data collection

Due to the strengths and weakness inherent to any single research method, Babbie (2007) recommends that multiple methods of inquiry be incorporated into case study research in order to overcome analytical and validity problems associated with singular research methodologies. As

suggested by Babbie (2007), Hakim (1987) and Yin (2003), the use of several different sources of data, and indeed the incorporation of different research methods to capture this data (otherwise known as ‘triangulation’), is a valuable research strategy, and was incorporated into this investigation. Given the recommendation of Marshall and Rossman (2006), the choice of the data collection instruments in this study was dictated by the requirements of the research, and by time and resource constraints which impacted on the investigator’s access to the necessary information. The first step in the data collection process involved the retrieval of secondary data relevant to the TFS’s history, culture and approach to people management. Marshall and Rossman (2006: 95) suggest that researchers commence the data gathering process with secondary historical material, as it is “...useful for establishing a baseline or background prior to interviewing”.

The study employed both primary and secondary sources. Primary data is that which originates from an investigator’s specific inquiry into a research problem, whereas secondary data is gathered by a researcher, but was originated for another purpose (Cavana et al, 2001). The distinction is significant, as it defines the proximity of the document’s author to the subject matter. Whereas primary sources record the direct observations of involved parties, secondary sources are, at best, indirect, and produced for purposes likely to be independent of the research in question. As the distance of secondary sources may decrease validity and reliability depending upon the research question being investigated, primary sources are preferred (Babbie, 2007). As the researcher needed to gather information beyond that contained within secondary data, and to build on the data obtained from a survey administered at the beginning of the trial stage, qualitative data was obtained from interviews and focus groups. These semi-structured interviews contained both standardised interview questions (i.e. common to all informants), and

specific interview questions (i.e. aimed at the key informants' specific involvement in the development or as a participant in the workplace feedback approach). The researcher was careful to use questions that focussed on addressing the research questions and on not performing the role of a consultant.

3.6.4 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The case study protocol specified the respondents, and the primary and secondary data, to be gathered by the research. In order to obtain the diverse perspectives necessary to investigate the role of the various groups of actors as described in the theoretical framework, to facilitate crosschecking of information, and to identify those issues requiring further consideration, the following research design illustrated in Table 3-1 was developed.

Table 3-1 Structure of Data Gathering

Type of data	Pre-trial	Trial		Post-trial
		mid	end	
(a) Secondary	x	x	x	x
(b) Primary				
(i) Focus Group		x	x	
(ii) Interview	x	x		x
(iii) Survey	x			

There were three major phases of data gathering. In the first phase, prior to the workplace feedback trial, there were two key informant interviews with members of the Human Services Department. As part of the pre-trial training a short survey was undertaken to obtain data on attitudes to performance management and expectations of the trial. As will be detailed in the Case History chapter, there was a residual impact of a previous performance management approach. This meant there were concerns about confidentiality of information. Therefore, no

biographical information was collected as the purpose of the survey was to inform the conduct of the trial rather than for statistical analysis of responses.

The second phase of data gathering sought detailed information from managers and employees across all nine work groups that continued to participate in the trial. The mid-trial review consisted of six focus groups (of either all employees or all supervisors/managers) and seven individual interviews (covering managers, supervisors and front-line employees). The aim was to obtain rich data using techniques that would facilitate respondents answering honestly. The supporting material produced by the TFS during the trial, and subsequently to facilitate the introduction of the workplace feedback approach assisted in providing context to focus group and interview questions. The end of trial evaluation utilised focus groups conducted on a work group basis. The third phase of data gathering was a series of key informant interviews of Human Services staff, executive managers and middle managers to obtain information about the process towards implementation of the workplace feedback policy.

Further key informant interviews were conducted as the workplace feedback system was being progressively implemented across the TFS. Hutchison (1993: 115) suggests that the interview process is an effective method, as it “...serves to clarify the meanings the participants themselves attribute to a given situation, [enabling] the researcher to understand the problem ‘through the eyes’ of the participant”. These questions were designed to cover the necessary issues, but were framed in an open-ended manner, to allow the interviewees sufficient latitude for introspection and open reporting of their own perspectives. As a result, the informants were free to pursue those matters that they considered important. With the permission of the participants, each interview and focus group was recorded onto audiotape.

The collection of primary data, using semi-structured interview and focus group methods, allowed informants to tell their own stories in their own way. This allowed the researcher direct access to their experience of the case (Clandinin & Connelly, 2005) which assisted in counteracting potential bias that could exist in the secondary documents (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), by adding matters of detail that may only be recorded in individual memory (Samuel, 1982), and by giving voice to those not usually heard (Fontana & Frey, 2005). In this case, a number of participants specifically commented that the development of the workplace feedback policy was the first occasion where their views had been sought. By participating in the research, the respondents could have altered their responses to the policy and may have influenced other employees. This is a factor inherent in embedded case studies and action research (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

3.6.4.1 The pre-trial survey

A pre-trial survey (see Appendix B) was administered as part of the training programmes run for the work groups participating in the workplace feedback trial. The purpose of the survey was to add to the qualitative analysis and not to act as a substitute. The questionnaire results were used to “...triangulate with the qualitative analysis, thus enhancing the evidence and contributing to the conclusions” (Baird, 2004: 438).

The survey was provided to participants during the training programme delivered prior to the trial commencing. The survey did not collect any biographical data and the survey forms did not have any identifying marks. This was done because of confidentiality concerns, and to maximise participation and participant confidence in answering questions honestly. The questionnaires

were placed in a sealed envelope and returned to the TFS Coordinator Organisation Development who collated them and forwarded them to the researcher. Ten work groups comprising both operation and support areas and groups in different geographical area undertook the training. One group withdrew prior to the mid-trial evaluation. There were 131 returns, of which 130 were useable. There was no formal attendance record kept of the participants in the training course. The Coordinator Organisation Development who conducted each of the training sessions assessed the total number as approximately 135. The response rate was therefore above 95 per cent.

3.6.4.2 Interviews

In order to control the content and scope of the interviews and focus groups, an interview guide was prepared (see Appendix D). This guide was based on the ‘elements for investigation’ and the ‘data requirements’ that emerged from the initial key informant interviews and preliminary secondary data gathering process. To meet ethical requirements, potential participants (other than the key informants) were identified (in conjunction with Human Services) by type of employment and location rather than by name and then contacted electronically by Human Services and invited to participate. If they chose to be involved, they contacted the researcher directly. In this way the researcher did not know the names of those who chose not to be interviewed, or participate in focus groups, and the TFS did not know who participated in interviews or focus groups.

The number of people involved was as follows:

- Key informant interviews stage one: 4

- Interviews as part of mid-trial evaluation: 6
- Key informant interviews post-trial: 9

3.6.4.3 Focus Groups

To identify the most appropriate subjects to include in a focus group, a purposive or judgment sampling method was employed which involves the selection of cases with a specific purpose (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007). This approach is an acceptable form of sampling for exploratory research and to “...identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation” (Neuman, 2006: 139). This allowed specific subjects to be selected based on the researcher’s understanding of the ability of the participants to meet criteria to inform the research topic (Bryman & Bell, 2007). According to Sarantakos (2005), the optimum number of participants in a focus group is five to twelve.

Given that current employees were potential participants, care was needed in the recruitment of individuals. It was not feasible to make inclusion in the research mandatory, and therefore volunteers were called for and were permitted to withdraw from the research at any time. For the second stage (as part of the mid-trial review) and third stage (and the end of the trial) of data collection the researcher facilitated six focus groups. This involved a structured discussion amongst a group of four to eight people with the researcher acting as facilitator or moderator to the discussion (Greenbaum, 1998). The focus group process had the dual function of verifying (or otherwise) the preliminary findings from the first stage of data collection, as well as providing any further information or insights not previously discovered. This type of verification is referred to as member validation, “...when the researcher takes field results back to members,

who judge their adequacy” (Neuman, 2006: 285). These stages of data collection thus provided a way of checking the reliability of the data, thus enhancing the methodological rigour of the research.

In conducting focus groups, the researcher can use a structured or unstructured method to elicit responses (Cavana et al, 2001). As with individual interviews, the researcher can use a set of predetermined questions or allow a more free flowing discussion, prompted by open-ended questions (Wilkinson, 2003). To maintain consistency across the focus groups, a structured approach was taken (O’Sullivan, 2003). A standard set of questions was devised with additional questions depending on whether the focus group was comprised of supervisors and managers, or of frontline employees (Sarantakos, 2005). Although seen to be an advantage in this instance (Bryman & Bell, 2007), focus group interaction between participants and the researcher can be seen to be a disadvantage. For example, subjects who may have a poorly conceptualised understanding of the topic may be swayed by others in the group. This can lead to responses that may be enhanced or changed dependent on the opinions of others, including perceived researcher bias, or because of a desire to give what the subject perceives as the ‘right answer’ to the question posed (Sarantakos, 2005).

In an effort to overcome this issue, all participants were informed that their opinions were the basis of the research and that there were no right or wrong answers. The importance of ‘telling it like it is’ was clearly stated as part of the introduction to the focus groups. (Cavana et al, 2001). Each focus group was informed that it was expected that some individuals would not have answers to some questions and that it was acceptable to ‘pass’ on a question. Each participant was allowed an opportunity to respond to questions by careful facilitation (Bryman & Bell,

2007). Where participants had no response to make, they were not encouraged to generate one. These mechanisms helped facilitate individuals to feel comfortable with the idea of not being expected to give an answer, thus reducing contamination of the data due to ‘group think’ (Tuckett, 2005). Prior to the focus group, participants were provided with information sheets summarising the main aims and theoretical background to the research (Appendix D). At the commencement of each focus group, the researcher then provided a brief explanation of the nature and purpose of the research and clarified any questions participants had in relation to the research. During the focus group, the researcher used observation techniques and reinforced that participants were not obliged to answer questions if they did not wish to do so.

In data gathering at stage two, the six focus groups were structured so the members of each group had common characteristics based on three classifications:

1. By hierarchical level: either manager/supervisors or employees (two manager/supervisor and four employees);
2. By work type: either operational or support (two operational and four support); or
3. By geographical location: either north or south (two north and four south).

Therefore, for example, one focus group comprised operational level employees in the northern region.

This structure was aimed to increase the level of confidence and perception of confidentiality of responses provided. The researcher wrote notes and observations throughout the duration of the focus group. These notes were utilised to clarify the context of participant responses when the transcripts were analysed. At the conclusion of the focus group, the participants were thanked

and informed that the results of the study would be made available, as indicated, once the thesis had been completed.

3.7 THE CASE ANALYSIS

As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), data in this study were analysed in a continuous fashion throughout the data gathering process. By continually analysing the data as it evolved from the documents and interviews, contradictions were isolated, missing data were identified and alternative explanations sought. The process and sequence of the case analysis appears below.

3.7.1 EDITING THE DATA

Data should be edited to ensure that they are “...accurate, consistent with other information, uniformly entered, complete, and arranged to facilitate coding and tabulation” (Emory & Cooper, 1995: 450). Editing was undertaken in the following manner on all information as it emerged from the documentary records, interviews and focus groups. As primary and secondary documentation generally focused on the facts of the case, editing at this stage was focussed on searching for inconsistencies and omissions within and amongst the manuscripts and also with organising the data in preparation for coding and categorisation. A particular issue was the difficulty in determining the neutrality of the researcher, and as such, all interview and focus group transcripts were closely scrutinized in the data analysis process.

As recommended by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), tapes of the interviews and focus were transcribed as soon as possible. The immediacy of the transcription of an interview is important,

as it is never an exact copy of the conversation that took place. No matter how thoroughly the transcript is done, the issues inherent to the ‘translation’ process may result in inaccuracies, mistakes and misinterpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The immediate transcribing of the interview recordings also enables the researcher to account for the content and context of the exchange, and add in additional notes to the data where it is deemed necessary. The interview transcripts served four major functions. Firstly, they recaptured the essence of the exchange, and allowed the researcher to reflect on the meaning of what the respondent had said. Secondly, they forced the researcher to reflect on the relationship between what had been recorded, and the aims of the study. Thirdly, they helped to determine what material was relevant and therefore worthy of coding. Fourthly, they enabled preliminary coding decisions to be made (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

3.7.2 DATA CATEGORISATION AND CODING

Data categorisation organises the various dimensions of the data by grouping together attributes that relate to the concepts being examined. By devising categories that are mutually exclusive, exhaustive, and based on a single classification (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), aspects of the data were clustered together to facilitate the interpretive process. Data coding refers to the appointment of titles to salient elements in the data, in order to assign them to an appropriate category (Schwandt, 2007). This exercise simplifies the handling and interpretation of information, by introducing ‘rules of order’ to the treatment of data (Schwandt, 2007). As recommended by Fleet and Cambourne (1989), data coding definition and labelling should: be consistent across the entire data bank; precisely indicate what information is constituted by each code; and align with the locus of the enquiry. As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), data

codes were assigned throughout the entire data gathering process. This allowed for the discovery of issues requiring further investigation, the refocussing of the research questions, the generation of additional codes, and the refining of existing codes. The complete coding system is detailed in Appendix E.

Given the predominantly qualitative nature of the research, particularly the focus group and interview stages of data collection, and the fact that statistical analysis would fail to address the needs of undertaking analysis at the level of the whole case (see Yin, 2003), minor emphasis was placed on the enumeration of frequencies. Instead, the data were analysed for aspects of relevance by using the principles suggested by Becker and Geer (1982: 245):

- The coding should be inclusive: that is, any incident should be coded under a category, if there is initially any reason to believe that it might be considered relevant. Many incidents will, therefore, be coded under several categories. An incident, which on later analysis proves to be irrelevant, can simply be discarded;
- The coding should be by incidents: either complete verbal expressions or complete acts by an individual or group; and
- The coding should be ‘full’: that is, the incident being coded should be summarised in all its relevant detail, including the idea expressed, the actions taken, the people present, the date, and the setting.

As recommended by Babbie (2007), when coding the data, all elements were inspected for their visible, surface components (i.e. the manifest constituents) and any meanings that might underlie the visible elements (i.e. latent constituents). Collectively, the coded incidents defined the essential situations and relevant factors embedded in the case study. By summarising and

describing the fundamental characteristics of these units, their bearing on the study was illuminated, and the relationships between them were assessed.

As the researcher proceeded through the program of interviews and focus groups, consistencies between the responses of participants became apparent, and through a process of constant comparison, broad patterns began to emerge in the data. The data was analysed by coding the raw data into the key themes identified in the literature review. The themes were coded and in the first pass through the data, parts of the transcripts that reflected any of the key themes were identified accordingly. These themes were then used as an analytical tool with which to re-examine the data for patterns (similarities and differences). This is consistent with the view that —.qualitative coding organises raw data into conceptual categories and creates themes which are then used to analyse the data” (Neuman, 2006: 321). It must be noted, however, that data analysis was not a separate stage of the research but an ongoing process throughout the research programme. The results of early data analysis were used to guide subsequent data collection.

3.7.3 DATA INTERPRETATION

Regardless of the methodological approach, Bacher (2002) states that the researcher has an obligation to disclose the manner in which the data were interpreted to the reader. The nine tactics for data interpretation as advanced by Miles and Huberman (1994) were employed in this research (see Table 3-2 for a summary of these tactics and their implementation). The information in this table is arranged from the descriptive to the explanatory and from the concrete to the abstract. As these procedures described in the table are not necessarily mutually exclusive, there was overlap in their application to the data set.

Table 3-2 Processes for Data Interpretation

Tactic	Procedure
Noting patterns and themes	When observing phenomena, gestalt psychology holds that people tend to perceive events in their entirety rather than their constituent parts. Therefore, as data were interrogated, recurring patterns and themes were noted in order to consolidate individual facets of the information.
Seeking plausibility	Miles and Huberman (1994:246) suggest that "...during analysis... a conclusion is [found to be] plausible, 'makes good sense', 'fits' ... so plausibility, and intuition as the underlying basis for it, is [valuable]".
Clustering	Organising data in to clusters aids in its interpretation by grouping objects that have similar characteristics (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this research, the clustering of data formed part of the coding process, followed by the grouping of more abstract elements during analysis.
Subsuming particulars into the general	By making comparisons across the data set, instances of similar phenomena may be categorised together. This approach was integral to the category development in the theory building processes of this thesis.
Grouping of variables	Grouping effectively reduces the number of variables by identifying which belong together and which seem to measure the same phenomenon.
Noting relationships between variables	Determining the nature of the relationship between variables involves examining data to ascertain whether certain variables change directly, change inversely, or indicate no relationship at all.
Finding intervening variables	An intervening variable is one that theoretically affects the observed phenomenon but cannot be observed. When variables in this inquiry seemed to be related but provided an unsatisfactory explanation, the data was searched for possible intervening variables.
Building a logical chain of evidence	This involves the development of a related sequence of factors so that prior elements of events are related logically to subsequent elements.
Making conceptual or theoretical coherence	Having gleaned evidence from the data that appeared to form converging patterns and identify relationships, theory was inducted from that evidence.

This table is adapted from the recommendations in Miles and Huberman (1994).

3.7.4 VERIFICATION OF CONCLUSIONS

The process of verifying the conclusions of this study emanated from the previously noted concerns regarding the notions of reliability and validity. While Altheide and Johnson (2005) argue that methods for establishing confidence in qualitative research are poorly defined, Miles and Huberman (1994) submit a number of tactics for verifying the outcomes of qualitative research which are outlined below in Table 3-3 below.

Table 3-3 Processes for Verifying Conclusions

Tactic	Procedure
Checking for representativeness	During the interpretive process, data from non-representative sources was scrutinised, non-representative events were eliminated from the analysis, and no conclusions were drawn from this data.
Checking for researcher effects	A major concern in qualitative data analysis is the potential contamination of data caused by the researcher. Potential sources of contamination in this study were: (a) holistic fallacy, whereby extreme evidence is ignored so data are interpreted as being more patterned or having greater congruence than they actually had, (b) 'going native', whereby researcher-informant relationships preclude the pursuit of further investigation lest it damages the rapport between the parties, and (c) over-reliance on particular well informed respondents. These influences were minimised by considering the material presented by a wide range of data sources.
Triangulation	Triangulation refers to the use of a combination of methodologies in the study of a singular phenomenon, and may be applied to both data and theories. Data triangulation was achieved by gathering material from a wide variety of sources.
Weighting the evidence	To account for the fact that some data were weaker or more suspect than others, the inquiry followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestion that differential weightings be applied to the data according to (a) informant characteristics, and (b) circumstances under which data were gathered.
Ruling out spurious relationships	Explanatory conclusions depend on inferences drawn that suggest that one factor is related to the other. Kidder and Judd (1986) recommend that researchers inspect each apparent relationship in order to ascertain that other causal processes have not produced the inferred relationship.
Checking out rival explanations	Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that explanations should not be accepted until all possibilities had been explored. On finding alternative explanations, resolution between competing analyses was reached by retaining all probable explanations until one became more compelling as the result of stronger evidence or the weight of various sources of evidence.
Looking for negative evidence	Yin (2003) notes that conclusions should be interrogated for evidence that might disprove an established result, thus this inquiry remained open to contrary findings.
Getting feedback from informants	As part of the triangulation process, the solicitation of feedback involved the informants reviewing drafts of the case reports. Yin (2003) emphasises the importance of this test as a way of corroborating the essential facts and evidence presented in the case report and enhancing the study's construct validity.

This table is adapted from the recommendations by Miles and Huberman (1994).

These tactics were applied progressively during the interpretation process, in accordance with the suggestion of Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest (1966: 66) that researchers should:

...begin with tactics that are aimed at assuring the basic quality of the data, then move to those that check findings by various contrasts, then conclude with tactics that take a sceptical, demanding approach to emerging explanations.

Where possible, therefore, a variety of tests were used for each potential explanation and, as a result, the rigour of both methodology and findings were significantly enhanced.

3.7.5 THE MODE OF ANALYSIS

The interpretation of the data, and the verification of the conclusions, were facilitated by the use of the QSR NUD*IST (version 9.0) software package. In the method literature, it has been emphasised that computer software programs, such as NUD*IST, are of significant value in qualitative analysis and any subsequent theory building (Kelle, 1995; Richards & Richards, 2005; Weitzman & Miles, 1995). The essential elements of the computerised interpretation and verification procedures were as follows.

The interview transcripts were imported into the NUD*IST software database, following which the categories (i.e. the coding of the data) were established as a series of nodes. These nodes formed part of an index system that the software depicts as a ‘stem and leaf’ system of association. As already noted, the coding system is reproduced in Appendix E. The generation of category nodes, and the subsequent coding of the data into these nodes, occurred in two stages.

3.7.5.1 Stage one coding

The initial categories were based on the characteristics of the case that the researcher sought to understand. The focus group and interview transcripts were scrutinised and when significant terms, key events or relevant issues were found, they were coded according to nodes as they were developed. NUD*IST was then utilised to search the text, and then to allocate segments of the data to a designated node. A sample of this process is recorded in Appendix F, showing the

content of a specific node. Where appropriate, data were allocated to multiple nodes for the purpose of analysis.

3.7.5.2 Stage two coding

Further nodes were established to categorise the results of the analysis of the first set of nodes. The second set of nodes were not determined by the units of analysis, but were rather developed so as to group together the outcomes of further analysis. NUD*IST was utilised to search through the preliminary ‘stage one’ coding for those factors that were common between the various concepts under review in this study. The results were then assigned to second set node sub-categories in a similar fashion to that undertaken in stage one. The tabular summary of the literature review was used to develop emergent ‘result nodes’ (see example in Appendix F).

In order to facilitate the theory building process later in the research process, memos (being in the form of electronic tags) were maintained about the data, their categories, and the relationships between them, as they emerged. Designed to store and organise ideas about the data, they were integrated into the analytic process. Wilson (1993: 420) suggests that memos assist in the development of theory in five important ways as they:

1. Require that you move your thinking about the idea to a conceptual level.
2. Summarise each category’s properties for developing operational definitions.
3. Summarise propositions about relationships between categories.
4. Begin to integrate categories with clusters of other categories.
5. Relate your analysis to other theories.

NUD*IST has a facility for the creation and retention of memos for later consideration and analysis. Utilising the memo capability within the NUD*IST package, memo reports were generated by the software during this stage of coding. From detailed analysis of these reports, the interaction between the parties gradually became clearer, the context of the various phenomena surfaced, causes and effects were identified, and motivations became more apparent. The manner in which this material was used to develop the outcomes of the study is presented in the next section.

3.8 DEVELOPING RESEARCH OUTCOMES

Consistent with the stated research purposes, the analysis led to descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory outcomes. These were achieved in the following manner.

3.8.1 THE DESCRIPTIVE OUTCOME

The role of description in qualitative inquiry extends beyond a mere narration of the phenomena of the case. Instead, it presents the issues and themes that are central to the analysis, either through the illustration of a particular theme, or as a method of demonstrating a combination of issues (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Given that this study involved input from interviews and focus groups conducted over an extended period, the issues and themes in this research were contextually bound, and therefore, their purpose and meanings could not be captured without first understanding their origins. The complexity of the development of the workplace feedback policy, and the impact of other people management initiatives, could only be comprehended by producing ‘thick descriptions’ of the contextual elements (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). From the accounts of the interviewees and focus group participants, together with the analysis of the

preliminary survey, analytical judgements concerning the research question were made, working propositions generated, and relationships identified.

As no research can incorporate all aspects of a case, the report in this thesis represents an incomplete representation of the phenomena. However, the abridgement of peripheral data did not diminish the interpretive value of the investigation. Addressing this issue, Hughes and Sharrock (1997: 85) suggest that:

...although descriptions have a fringe of incompleteness about them...this does not impair their ability to do the job, since nothing like completeness is ever attempted by the speaker of a natural language. Often a single descriptor will provide an adequate description...the remaining particulars being, as it were, bracketed away for present purposes or their sense „filled in’ using the specifics of the context in which they are used.

As an instrument through which the phenomena of an episode are exposed (Cavana et al, 2001), the descriptive component is clearly the foundation of case study research. Having identified the phenomena of the TFS case, the researcher could investigate the dimensions, manifestations, and relationships of those phenomena. This is discussed below.

3.8.2 THE EXPLORATORY OUTCOME

The distinguishing feature of inductive inquiry is that theoretical concepts emerge from the case data, rather than being imposed upon it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Inductive research is related to symbolic interaction (Bryman & Bell, 2007), a theoretical model in which investigation focuses on the ways people communicate and interpret meaning. By viewing the subjects’ behaviour from this perspective, theories and propositions about social phenomena could be derived from the data of social research.

Emanating from the narrative data, from the findings of previous research, and researcher preconceptions, inductive research may not be able to offer the concrete reassurance that the hypothetical-deductive approach offers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, inductive theory building does produce valuable research outcomes that are ‘less sterile’ than hypothesis testing. The generation of theory from case evidence in this study used four procedures, category development, linking categories, testing emerging relationships, and connecting with existing theory. Each is briefly described below.

As noted, category or node development was executed utilising NUD*IST software. Throughout the coding process, data were assigned to emerging categories to build a hierarchy of units of analysis. In this procedure, Field and Morse (1995: 111) suggest that:

Identified categories are accumulated until it becomes clear to the researcher those properties and characteristics of the elements which fit into that particular category. The researcher can then identify the criteria for further instances that would fit the specific category. A category is saturated when no new information on the characteristics of the category are forthcoming.

Once a category was ‘saturated’, a definition based on its inherent properties was formulated so as to demonstrate further data collection and to stimulate theoretical reflection. Categories were refined, produced and discarded as required.

The links between the various categories were identified through the use of the NUD*IST software, and integrated into the result nodes. Scrutiny of the result node reports facilitated consideration of preliminary propositions, as recommended by Eisenhardt (1989: 542).

From the within-site analysis...overall impressions, tentative themes, concepts, and possible relationships between variables begin to emerge. The next step of this highly iterative process is to compare systematically the emergent frame with

evidence from [the] case in order to assess how well or poorly it fits with the case data.

In order to test the emerging relationships, key variables within the ‘result node’ reports were identified and studied to ensure relationships held within and between categories. Although Eisenhardt’s (1989: 542) discussion of this process focussed on the multiple case study method, the principle holds for single case designs.

A step in shaping hypotheses is verifying that the emergent relationships between constructs fit with the evidence in each case. Sometimes a relationship is confirmed by the case evidence, while at other times it is revised, disconfirmed, or thrown out for insufficient evidence. This verification process is similar to that in traditional hypothesis research.

The emergent propositions were then compared to, and contrasted with, existing theory. This imperative is emphasised by Eisenhardt (1989: 544).

Examining literature which conflicts with the emergent theory is important for two reasons. First, if researchers ignore conflicting findings, then confidence in the findings is reduced. Second...conflicting literature presents an opportunity. The juxtaposition...forces researchers into a more creative, frame-breaking mode of thinking...The result can be deeper insight into both the emergent theory and the conflicting literature...Literature discussing similar findings...ties together underlying similarities in phenomena normally not associated with each other. The result is often a theory with a stronger internal validity, wider generalisability, and a higher conceptual level.

Eisenhardt’s (1989) approach is similar to Yin’s (2003) tactic of pattern matching, in which empirically based patterns coincide with, or contradict, predicted patterns. Hartwig and Dearing (1979: 9) emphasise the procedures discussed above by suggesting that the “...underlying assumption of the exploratory approach is that the more one knows about the data, the more effectively data can be used to develop, test, and refine theory”. Having identified the exploratory outcomes of the TFS case, the researcher was able to identify the specific roles

undertaken by the various actors involved in the development of the workplace feedback system and use that to develop an integrated SHRM framework.

3.8.3 THE EXPLANATORY OUTCOME

Due to the complexity of the interrelationships and the imprecise measures inherent in the interpretive approach, the explanatory process relies on deriving, organising, and integrating ideas about the manner in which phenomena are interrelated, and which offer understanding of the underlying causes of phenomena (Polit-O'Hara & Beck, 2004). Warning that the process of explanation building from case studies is not well documented, Yin (2003: 121-122) suggests that the final explanation results from a series of iterations, and recommends the following procedure:

- Making an initial theoretical statement or an initial proposition;
- Comparing the findings of an initial case against such a statement or proposition;
- Revising the statement or proposition;
- Again revising the statement or proposition;
- Comparing the revision to the facts of a second, third, or more cases; and
- Repeating this process as many times as is needed.

Although Yin's (2003) process refers to multiple case studies, its basic features were applied in this research. As explanatory research invariably leads to alternative conclusions about the same set of results, Yin's (2003) iterative approach clarified the outcomes by consolidating some findings and discounting others.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter described the methodological issues relating to the research. Based upon the need for a longitudinal qualitative approach to the research questions, the single case study method was used to address the descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory purposes of the inquiry. The research design sought to address methodological issues in SHRM research as detailed in Section 2.3.1. A specific focus was to use a qualitative approach to permit theory building. The methodology sought to obtain data that would contribute to assessing the theoretical models and frameworks analysed in the literature review in Chapter Two and contribute to building a SHRM model that covers both the content (the ‘what’) and the process (the ‘how’) of HRM policy development.

A protocol was developed to guide the investigation, and to assist in any further consideration of the case. Information was gathered using secondary data, a preliminary survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Verification was fundamental to the study, and was engaged in at every stage of the inquiry. The processual elements were particularly influenced by Eisenhardt (1989), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Yin (2003). The categorisation, coding, and analysis of the case data was undertaken using the NUD*IST software package, details of which are included in Appendix E. The following chapters present the results of the methodological approach adopted, and are discussed in accordance with the organisation of the thesis as presented in Chapter One.

CHAPTER 4

CASE HISTORY

4.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE CHAPTER

The objectives of this chapter are three-fold. Firstly, it will provide a contextual background to the decision by the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) to introduce an approach to managing employee performance that is centred on workplace feedback. Secondly, it will provide a timeline of the process that focuses on feedback as the core of TFS's approach to managing employee performance. Thirdly, it will detail the contextual factors that informed the process of developing workplace feedback and the factors that contributed to the protracted nature of the project. In achieving these objectives, this chapter also provides information on the roles of the EMT, Human Services, line managers and employees in the process of developing and commencing to fully implement a system of workplace feedback.

4.2 HISTORY OF THE TFS AND THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

4.2.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TASMANIA FIRE SERVICE (TFS)

The earliest legislation on fire fighting in Tasmania dates from 1883. The TFS is the operational arm of the State Fire Commission, established by the Fire Services Act of 1979, which amalgamated the State Fire Authority, the Rural Fires Board, and twenty-two urban fire brigade boards. Currently, the State Fire Commission is the governing and policy group which has the functions of policy formation, development of fire protection and prevention measures, standardisation of fire equipment, establishment and maintenance of training facilities, and to generally advise the responsible Minister. The State Fire Commission comprises the Chief Officer (as chairperson) and representatives from:

- The United Firefighters Union (UFU);
- The Tasmanian Retained Firefighters Association;
- The Tasmanian Volunteer Fire Brigades Association;
- The Local Government Association of Tasmania; and
- A person nominated by the Secretary of the Department of Police and Public Safety.

The TFS itself provides a state-wide set of services, through a network of 233 brigades (the majority of which are operated by volunteer firefighters) that focus on rapid response to fires and emergencies, including motor accident rescue and hazardous materials, as well as fire prevention and fire safety education. Firefighting and rescue services are generally provided free of charge, while the TFS charges fees to households and businesses in training and equipment. The TFS has approximately 460 employees (of which two-thirds are operational) who are supported by a group of approximately 4 800 volunteers. Under *the Fire Services Act of 1979*, the TFS operated as the direct employer; however, in 1984 as part of the *State Service Act*, the TFS came under the umbrella of Tasmanian Public Sector employment policies and subject to direction from the Public Service (since re-named as State Service) Commissioner.

4.2.1.1 The TFS and performance management

The first formal performance management practice commenced circa 1983. Its primary purpose was to provide information to contribute to promotion decisions. The system was an annual appraisal modelled on those used in military organisations. It involved the employee's direct supervisor providing an annual appraisal of past performance. This was seen appropriate for a rank-based organisation and where a number of senior officers had military backgrounds. This

style of performance management system was not seen as being effective or transparent by the TFS employees, and its shortcomings led to its abandonment by 1988 (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008). Between 1988 and 2002, there were no formal attempts to introduce performance management for TFS employees.

John Gledhill was appointed as Chief Officer of the TFS in 1995, after having spent twelve months in the role of Deputy Chief Officer with the organisation. He brought a different management philosophy geared at moving TFS towards a *“more modern and more democratic organisation”* (Chief Officer, September 2009). Under the previous Chief Officer, who had a background in the Australian military, there had been no executive to advise the Chief Officer: decisions were made, passed down the ranks, and were expected to be accepted without question. As an example of the prevailing culture, prior to 1995, there were long standing practices such as the Chief Officer’s car being cleaned on a daily basis and areas where firefighting vehicles were kept being given a thorough washing out every Saturday: a practice that harked back to a time when horses pulled vehicles. It continued for decades after all the vehicles were mechanised. As Gledhill noted *“...the Fire Service was in a time warp because it was way behind other organisations”* (Chief Officer, September 2009).

The Chief Officer established an Executive Management Team (EMT) in 1997 to assist with the strategic management of the TFS. The EMT consisted of the senior executives from Operations, Community Fire Safety, Corporate Services and Human Services. Since 1997, the role of EMT evolved to include roles to: identify strategic directions for TFS for approval by State Fire Commission; ensure that organisational consistency exists in the in the implementation of corporate strategies; manage the change issues involved in the development and implementation

of significant policies, and corporate projects; and, to anticipate and manage issues of significant organisational impact.

The process of organisational change included the consideration of a contemporary approach to managing people – including performance management. Interest in developing a new approach to performance management came from three sources being: negotiations in the context of successive Enterprise Agreements dating from 1999, discussions within the EMT linked to organisational cultural change and corporate plans, and a State Service Commissioner's Direction (dated November, 2002) that required each State Public Sector Agency to have in place a system for managing employee performance. At the time that a decision was taken by EMT to develop and introduce a performance management approach based on workplace feedback, none of the equivalent emergency service organisations in any of the Australian states had a formal policy or practice of performance management for operational personnel. That situation was still the case at the time for the period 2003 to 2009 during which the research for this thesis was completed (Director Human Services, September 2009).

4.2.1.2 The Chief Officer

John Gledhill was appointed in December 1995, and sought to modernise the TFS's approach to the way the people were managed. Up until that point, the organisation had been structured and managed along para-military lines with strict hierarchical control and without an executive group to advise or mitigate the decision making powers of the Chief Officer. As noted by Gledhill, "*...there was very little delegation of the strategic areas; it was all in one place*" (Chief Officer, September 2009).

The Chief Officer had a different philosophy towards leadership and people management, and actively sought to alter both the structure and culture of how people within TFS were managed. Consequently, a range of people management strategies were progressively developed and implemented as part of an overall cultural change strategy. The aim was to alter the organisation to one that was more modern, more democratic, complex, diverse and responsive. According to the Chief Officer, it was important to move the organisation from one with a “...19th century approach” (Chief Officer, September 2009) to that of “...a modern responsive organisation that reflected the community in which it operated” (Chief Officer, September 2009).

An external organisational review was undertaken by the consultancy organisation Twyfords in 1996 which recommended, (among other administrative changes), the establishment of a human resources function separate from the operational Division. Prior to that there was “...a personnel officer that dealt with aspects like pay” (Chief Officer, September 2009). The Human Resources Function was established with a position entitled Manager Human Services reporting directly to the Chief Officer as a member of the newly formed Executive Management Team (EMT). The Chief Officer remained in that position until retirement in August 2009, (which was two months before the research period ended).

4.2.1.3 Appointment of a HR Manager

The Human Resources Manager (HR Manager) was appointed in 1997. There had been a focus on personnel operations (payroll, OH&S outside of emergency incidents, and coordination of recruitment and selection activities), since the TFS came under the State Public Service employment umbrella in 1984. The challenge faced by the HR Manager was to consolidate the existing practices and commence a dialogue, with the Chief Officer and other senior line

managers, about a strategic approach to people management that included linkages to corporate goals and values.

Being appointed from outside the TFS (but from within the Tasmanian State Service), one of the key priorities for the HR Manager was to establish credibility with the operational employees. A key component of this was spending a period of approximately eight weeks working with operational groups who worked across the four shift system that operates twenty-four hours per day seven days a week. During this period, the HR Manager received a number of comments about promotions, in operational Divisions, not being made on merit. Feedback provided from employee's supervisors and managers was largely negative and tended to be directed in a personal rather than job performance manner (Director Human Services, September 2008). The comments received by the HR Manager contributed to a decision to include a broader range of employees being involved in the Corporate Planning processes (see Section 4.2.2). The aim of this was to build commitment to and ownership by employees in the key people management strategies as they were proposed and developed.

In 2001, the position of HR Manager was re-named The Director of Human Services and, later in that year, the TFS sponsored her to undertake an executive development programme for people working in emergency services. This programme included a requirement to formulate a 'future directions' paper for the TFS. Research for that paper highlighted the potential impact of demographic changes including the impact of ageing in the workforce/general population on the TFS workforce. It also increased the awareness of the importance of effective attraction and retention strategies particularly of younger and more educated employees (Pearce, 2001).

The relevance of working on the ‘Future Directions’ paper was that historically the TFS, and comparable organisations in other States, had attracted far more applicants than current and emerging vacancies. It was the norm, for example, for the TFS to receive in excess of three hundred applications for twelve places. The TFS also had a record of low turnover (on average less than four per cent). Consequently, —*there had been little focus on attraction or retention*” (Director Human Services, June 2008). In discussions with the Chief Officer and other key line managers, it was agreed that if the TFS was to lessen the impact of the demographic changes, then the TFS would need to position itself as a ‘modern and attractive’ employer. This reinforced the importance of the TFS developing a more integrated approach to HRM policies and practices to support changes to a more democratic management style (Chief Officer, September 2009). The view of the Director Human Services was that for an altered management style to be effective, given employee responses to a range of issues such as the previous performance management approach outlined in section 4.2.1, changes to the nature of communication and feedback between managers and employees were required.

4.2.2 CORPORATE PLANNING OUTCOMES

A corporate planning process (that included a range of people from across the TFS) was established in May of 1997. It involved a diagonal slice of forty employees and volunteers (comprising of employees at various levels and sections of the organisation), who developed a Corporate Planning framework with assistance from an external organisational development consultant as facilitator. The Corporate Plan was completed and endorsed by the State Fire Commission in February 1998. The corporate planning process included people working in groups to discuss matters they believed should be contained in a corporate planning document.

One of the groups concentrated on human resources matters and a specific concern raised was that feedback to unsuccessful promotion applicants included information that had not previously been supplied. Consequently people were receiving (often unpleasant) ‘surprises’ and hearing for the first time issues of performance and behaviour that had contributed to their unsuccessful promotion application. The outcomes of those discussions in the corporate planning process helped shape the content and tone of the strategic directions and key result areas in the final corporate planning document. This included a specific reference to performance management (1997 TFS Corporate Plan).

The 1998-1999 to 2000-2001 Corporate Plans (for extracts of the relevant Corporate Plans see Appendix G) contained three areas of Strategic Direction; effective response to fires, fire safety and TFS being a productive and safe workplace. The third area (Corporate Plan 1998: 3) was expressed as:

Positioning the TFS as a productive and safe workplace where members are able and willing to contribute to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the organisation.

The TFS recognises the importance of its people in the successful achievement of its organisational goals. Accordingly, initiatives are planned that will enhance the effectiveness of the workplace and the ability of our people to achieve job satisfaction. These initiatives cover such areas as organisational values, equal employment opportunity, occupational health and safety, training and development, and recruitment and retention.

The 1998 Plan established six key result areas; the second of which (behind emergency response) was called ‘Our People’ which was explicitly identified as a “significant movement in strategic direction” (Corporate Plan 1998: 8). The Our

People Key Result Area had nine objectives; Objective 7 (Corporate Plan 1998: 15) stated:

To ensure that TFS provides all (operational employees) with access to both regular performance feedback and subsequent support and recognition.

There is a note at the end of the 1998 plan to the effect that for the TFS to achieve its Human Resource Plan “...will require significant consultation with stakeholders” (Corporate Plan 1998: 35). A subsequent Corporate Plan for the three-year period 2002-3 to 2004-2005 was approved by the State Fire Commission in March 2002 (‘the 2002 Plan’). The 2002 Plan contained four Key Result Areas with number two renamed as ‘Supporting Our People’ (Corporate Plan 2002: 7). Part of Objective 2: “...to continue the development of systems for recruitment, selection, promotion and retention” was strategy number six: “To implement a performance management system for (operational employees) by December 2002” (2002 Corporate Plan 11-12). The differences in the statements and context of workplace feedback across the two corporate plans are that the 1999 plan had a focus on performance feedback as a separate strategy, whilst the 2002 Corporate Plan included a more specific reference to performance management within a more integrated approach to people management, and had a specific time for implementation.

4.2.3 ENTERPRISE AGREEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

The TFS has had a high percentage of its employees who are members of one of the two primary unions. The UFU that represents operational employees from trainees up to positions immediately below membership of the EMT, and more than ninety nine per cent of eligible TFS employees are members. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) that represents

administrative and support staff has about thirty five per cent of eligible TFS employees as members (Director Human Services, June 2008).

Following the inclusion of the reference to a performance feedback aim in the 1998 Corporate Plan, the TFS negotiated with the UFU for a clause in the 1999 Enterprise Agreement that contained a commitment to the development of a performance feedback system. This commitment has been renewed in each subsequent Enterprise Agreement. According to the Director Human Services, the attitude of the UFU initially was: —*if you want to include a clause in the Agreement on workplace feedback, that is OK but it's not going to work. In any case there will have to be a vote of members before any system is implemented*” (Director Human Services, June 2009). Some twelve months following the trial evaluation, in mid-2007, there was a formal vote of members of the UFU. The vote supported the implementation and an Agreement was signed between the UFU and the TFS (although this was not registered with an Industrial Tribunal). The Agreement is contained in Appendix H.

4.2.4 STATE SERVICE COMMISSIONER'S DIRECTION TO AGENCIES TO DEVELOP PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A Direction, from the State Service Commissioner, who is responsible for Public Sector employment policy, was issued in November 2002. This Direction required each Public Sector Agency to have in place a system for managing employee performance (See Appendix I for key extracts). In the context of performance management, the State Service Principles require a Head of Agency to put in place measures to:

- a) Manage performance and achieve results;
- b) Develop leadership of the highest quality; and
- c) Establish a workplace that encourages communication, consultation and input from employees on matters that affect their work and workplace.

This is based on Section 34 (1) (g) of the *State Service Act 2000* which requires Heads of Agency to “...develop and implement systems to evaluate the performance of employees in that Agency to ensure that the duties of the employee are performed effectively and efficiently” (Tasmanian State Service Act, 2000). The Direction was updated and amended in June 2007 and more explicitly provided a requirement for each Agency, as a minimum, to have a system “...to evaluate the performance management of employees” (SSC 2007: 2-3 refer to Appendix I) to:

- a) ensure adherence to the State Service Principles; and
- b) be fair and equitable and have clearly defined objectives and be well documented; and
- c) be supported by particular training for supervisors/managers and appropriate training for all other employees; and
- d) have a performance agreement and appraisal system(s) covering all Agency employees which:
 - i. operates on a regular cycle (at least annually); and
 - ii. identifies the structured training and development needs of employees; and
 - iii. is aligned with the Agency corporate objectives; and

- e) have appropriate confidentiality provisions and ensure that all information generated through the performance management process is used appropriately.

4.3 HOW THE RESEARCH PROCESS BEGAN

4.3.1 PRESENTATION TO THE EMT

The Director Human Services invited the researcher to deliver a presentation on the relevant literature and the key principles underpinning the concept of performance management. The presentation provided an overview of the research evidence on linking HRM policies to performance and on performance management as one of the key components of an integrated and strategic approach to managing human resources. The presentation included a theoretical framework based on a consolidation of the work of Guest (1987, 1997, 2002). It was presented as being based on four main components (as detailed in Chapter 2 at 2.2.3): vertical integration with organisational objectives, horizontal integration with all other people management policies and practices, effective implementation (demonstrated line management support) and the employee response.

Following the presentation, the EMT agreed that a number of organisational prerequisites would be required prior to any full implementation of a performance management strategy. These prerequisites can be summarised as follows:

- An effective strategic and business planning process underpinned by a clear mission and set of corporate values;
- An integrated and internally consistent set of human resource policies that are congruent with the organisation's overall strategy and business plans;

- An organisational culture that is supportive of performance management and, particularly one that promotes regularity and honesty of feedback;
- A sufficient level of trust across the organisation such that employees would approach a new performance management system with at least an open mind rather than with suspicion and cynicism that reflected the experience with the previous TFS performance management system (or due to experience with performance appraisal with prior employers);
- The importance of managerial behaviour and skills to support and effectively implement such a programme; and
- Involving employees in the design and implementation of the performance management system to maximise the likelihood of its general acceptance.

These principles played a significant role in the way the approach to workplace feedback was developed and, in particular, in shaping complementary people management and leadership initiatives to increase the likelihood that the approach would be accepted as used as intended. In addition, the EMT accepted a set of themes drawn from both academic and practitioner focussed material (principally from Williams, 2002) to assist in providing a clear direction in how the approach would be developed. The broad themes accepted were:

- People are responsible for their performance. The basis for this being the nature of the work roles together with education and training of the employees in both operational and administrative roles;
- The organisation is responsible for providing the environment to allow optimal performance. This includes resources, facilities, systems (including a HRM system) leadership and culture;

- ‘No surprises’ - meaning that feedback about positive and negative performance should occur as soon as possible after it happens and not be saved up for a future formal interview;
- Self and Supervisory assessment rating based on the principle of equal contribution;
- Using a range of performance information; and
- Integrated and flexible criteria developed for the TFS environment.

The EMT were provided with a summary of the typical reasons for performance management approaches not meeting their objectives including factors such as lack of top management support, managers dislike of face-to-face confrontation, lack of employee ownership, employee perceptions of unfairness, excessive paperwork, lack of training, conflicting purposes, and the process of performance management being seen as a ritual rather than something which managers and employees saw as being of value.

In deciding on an appropriate performance management process, the TFS considered the following key points: the history of the organisation, change of leadership styles, and the inclusion of performance management in the corporate planning process that involved a broad cross-section of staff. The TFS decided that the most consistent and effective way to progress towards an approach to managing people was to develop and implement a system right from the beginning rather than considering commercially available products. The EMT also recognised that effective development and implementation would require: specialist resources not available with the organisation; commitment to provide training; system support; and, the development of a communication strategy to support both the development and the implementation phases.

As the result of these factors, in March 2003 the EMT supported an integrated, incremental and inclusive process to the TFS developing an organisation-specific approach to performance management based on day to day feedback in the workplace. From this time, the term ‘workplace feedback’ was adopted in place of ‘performance management’. Such an approach included the need to develop a more transparent workplace feedback culture. Changes would also be required to other HRM policy areas such as selection and employee development that required support from a consistent set of leadership and managerial behaviours. Additionally, there was explicit recognition of the importance of the role of the HR function, line managers (including the EMT) and employees in developing a positive feedback culture.

In May 2003, the EMT participated in a one-day workshop titled ‘Frameworks for Understanding People’ that covered competencies necessary for effective workplace feedback. These included emotional intelligence, different learning styles and the management of emotional situations arising from workplace feedback conversations. This workshop was facilitated by an external psychologist/HR Consultant (Director Human Services, May 2005).

4.3.2 ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE RESEARCH

In 2003, the TFS (through the Director Human Services) established a set of arrangements for research to be undertaken on the organisation’s development of workplace feedback. These arrangements permitted access to material and permission to request that employees participate in surveys, interviews and focus groups on a purely voluntary basis, and consistent with the University of Tasmania’s ethical approval for the research. The researcher agreed to provide summary reports to the EMT provided that information was shown in aggregate and no

individual information could be identified. No payment or fees would be provided to the researcher for providing these summary reports.

4.4 THE REFERENCE GROUP AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRIAL

4.4.1 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REFERENCE GROUP

The first step in the TFS developing its approach to performance management was the establishment of a project team of twenty people (called the Reference Group) in May 2003. The purpose of the Reference Group was to gather information from employees about the purpose, format and implementation of the system. The Director Human Services sought people to self-nominate to the Reference Group by email invitation. From this list of self-nominations, a selection was made to produce a representative diagonal slice of the organisation covering function, location, level and gender. The Reference Group included one of the members of the EMT who took the role of ‘Uniform Champion’. The Reference Group people also included officials from the UFU and the CPSU. The Reference Group was chaired by the Director Human Services.

The Reference Group held a series of workshops. During the first of these in May 2003, the EMT provided a brief setting out the broad parameters that had contributed to the decision to establish an organisation-specific approach to performance management with a focus on performance feedback. The key aspects of the brief were that:

- There was strong unequivocal support from the EMT to develop the process consultatively, and attempt to avoid mistakes made by other organisations;

- There was a recognition that the process would take time as it involved significant adjustments to the organisation's prevailing culture;
- There should be a focus on positive feedback – finding employees doing something right and telling them so;
- Performance feedback separated from existing operational analysis (that is reviews and debriefs after operational events);
- Everybody will get training in the new performance feedback system, whatever it becomes. Therefore, there will be training in the nature of the system, the role of employees and the role of supervisors; and
- The process to focus on giving and receiving feedback and a formal appraisal process would be introduced only after a successful implementation of workplace feedback.

4.4.2 PROCESSES USED BY THE REFERENCE GROUP

The Reference Group met on a total of five occasions: twice in May 2003, in June 2003, in August 2003 and in August 2004. The reasons for the delay in twelve months between the penultimate and final meetings was partly due to the summer period being the main fire season, and also to permit development work on policy, forms and guidelines for the Reference Group to consider. The meetings involved detailed discussions about relevant factors that affected the TFS. The Reference Group, discussed various performance management concepts and approaches, and developed principles to underpin how the TFS should approach performance management. The Reference Group made formal recommendations to the EMT, including that a trial across a representative number of work groups be undertaken and evaluated prior to any formal decision on an organisation wide approach to managing employee performance being made.

The Reference Group used a workshop technique that involved splitting into smaller groups to discuss key points with outcomes reported to the whole Reference Group, which then formulated agreed positions. The Reference Group did not need to vote as agreed positions were achieved through a consensus approach. An example of an item that went through the workshop process was evaluating factors relevant to the TFS that were supportive or impeding the introduction of performance management.

Table 4-1 Factors supporting or impeding the introduction of Performance Management

Supportive factors	Impeding factors
A clear commitment from the EMT to use a best practice approach	Existing elements of a paramilitary command and control culture
A willingness to take a measured and incremental approach	Previous negative experiences with performance management systems, both within the TFS and with prior employing organisations
Long term experience in the use of feedback following critical incidents	Elements of a low trust environment
A range of internal discussions, including as part of the strategic planning process over a period of time	Some general resistance to change
External requirement to implement a performance management system	

4.4.3 REFERENCE GROUP OUTCOMES

4.4.3.1 Principles to underpin workplace feedback

The Reference Group identified a set of guiding principles that should underpin the TFS's approach to performance management. Firstly, the use the term 'workplace feedback' was adopted to distinguish the TFS's approach from more traditional performance appraisal systems. Secondly, the Reference Group incorporated a set of values that had been developed by the EMT, but not formally communicated and implemented across the TFS, to shape the guiding

principles. The development of these principles provided a signal that the TFS recognised the importance of a values based approach and in developing a feedback system it was important to “...seek feedback from employees about how we should do it” (Director Human Services, May 2005).

Table 4-2: Principles underpinning the approach to Performance Management

<p>Flexibility: The TFS is made up of diverse work groups with varying management arrangements and work cultures. It is important that the system is flexible enough to meet the needs of these groups.</p>
<p>Confidentiality: Confidentiality is essential to the integrity of the system. People will usually gain significant benefits when they can openly and honestly discuss skills and behaviour that affect performance. People may not participate openly and willingly if they believe their privacy will not be respected.</p>
<p>Consistency with the TFS Values: The feedback system needs to be developed, implemented and operated in a way that is consistent with the TFS Values and behaviour necessary for the values to be reflected across the organisation. It is particularly important that the following values are evident in the way the system works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p>Honesty</p> <p>It is important that people participating in a feedback discussion can be honest about how well they are performing in the workplace, both technically and behaviourally. Feedback needs to be given in context and supported by examples to assist with understanding.</p> <p>Any discussions under the auspices of the feedback system are to take place in a manner that is diplomatic, tactful and constructive. The aim at all times is to improve performance and not to humiliate or demean individuals.</p> <p>Fairness and Equity</p> <p>People are to be treated at all times with respect and dignity, and without bias.</p> <p>To this end, each person is to be treated as an individual and be given feedback that takes into consideration the attributes and abilities of that person alone. Feedback is to be based on the genuine work-related requirements of the position the person occupies. Feedback is not to be based on comparisons with the abilities or performance of other members of a work team.</p>

- **Commitment**

For the feedback system to have credibility and effectiveness, it is important that:

- People make time to have the discussions;
- Discussions occur on a timely basis; and
- Outcomes agreed in discussions are achievable and implemented.

- **Clarity and Transparency**

People will trust a system that they believe is there to help them and not ‘catch them out’. With feedback existing as a normal part of the way we do our work, people need to participate in formal discussions without fear that issues will be raised with them ‘out of the blue’. An underpinning philosophy, then, is that formal discussions will occur on the basis that there are ‘no surprises’.

4.4.3.2 Key elements of the feedback system

The feedback policy related to the giving of two-way feedback on individual skills and behaviour between a supervisor and employee as a normal part of work. The focus was on regular day to day feedback rather than summative feedback at the end of six or twelve month periods. An aim of the approach was to gradually develop the giving and receiving of workplace feedback as a normal part of workplace processes. The Reference Group recommended that the workplace feedback approach should be kept separate from disciplinary, or continuing poor performance, issues that require a specific performance improvement plan. The goals for the feedback system, as reported to the State Service Commissioner in mid-2006, some twelve months after the conclusion of the workplace feedback trial were to:

- Get people talking about issues that managers and employees have found difficult to discuss and resolve in a skilful and timely manner;
- Provide feedback and recognition to increase employee engagement;
- Promote accountability of employees and managers;

- Get managers and supervisors to address performance issues early and effectively, document them, and where necessary deal with them through a separate performance improvement process;
- Provide planned professional development for employees; and
- Coordinate development activities across the organisation.

4.4.4 RESOURCES TO SUPPORT WORKPLACE FEEDBACK DEVELOPMENT

Because of the decision to develop an approach to managing performance internally and incrementally, it was recognised that both direct and indirect supporting resources would be required. These additional resources were identified as follows:

4.4.4.1 Appointment of a Project Officer

The primary resource identified was a position titled Coordinator, Human Services to take a role of coordinating and facilitating the feedback trial process. The position was approved and advertised in mid 2004. However, a decision was taken after the interview stage not to appoint from that pool of applicants. The position was re-advertised and an appointment from outside of the TFS was made commencing in November, 2004. Subsequently, the position was retitled to Coordinator Organisation Development. Apart from a key role in supporting the development of the workplace feedback approach, the scope of this position included “...*grievances, monitoring probation, diversity management, developing induction systems, perform investigations and the introduction of a leadership program*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008).

The Coordinator Organisation Development, early in understanding and scoping the role, appreciated the importance of developing credibility with the operational employees and to reduce negative perceptions that an ‘outsider’ would not understand the nature of the emergency management chain of command processes on leadership and supervisory behaviour. Therefore, an orientation programme that included observing/shadowing a number of shifts was instituted. The Acting Regional Chief, as a member of the EMT, played a role in introducing the Coordinator Organisation Development to the operational workgroups who were participating in the trial.

4.4.4.2 Establishment and role of the Trial Steering Committee

To oversee and monitor the development and operation of the workplace feedback trial, a Steering Committee was established in April 2005. The Steering Committee contained a member of EMT as chair, representatives from Human Services and one representative from each of the trial workgroups. Each group was encouraged to nominate a non-managerial representative to the Steering Committee. The purpose of this was to facilitate questions, concerns and problems coming forwarded without being filtered by a managerial perspective. The Steering Committee met four times over the trial period that became twelve months (June 2005 to June 2006) and reported to the EMT.

4.4.5 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The TFS recognised that a communication strategy, in parallel with the trial, was important for clarity, transparency and visibility. The communication strategy was based on simplicity, regularity and the use of a variety of communication channels. The strategy, as managed by the Coordinator Organisation Development included:

- Using the organisation's Intranet as a mechanism for general information and specific items such as background, principles and frequently asked questions (FAQs);
- The quarterly TFS magazine called 'Fireground' which published regular update articles;
- A 'Road Show' of presentations to all staff. These were conducted by the Coordinator Organisation Development and the Deputy Regional Chief as the EMTs 'champion' of the workplace feedback;
- Emailing all staff to provide information about the trial Work Groups and how to access additional information;
- Fliers and posters displayed on notice boards in work areas and 'lunch rooms'; and
- Stakeholder updates including to the State Fire Commission and to the two unions.

4.5 THE WORKPLACE FEEDBACK TRIAL

The EMT accepted recommendations from The Reference Group, in early 2005, for a trial across a representative range of work groups. Initially, the trial was to operate for six months from June 2005, during which each employee was to have at least one informal feedback session and one review session. Due to operational factors including: some delays in completing pre-trial training; the impact of the fire season during the warmer summer months; and, a number of

personnel changes within the trial work groups; the trial was extended to twelve months and to include two rounds of review meetings. The focus of the trial was on increasing effective use of feedback and employee development. Factors such as discipline, promotion and pay were expressly outside the parameters of the trial.

4.5.1 IDENTIFICATION OF WORK GROUPS

The establishment of trial work groups included significant staff involvement. The trial work groups were identified through self-nomination with strong encouragement for there to be a representative cross section of work groups. Ten work groups involving more than 25 per cent of employees volunteered for the trial. Groups included operational (shift work) groups in each of the three major Tasmanian regions (South, North and North West) and a number of support and administrative groups (with administrative groups in the two largest regions). Partly due to a large turnover in membership just after the trial commenced, one of the work groups decided to withdraw from the process, leaving nine groups ranging in size from eight to twenty employees. In addition, the EMT and Human Services participated in the trial to the extent of having a training session and review meetings, without being formally included as trial work groups.

Early in 2005, each group received a presentation on the purpose of the trial from the Coordinator Organisation Development. Following the presentation, each group voted to decide whether they wished to be involved. Each trial group had a monitoring working party of four people; two employee and two supervisors/managers, one of whom (and it was encouraged to be one of the employees) acted as the work group representative on a Steering Committee that oversaw the trial process. Each working party had a role in reviewing and, where deemed

appropriate, adapting the draft paperwork and system to fit the specific workplace situation, and deciding on how workplace feedback could be effectively integrated into normal work processes.

4.5.2 PRE-TRIAL TRAINING

Pre-trial training of one and a half days was provided between April and June 2005 for all employees with each supervisor/manager receiving an additional half-day training on conducting review sessions. This training was coordinated and delivered by the Coordinator Organisation Development. It covered the background, principles and key elements of the workplace feedback approach and provided an opportunity for role playing, clarifying questions and raising matters of concern. The training was delivered in three parts with all groups in each of the three regions trained together.

4.5.3 PRE-TRIAL SURVEY

An anonymous written survey of twenty eight Likert-scale questions was administered as part of the training programme. The purpose of the survey was to gather information on the attitudes of employees towards performance management and working for the TFS. Participants were invited to complete the survey and return it to the Coordinator Organisation Development who collated the returns and posted them to the researcher. More detailed analysis is reported in Chapter Six; however, in the context of the Case History, the key outcomes of the pre-trial survey that informed the conduct of the trial and the development of the overall workplace feedback system were:

- A high level of consistency in the responses;

- General agreement that feedback was important to assist the TFS to become a more effective organisation;
- The TFS is ‘a good place to work’;
- The TFS doesn’t communicate effectively to its employees;
- The TFS hasn’t encouraged the use of regular feedback;
- There was a moderate level of concern that the trial would disrupt normal work or that the trial groups wouldn’t take the trial seriously; and
- Whilst the majority were not concerned about information from the trial being used against them – a significant minority did express concern that this may occur.

A written summary of these results was provided to the EMT in July 2005.

4.5.4 THE TRIAL STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee included an EMT representative as chairperson, the Director Human Services and the Coordinator Organisation Development. The composition of the Steering Committee was consistent with the philosophy of creating ‘owners’ of the system and transferring accountability away from the HR function. The Steering Committee met four times over the period July 2005 to July 2006 with the primary objective of monitoring progress of the trial and dealing with issues and concerns that arose.

4.5.5 THE MID-TRIAL REVIEW

A mid-trial review was conducted during January to February 2006, six months after the trial commenced. This occurred later than planned and was one of the factors in the trial being extended to twelve months. The mid-trial review consisted of seven individual interviews and six focus groups (involving a total of twenty seven people or approximately 30 per cent of people remaining in the nine trial groups). The focus groups were comprised of either supervisors or employees with the sessions were held both in the South and North regions. Individual interviews were conducted with supervisors and managers. This approach was designed to capture information relatively efficiently and to provide an environment where people felt free to express their views.

A report was provided to the EMT in April 2006, which in summary (see Chapter 6 for a detailed analysis), demonstrated support for the concept of a structured approach to the giving and receiving of feedback within the TFS, and for the incremental, inclusive approach that had been taken. The respondents were able to articulate an understanding of performance feedback and that their role would be to participate in the giving of receiving of feedback on both a regular basis, and as part of more formal review sessions. A specific matter reported to the Steering Committee and the EMT, was that a number of employees had not participated in a formal feedback session. Some of the feedback sessions had been given in front of the work group as a demonstration. This resulted in both the givers and receivers of the feedback being more reserved and less honest in providing feedback than if the session had been conducted in private. Partly due to prior experience with performance management, in organisations prior to joining the TFS, and to the manner in which the trial had been developed, most people indicated comfort

with the level of their feedback skills. From a process management perspective, particularly within operational areas, the degree of movement at supervisor level made continuity an issue. A further matter raised was a perception of a need for the EMT to be more explicit of their support of, and participation in, workplace feedback.

4.5.6 THE POST-TRIAL EVALUATION

4.5.6.1 How the evaluation was conducted

In June and July 2006, following the twelve month trial period, the researcher conducted focus groups with available members of the four person monitoring group of each of the nine work areas that had completed workplace feedback trial. The focus groups were conducted over a two and a half week period involving a total of twenty-four people; ten of whom had participated in the mid-trial evaluation. The focus groups responded to a set of questions that had been sent out in advance. The questions are contained in Appendix J.

4.5.6.2 Report to the Steering Committee and Recommendations to the EMT

A report of the post-trial evaluation was provided to the Steering Committee in early August 2006 and a presentation on the findings was made to the EMT in October 2006. The report indicated that the extended period had resulted in some reduced levels of enthusiasm and concern that the TFS was not as committed to workplace feedback as had been stated by Human Services and the Deputy Chief Officer in his ‘Roadshow’. The post-trial evaluation report highlighted the importance of using the communication channels effectively to show that progress was being made and that EMT were committed to (and had been utilising the workplace feedback process in conjunction with the trial). The report detailed how participants commented on the importance of the workplace feedback approach being seen to be driven by line managers, and be supported

by adequate resources to develop procedures and support networks to assist with coaching and technical assistance. A concern raised during the post-trial evaluation was that confidentiality of information and documentation remained a significant issue for some people.

The EMT endorsed the report at its October 2006 meeting and decided that the TFS should proceed with a full implementation of an organisation wide workplace feedback system. Given the content of the evaluation and some operational concerns, the timing of commencement was to be reviewed after completion of initiatives to address harassment and bullying.

4.6 TOWARDS FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF WORKPLACE FEEDBACK

4.6.1 ROLE OF HUMAN SERVICES

Human Services provided both strategic contribution and operational support to the full implementation of the workplace feedback system. The Director Human Services gave updates to the EMT which reinforced that their involvement and behaviour played a significant role in demonstrating the importance of the system to employees. The Coordinator Organisation Development was the primary contact point for the various workgroups, coordinated the development and delivery of training and support systems for employees, project managed the production of a DVD and supporting documentation and procedures for the system. He provided an expert consultancy service in problem solving and assisted where serious work performance or behavioural issues emerged. A key resource developed was a ‘toolkit’ of on-line and multi-media and paper based resources to guide managers and employees through the system. There were three secondments of operational staff to assist with development of materials and coordination of activities such as the rollout of the training for employees in workplace feedback

over the latter part of 2008 and the early part of 2009. This not only increased the available staffing resources but also assisted with the credibility of the system as the seconded operational staff contributed components of the toolkit (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009).

4.6.2 IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPLEMENTARY HRM STRATEGIES

It was recognised by the EMT that for effective workplace feedback to be sustained, there were implications for other HRM policy areas. Strategies and policy changes were needed to reinforce complementary people management behaviours. One such project was a survey of TFS employees on various aspects of bullying behaviours. This survey was conducted by external consultants to identify the frequency and nature of bullying behaviour. This survey was jointly sponsored by the TFS and the UFU. The survey administered in July 2007, allowed respondents to provide information from the perspectives of being victims, witnesses and self-disclosed bullies. The survey results, provided to employees in October 2007, helped to reinforce appropriate methods of communication, including feedback. An education programme involving all employees was undertaken in late 2007 and early 2008 to address the broad area of workplace harassment. This included identifying and training of twenty-two harassment contact officers who provide advice, support and information to employees who have concerns or grievances arising from the workplace feedback process or in dealing with an issue that is identified from a feedback session.

Complementary HRM policies and procedures were implemented to reinforce the workplace feedback approach. During 2007 and 2008, position descriptions for all people in supervisory positions were audited. Where necessary they were amended to give sufficient weight to

feedback skills, in managing performance, and in actively developing employees. This facilitated the development of feedback and leadership as essential selection criteria for all supervisory positions. In addition, the firefighter recruit programme was amended to include workplace feedback concepts and training in feedback skills.

4.6.3 DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORTING NETWORKS AND MATERIALS

To support the effective implementation of the workplace feedback system, a range of networks were developed. The aim was to increase the level of support for workplace feedback across the organisation, to try to maintain the momentum, and to have a range of people across functions, regions and levels to act as advisors, coaches and providers of technical support. Internal support mechanisms included regional support persons and qualified internal trainers who are available so that employees with questions or concerns can “...*talk to a colleague in the same Division and at the same level and not be talked down to or have to go to Human Services*” (Supervisor Operations, September 2008).

In September 2008, a contracted external training provider conducted a ‘train the trainer’ programme for sixteen employees to become ‘in house trainers’. This programme consisted of a four-day workshop that included participants receiving details about the workplace feedback process, its context and their role. It then involved the participants doing small presentations on specific aspects of workplace feedback. There was also a session on coaching. These in-house trainers then lead workshops of approximately three-quarters of a day so workgroups could learn about, and then practise, using the feedback processes, the forms and supporting items from the ‘toolkit’. The role of internal coaches is:

...to guide people through the first (summary feedback) session, the first time they run a summary feedback meeting, and to get them to start to think about what they could do better next time. The first time they do this, they might not be very good at it. That's actually going to be the time they learn most about it, rather than having to feel like they know everything the first time (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009).

The Deputy Chief Officer (who was appointed to the position of Chief Officer in October, 2009 to replace the retiring Chief Officer) took on the role as the executive champion of the system and promoted it when meeting with managers and employees. Members of the Reference Group, the Steering Committee and participants in the trial together provided a broad network of support for the Coordinator Organisation Development, the trainers and the contact officers.

4.6.4 IMPACTS OF OPERATIONAL FACTORS AND INDUSTRIAL DISRUPTION

As indicated, the process from the presentation to the EMT to the conclusion of the research period covered the period from December 2002 to October, 2009. When the EMT accepted the recommendations of the Reference Group to develop a TFS specific approach to workplace feedback in early 2005, it was envisaged that the whole process of development, trial and full implementation would take approximately two years. As at October 2009, the workplace feedback system is not fully operational across the whole of the TFS. The areas that have taken the longest time to start using the system are in operational areas in the North and North West.

There were four major factors contributed to the delays. Operational patterns of busy periods, and unpredictable volumes of emergency calls, increased the complexity of scheduling briefing sessions, training and the conduct of feedback and review sessions. These events are more easily scheduled away from the warmer October to April period (and around periods when shift workers take blocks of annual leave). Secondly, from 1 December 2006, the TFS acquired a

greater role in road accident rescue. This required the development and implementation of specific training for all operational firefighters. The consequence was that no workplace feedback training was able to be scheduled in 2007. The second factor derived from developing workplace feedback solely from available internal resources. It took time to appoint the Coordinator Human Services (as originally titled) and there were gaps in the capacity to provide seconded staff due to operational requirements – particularly during the traditionally busy months. There were also delays in securing funds for consultants and providers of the support materials. The third factor was the impact of developing other HRM policy areas (as outlined in 4.6.2) and fourthly, there were instances of industrial disruption involving operational employees. The disputes concerned superannuation entitlements and negotiating an industrial agreement (which were both independent of the workplace feedback approach), but resulted in bans by union members on training over the period from April 2007 to May 2008 (Director Human Services, June 2009).

4.7 STATUS OF WORKPLACE FEEDBACK AT END OF RESEARCH PERIOD

4.7.1 VARIABLE TIMETABLE OF IMPLEMENTATION

Partly as a consequence of the factors that caused delays (see Section 4.6.5), it was decided to take a staged approach to the full implementation process. Differing operational requirements, and the limited resources to support the process (in particular from the HR function), resulted in a decision to have a gradual rollout rather than a common start date across the organisation. Some of the work groups, which had participated in the trial, had continued with informal review sessions. In operational firefighting areas, the full implementation occurred on a region by region basis, starting with the South Tasmanian region. Based on experience from the trial, where the

proportion of review sessions declined the further the distance from headquarters in Hobart, this approach had the focus of getting a critical mass of employees undertaking workplace feedback as part of their normal day to day activities.

4.7.2 THE NATURE OF REVIEW SESSIONS

The principle aim of the workplace feedback system was to increase the level of timely feedback as part of normal management practice. The outcome is to increase the level of transparency and improve the capacity and willingness to openly discuss matters that are traditionally difficult conversations. The other principal element is the summary feedback discussion (or review) meetings that are planned to occur at least once a year and preferably twice a year, with the work group determining the frequency. Managers are accountable for organising the cycles in their divisions. Autumn and spring were identified as times of relatively lower activity that could permit easier scheduling of review meetings. These summary feedback meetings are based on the functions and duties as outlined in the Statement of Duties. Statements of Duties outline the objectives and duties of the employee, including those related to the development and implementation of the Corporate Plan and the development and use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

4.7.3 THE LINK TO TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Workplace Feedback system interfaces with the TFS's training and development approach through employees' individual Personal Development Plans (PDPs). These are documents that are completed annually and are intended to be a key outcome of review sessions. PDP's have sections to record the employee's technical skills, interpersonal skills/ behaviours and career

objectives. Given the philosophy of the workplace feedback approach, significant weight is given to interpersonal skills/behaviours, particularly for people with supervisory or managerial roles.

One copy of the PDP stays with the supervisor as a record of what development is planned and who is accountable for each action. This was aimed at reducing complaints that agreed outcomes of review sessions not being followed up. Copies of the PDP are provided to the employee and to the relevant Learning and Development section of Human Services so that organisation-wide needs and trends are identified and, as far as possible development activities are coordinated. This also facilitates the identification of key gaps that may require a whole of organisation approach that would need to be planned, funding be approved and developed (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009).

4.7.4 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Some concerns with confidentiality and access to information were raised during the reference group, and from data gathering as part of the pre-trial survey. This was addressed by Human Services, through the Workplace Feedback Trial Steering Committee, by establishing processes so that documentation and records are managed in the following manner:

- Notes (‘Prompt Sheets’) made prior to ‘Summary Feedback Meetings’ to remain with the individual employee;
- Agreements from the meeting (in terms of job focussed action plans and training and development needs) to be recorded and a copy kept by the supervisor and employee only. This document will be kept confidential. These will be kept for two to three rounds of Summary Meetings only (to establish trends and patterns) before being discarded. They will not be placed on employees’ personal files. They will not be accessed by anyone else

unless: there is continued pattern of sub-standard performance or there are compelling legal or ethical reasons to inform others (such as instances where potential breaches of the TFS's Code of Conduct may have occurred);

- The information in a PDP forwarded to Learning and Development is to contain only information that both supervisor and employee agree to share; and
- Office environments will be provided with locking filing cabinets. Consideration is being given to developing a secure system of electronic storage of confidential docs for operating environments where face to face contact can be logistically difficult and where employees and supervisors change shifts. This requires a substantial investment in information technology resources that, at the time that the research period concluded was yet to be formally committed.

4.7.5 FLEXIBILITY OF APPROACH

During the Reference Group period, and confirmed in successive stages, an issue was that different parts of the TFS had differing aims and needs from the workplace feedback approach. To balance consistency and flexibility, workplace feedback was designed as a 'core plus' approach with a standard set of information, whilst permitting workgroups to tailor forms/paper work, timing, and storage of documentation to suit particular operational requirements and employee preferences.

4.7.6 REPORTING EFFECTIVENESS OF WORKPLACE FEEDBACK APPROACH

Progress reports on implementation occurred on a regular basis to the Chief Officer and EMT through discussions at Executive Management Team meetings. Reporting occurred at State Consultative Committee meetings (joint TFS and UFU) on a quarterly basis. A system of

providing quarterly reports, by work group, on the conduct of the summary meetings and completion of documentation, to the EMT was being instituted as the research period ended.

4.7.7 POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS

During the Reference Group phase (see Section 4.4), a specific and definitive decision was taken that it was more important to get supervisors and employees to have a conversation and obtain feedback that can be used by both, rather than to start ‘grading’ performance. The concept of grading (producing a ‘number’ as an outcome of annual reviews) is to be reviewed after the workplace feedback approach has been fully embedded into the organisation (Director Human Services, June 2009). This review is likely to be at least three years after the research for this thesis concluded.

4.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This Chapter set out to provide a contextual background to the decision by the TFS to introduce an approach to managing employee performance that is centred on workplace feedback. It provided a broad timeline, within a thematic structure, of the process used by the TFS to develop and implement workplace feedback. This chapter also provided information on the roles of the EMT, Human Services, line managers and employees in the process of developing and commencing to fully implement a system of workplace feedback. The factors that contributed to the process being protracted were also detailed.

The following three Chapters report on the findings from the research conducted over the period from 2005 to 2009. Chapter Five covers the period from 1979 to December and details

contextual background of the TFS and the factors leading to a decision to undertake a workplace feedback trial. Chapter Six covers the period from January 2005 when the feedback trial was launched to reporting of the trial evaluation in October 2006. Chapter Seven covers the period from October 2006 to the end of the research period in October 2009.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS PART 1: CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT

5.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter covers relevant factors from the time the TFS came into being in 1979; changes implemented by the Chief Officer introduced from 1996 to 2002, and the process of development of the workplace feedback approach from its consideration by the EMT in December 2002 up to the end of 2004. The contextual factors are primarily related to a managerial driven cultural change. The external factors include a requirement on Public Sector organisations to introduce a performance management approach and an increased level of workplace diversity.

The primary purpose of this Chapter is to examine the first research question:

Research Question 1: *What are the relevant contextual issues important for an organisation to consider in developing a new human resource policy?*

The Chapter will cover the reasons why the organisation needed to change its approach to managing employee performance. This includes the legacy of the former performance management approach. The Chapter will then detail the implications of these factors for the HR function, the executive, for line managers, and for TFS employees.

5.2 NEED FOR THE TFS TO CHANGE

This section will review the development of the TFS from its formal inception in 1979 and the key factors influencing the change of culture and managerial style. The factors to be discussed are the prevailing culture, the residual legacy of a 1980s performance management approach, complaints from employees about a lack of positive feedback, and an externally imposed requirement to develop a performance management approach.

The TFS was created in 1979 with the amalgamation of the metropolitan and the rural fire services. This amalgamation was not well supported; particularly by members of the rural fire service (Chief Officer, October 2009). Both constituent organisations had histories of more than one hundred years with stable labour forces who tended to join as recruits and remain with the organisation until retirement. Partly because of these factors, it took an extended period of time for TFS to effectively become an integrated organisation. This was explained in the following way.

The last vestiges of a divided service only really disappeared in about 1999-2000 and we are now getting a significant number of the older group retiring...who were a part of that acrimonious beginning. We are starting to be able to tell stories based on one service, rather than two services. Those stories are going to be critical to the future, in making sure that we are telling a good story to amplify that this is what the organisation is now all about (Director Human Services, June 2009).

A matter raised prior to the commencement of the workplace feedback trial in 2005 was the importance of the TFS being more responsive to the communities in which they operate. A number of the interviews posed the question ‘How different is TFS going to be from what it was in 1990?’ The responses to this question emphasised the continuing focus on “...responding to emergencies and that is probably how most of the public see it” (Acting Chief Officer, September 2008). The major change is from a reactive to a proactive focus by engaging with the community to increase the TFS’s level of credibility through a greater community understanding of fire dangers, preparation and cooperation in combating fires.

It used to be all about red trucks and hoses but if we really want to make a difference, it’s got to be a lot more about giving the community knowledge, making the community aware and influencing the community to act in response to keeping themselves safer (Manager Operations, February 2006).

It was argued that the TFS could further develop its credibility by its staff having:

...more understanding of the environments in which they work – political, social and environmental and by producing evidence based research so that its changing profile can be understood and respected by the community through media and other forms (Acting Chief Officer, September 2008).

5.2.1 THE CULTURE OF THE TFS

When a new Chief Officer was appointed in late 1995, he brought a different management philosophy geared at moving TFS towards one *“that worked on contemporary management principles”* (Director Human Services, September, 2009). The new Chief Officer’s expressed how he would like to manage the organisation as follows:

After a period of time, it occurred to me that a lot of contemporary organisations manage in a democratic way that reflected the society that we were there for. It reflected the society outside, because up until that period, the Fire Service was in a time warp because it was way behind other organisations. It was a very insular organisation (Chief Officer, September 2009).

TFS’ operational history, embodied by its uniforms that clearly displayed each person’s rank, resulted in a culture that reflected its strict hierarchical structure. As reported in Chapter Four, there was no executive structure and a lack of delegation that reinforced a strict chain of command as expressed: *“The discipline was very strong and you certainly knew where you stood in the chain of command and within your workplace. Breaking that down was always going to be a long process”* (Middle Manager Operations, September 2008).

This culture reinforced an attitude of “...do as you are told and don’t question decisions made above you” (Front Line Operational Employee, January 2006). One of the sources of the “...bad culture comes from a conformist one way of doing things” (Chief Officer, September 2009). Such a conformist approach reduced the preparedness of employees to go beyond the strict confines of their position that results in the following viewpoint:

In a hierarchical organisation, you don’t need an extensive study to see that there are attitudes that are suppressing and silencing creativity and investment in doing a good job or going the extra yard. Not even the extra mile, but the extra yard (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008).

The prevailing culture not only had an impact on the attitudes and behaviours of the front-line employees, it also impacted on the general levels of organisational trust both from employees to senior management and also from the management to employees. The view of the senior levels was that there was a need for specific and rigid policies and procedures. “*The management of the organisation was still, and is still to a degree, steeped in that we don’t trust them not to abuse*”....flexibilities in policies and systems (Director Human Services, September 2009).

There were indications that the culture of the TFS was changing slowly; partly due to increases in the diversity of employees in terms of a greater spread of the age of recruits, a small number of female fire fighter recruits, and some women in managerial positions in the non-operating areas (including human services). “*I think that getting diversity will do all sorts of things. It will break down some of the bad culture. However, getting a team based culture is something we are still struggling with*” (Chief Officer, September 2009).

A further relevant aspect of the prevailing culture was its impact on the working relationships and nature of the communication about factors not directly related to operational matters. This was expressed in the following way:

The culture of the TFS when I started was outwardly supportive of people but insular. People tended to be unaware of their affects on others. They had been trained to think in a specific way that was all about fighting fires. The culture is open and friendly on the surface but guarded below (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2005).

5.2.2 LEGACY OF 1980S PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL POLICY

One of the contextual factors, relevant for TFS when considering the nature of the performance management system that it may implement, was existing staff memories of a performance appraisal system that had operated from circa 1985 to 1988. Whilst no system had been in place over the period 1988 to 2002: “...older staff, myself being among them, were reticent due the memories we had of the system way back when” (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008). It was further explained that “...there was some fear of the unknown and some bad vibes from previous negative experiences at the TFS and for some, with previous employers” (EMT member, September 2008). “It was implemented, and then within a reasonably short period of time it just wasn’t getting used. I would be surprised if it lasted effectively for much more than a couple of years” (Director Human Services, September 2009). As described by the Chief Officer:

It was copied from the military and I think it probably worked. Well it should have worked in an organisation that was autocratic. But it wasn’t driven properly. There was no strategy for rolling it out. Senior people weren’t sort of taken in by the whole thing: they weren’t convinced of its merits (September 2009).

This process involved the employee’s direct supervisor providing an annual appraisal of past performance that was not linked to formal key performance indicators. It did not impact on

remuneration as, at that time, there was no mechanism within the Tasmanian State Sector to link performance appraisals to pay. The 1980s system was described in the following manner:

The annual performance review system, stayed in place so that the last two written performance reviews, could be and would be produced at interview if you went for promotion so disciplinary is probably the wrong word but it wasn't seen as anything positive and my experience of it was that it just wasn't used for anything positive (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

The credibility of the former performance appraisal system was also undermined by a perception that promotions within the Operating Divisions did not operate consistently with the merit principle. According to the Director Human Services, there was a strong view that “...promotions, in Divisions, were given to people who were seen as „favourites’ or „blue eyed boys” (September 2008). Overall, the residual impact of the 1980s performance appraisal process was that “...some people still bear the emotional scars from it and it had a bad name” (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2005).

5.2.3 FEEDBACK ABOUT A LACK OF POSITIVE FEEDBACK

The TFS’ hierarchical structure and prevailing culture, prior to the development of workplace feedback, meant that employees felt the organisation was not effective at providing feedback to employees. During the HR Manager’s induction programme in 1997, she received comments about a lack of effective performance feedback along the lines of: “*It is always a part of that ongoing issue, people just not knowing why they missed out on a promotion*” (Director Human Services, September 2009).

As discussed in Chapter Four, during the Corporate Planning process in May, 1997, the HR working group raised concerns that unsuccessful applicants for promotion were receiving feedback on matter that had not previously been raised with them. This view was reinforced by the Acting Chief Officer whose responsibility had included conducting exit interviews with fire fighters when they left the TFS.

At least two exit interviews that I remember with good people who left this organisation that part of their feedback was that they thought they didn't get reinforcement and feedback. I've heard that from other people too that they didn't hear from their supervisors how they were doing and how they were tracking (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

When TFS employees received feedback, it tended to be negative rather than positive. As one operational fire fighter explained *"There is no way that the TFS has a culture of giving positive feedback to people"* (EF15). According to the Director Human Services, most feedback provided from employees' supervisors and managers *"...was negative and tended to be directed in a personal rather than job performance manner"* (September 2008). Feedback of this nature meant that *"...people seem not to know what's expected of them so therefore how do they know what they're doing is right without feedback?"* (Manager Divisions, January 2006). This was linked back to the prevailing culture in the following manner:

Something with our culture that we give feedback where we tended to provide feedback when things weren't going well and not necessarily when things were going well or in engaging in ideas from people due perhaps to the rank culture and no avenue for alternative approaches (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

Not all those interviewed agreed with this point of view. There were comments from some of the middle managers along the following lines:

Since I've been with the Fire Service, informally the feedback has been fairly good. This was more than the debrief sessions we had after incidents as we'd sit down one on one and discuss how the previous month went for them....and provide feedback on how people were going as we saw it (Manager Divisions, January 2006).

However, this view was explained by the Coordinator Organisation Development as:

There is a view that the TFS is already doing this but it is technical and operationally based. When fire crews return for a job, there is a debrief covering: how did it go; what was stuffed up? The operational side are not generally comfortable with behavioural management although some managers can pull people gently into line. A lot of behaviour management is by exclusion, intimidation and ridicule, especially among fire fighters (May 2005).

5.2.4 STATE SERVICE COMMISSIONER'S DIRECTION (NOVEMBER 2002)

One of the contextual factors that impacted on the TFS's decision to embark on developing and deciding its approach to performance management was the issuing, in November 2002 of a Direction by the State Services Commissioner (see Chapter 4.2.4). This Direction required all Tasmanian Public Sector Agencies to have in place a system for managing employee performance. Whilst the Direction did not specify the nature of the system, it was required to manage performance, develop leadership and encourage two-way communication (State Service Commissioner Tasmania, 2002).

The Direction focussed the attention of the TFS and contributed to a decision for the EMT to consider its approach at its December 2002 meeting. The Direction helped to overcome some of the resistance to performance management that lingered from the 1980s system as the TFS were able to say that "...we were obligated because its Government policy" (Chief Officer, September 2009). This was generally supported across the organisation with one employee response being

that “...all public service departments are expected to implement performance feedback. I think that gave it a fairly strong footing” (Employee Operations 2, February 2006).

However, “...there was some negative reaction to having a performance management system because it was a compulsory Public Sector requirement” (EMT Member, September 2008).

Overall, the impact of the Direction was summarised by the Director Human Services as:

All the Commissioner’s Direction did was to give us a greater motivator to use with the workforce.... Now that may well have made more of a difference with the Union in terms of getting them on board and their support (September 2009).

5.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE HR FUNCTION

The purpose of this section is to outline the development of the HR function of the TFS over the period 1997 to the end of 2004 and to describe the HR function’s contribution to the organisational responses to the contextual issues. Before the appointment of the Chief Officer in December, 1995 there was not a formal HR function within the TFS.

HR at the time I took over wasn’t HR. All HR matters were dealt with by the Chief. We had a personnel officer that dealt with aspects like pay and other things. We had general orders that covered discipline. But there was no HR strategy (Chief Officer, September 2009).

In terms of anything that was focused towards the strategic development of people or the people capacity of the organisation, there was little to none (Director Human Services, September 2009).

The HR function’s initial role was to implement the recommendations from a 1996 external consultants’ report (Twyfords Report) which “...recommended a number of things around the development of people...development of career paths” (Director Human Services, September 2009). A position of H R Manager was filled by an external appointment. Coming from outside

the TFS, and being a woman in a predominantly male environment, meant that establishing the credibility of both the HR function and the HR Manager was important. This was a major reason for the HR Manager to spend time with operational crews on both day and night shifts. The importance of this was explained by an operational manager as “...*having an HR person spend time on shift was a good idea as HR is a bit of a mystery for the operational shift workers*” (EMT member, September 2008).

One of the reasons for the appointment was the need to have a more strategic approach to industrial relations. The new Chief Officer did not have a background in industrial relations matters where the previous Chief Officer dealt directly with “...*the Secretary of the Union at the time, who was a fire fighter. They had a rapport and had a way of working things out. So there was no need for anyone with those industrial skills other than the Chief*” (Chief Officer, September 2009). As discussed in the Chapter 4: Case History, there was been a high level of union membership, particularly by operational fire fighters. The relationship between the TFS and the Unions was variable but generally constructive. As discussed previously, the rate of union membership by the operational fire fighters was very high and the union had commanded a high level of support and commitment from its members. This contributed to a view that employee commitment could be expressed as “...*the relation is employee to union before it is employee to organisation*” (Director Human Services, September 2008). Therefore, one of the important stakeholders for the HR function was the UFU. Partly due to the lingering impact of the previous performance management approach, there was a degree of resistance from the UFU towards the proposal to have a new performance management system.

A major organisational process towards a new approach to performance management was the Corporate Planning Workshops in 1997 and 1998 which was that it was the first time employees had direct input to planning. In the 1998 Corporate Planning Workshop, “...*there was concern about the concept of a performance management system and how it may be used and misused, but there was a general support for the idea that performance management had to come*” (Director Human Services, September 2009).

By mid-2001 the TFS had “...*looked at options for career paths, had looked at improvements to training and training systems and there had been...a major review of our competency training*” (Director Human Services, September 2009). There had also been two Enterprise Agreements concluded with the Unions. The position of HR Manager was re-titled as Director Human Services and the TFS sponsored her attendance at an Executive Development Program at the Australian Institute of Police Management, in Sydney. Attendance at this course permitted the consideration of challenges for the TFS including those deriving from projections of changes in Tasmanian workforce demographics. The implications of this were that:

If we are going to be the sort of organisation that is going to continue to attract and retain people, we’ve got some fundamental changes that we need to make to the way in which we treat our people for them to want to be here and want to commit in the market that was going to become increasingly harder to attract and retain people (Director Human Services, September 2009).

These changes in approach to people management had implications for recruitment, selection, development and promotion. Consistent with many Public Sector organisations, “...*people have tended to be promoted to management on the basis of technical skills*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2005). Changes to people management required development of behavioural skills including effective communication and the giving of feedback. This

required change from a command and control leadership style that existed in the Operational Divisions. The leadership style sought by the Chief Officer and Director Human Services was *“...around engagement and leadership, being able to have peacetime leadership most of the time, and being able to turn on the emergency leadership in emergencies. Not having emergency leadership one hundred percent of the time”* (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2005).

5.4 IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL CHANGES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The leadership approach of the Chief Officer, in combination with the more strategic approach to human resources, implied a change to the prevailing style of leadership to:

One whereby we're leading people to engagement, where people have a clear vision and understanding of what the organisation is trying to achieve, where people are willing to put in the effort to be able to achieve that, you know that discretionary effort. They will have some control and involvement in their own workplace and they will be treated with respect in doing that. They will actually be able to engage in the way that they do the business, and that they are able to feel safe coming to work and be able to contribute, and.... (receive)... just recognition in the way they are treated (Director Human Services, September 2009).

Consistent with the leadership approach, and the example set in the Corporate Planning exercises *“...there is a significant expectation in this organisation that people will have a say about how things are going to work”* (Director Human Services, September 2009). This was reinforced from comments about the capabilities of employees from all levels of the TFS that were not being effectively sought or utilised. *“There is a lot of very good experience in people that we needed to engage and we weren't providing the avenue to get those ideas”* (Acting Chief Officer, September 2008). The TFS was seeking to increase the level of engagement employees

had with the organisation. *It is about more engagement with people wanting to put in the extra effort, rather than just coming in and doing the minimum. Engagement is about desire not just about duty*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009). To increase the level of engagement required employees to be encouraged to utilise their skills to a greater amount. This was expressed as:

They’ve got a lot of fantastic skills but when they go to work their skills are suppressed, they are not able to express themselves. When they go to work they conform. Challenging the status quo is very much contrary to the way you do things (Chief Officer, September 2009).

For performance management to be effective required the TFS employees to develop skills and confidence in providing feedback and having conversations about subjects that historically had been avoided (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008). Any approach to performance management needed to “...provide an opportunity and a forum to have those conversations that we may not normally have and some of us feel uncomfortable having” (Acting Chief Officer, September 2008). Part of the reason for the existing behaviour was that “...we don’t like being critical of others to their face, we do it behind their back quite easily, through other people, which is obviously very wrong” (Chief Officer, September 2009).

Part of the rationale for developing the approach to workplace feedback internally was to work at increasing the levels of trust between operational fire fighters and senior levels of management. The level of trust according to the Director Human Services would be improved based on people’s experience with the formal component of the workplace feedback approach.

People will trust a system that they believe is there to help them and not „catch them out’. With feedback existing as a normal part of the way we do our work, people need to participate in formal discussions without fear that issues will be

raised with them ,out of the blue'. An underpinning philosophy, then, is that formal discussions will occur on the basis that there are „no surprises’ (Director Human Services, May 2005).

The overall impact of the development of workplace feedback on the style of people management required was explained by the Coordinator Organisation Development as follows:

Operationally the rank structure is over-riding and was used instead of leadership skills. It is changing in areas such as middle to senior management that had been influenced by people coming in from outside (of the TFS). There is still influence from people with a military and trades background who prefer a command and control style. The para-military style allowed supervisors to squash thoughts of being able to work the problem out together. In the past people have been bastardised (physically punished) for showing feelings or speaking out about concerns (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2005).

As workplace feedback required a different approach to leadership in the day to day relationship between managers and employees, the role of the EMT as the leadership group was central in developing increased levels of trust necessary for effective feedback. The next section explains the role of the EMT in adopting a workplace feedback approach to performance management.

5.5 THE EMT AND DECISIONS ON WORKPLACE FEEDBACK

In 2002, following the publication of the State Service Commissioner’s Direction, the Chief Officer was “...very supportive of the concept of having performance management. Yes we do want and need it. And we need it tomorrow. So go away and develop a system and put it into place” (Director Human Services, September 2009). The view of the Director Human Services based on her experience in a government business enterprise and a core public sector agency was the performance management was about “...talking about what we’re doing, where we are going and how we’re doing it” (Director Human Services, April 2005) rather than a rating based appraisal approach. Therefore, the Director Human Services obtained the agreement of the Chief

Officer to invite an independent University lecturer (the researcher) to make a presentation to the EMT that, among other factors, covered:

- A summary of published research evidence about the lack of success of performance management systems;
- The importance of performance management being integrated with the TFS' overall approach to people management;
- The pre-conditions for a successful performance management implementation including: leadership style, a supportive organisational culture and sufficient levels of trust between managerial levels and employees;
- A rationale to use an inclusive approach involving employees and to have a trial before full implementation of the performance management system; and
- Reasons why factors such as poor performance and grievances should be separate from processes used for performance management.

The EMT supported taking a holistic view of performance management in the context of a broader set of changes to HRM policies. In particular, the EMT accepted that it would be consistent with the previous Corporate Planning approaches (see Chapter 4.2.2) to use a consultative method, involving a cross-section of employees, to assist in determining the most appropriate performance management. *"The EMT took a leap of faith against a perception that the system would fail. They saw a behavioural approach as preferable to a results based appraisal approach"* (Director Human Services, September 2008). In the period leading up to the trial, *"...the EMT saw value in the process and having a trial but not by everyone: they were supportive but cautious"* (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2005). The view of the

Chief Officer had modified to viewing the development of workplace feedback as a process that “...was going to be a fast evolution but not a revolution” (Chief Officer, September 2009).

Therefore, for workplace feedback to be effectively developed and implemented, required a cooperative and coordinated approach by the organisational leadership and Human Services cognisant of contextual factors. The aim was to achieve a high level of ownership in which the perspectives of the various groups played a central role in developing workplace feedback. The next sections details the general attitudes of the HR function, the EMT, the line managers and the employees prior to the workplace feedback trial commencing in 2005.

5.6 GENERAL ATTITUDES OF THE KEY ACTORS PRIOR TO THE TRIAL

The purpose of the section is to outline the perspectives of the four sets of key actors in the theoretical framework towards workplace feedback. It will therefore contribute to an understanding of how a SHRM framework may operate in practice and the extent to which there are competing values.

5.6.1 THE HR FUNCTION

From the perspective of the HR function, the workplace feedback approach was as a component of a broader strategy of cultural change. This was articulated by the Director Human Services as:

The workplace feedback approach fits into a broader cultural and behavioural change so people are capable of engaging in working relationships of trust and empowerment. It improves understanding of self and clarifies what behaviour is OK and not OK. The focus is on values and behaviour (September 2008).

This statement encapsulates how the workplace feedback approach fits within a broader set of initiatives and clearly signals a broader approach to managing people. It helps to explain the rationale for developing an inclusive and iterative approach rather than considering the purchase of a commercially available product. In general terms, the aim of performance management is to:

...help people achieve their potential and move towards organisational goals. It will give people a clear idea of what is expected of them, a clear idea of how they are going, where we want them to get to and what support they will receive from the organisation. A lot of it is motivation: provide clear expectations, bottom lines and boundaries. Define suitable behaviour with consequences and rewards. Accountability for behaviour is important (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2005).

Two aspects that were reinforced were the importance of dealing with issues at the workplace level before they escalated, and to increase the amount of positive feedback being given and received. The essence of the TFS approach to workplace feedback is “*...to get people talking about difficult issues better and to address performance issues sooner, and to give recognition, because most people are doing a good job*” (Manager Divisions, January 2006). An aim of workplace feedback “*...to increase morale, where people have the skills and confidence to resolve things and it is expected that they prevent them from becoming big issues down the track*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008). This was further clarified as including having less interpersonal issues requiring HR intervention.

5.6.2 SENIOR MANAGEMENT (EMT)

The aim of the senior management of the organisation was for a workplace feedback system that contributed to the change of culture and managerial style. *“It’s about appropriate contemporary management where reasonable communication occurs down or up the organisation”* (Chief Officer, September 2009). The feedback approach is focussed at the individual level as:

It is a process to manage performance. It should focus on continuous improvement in the individual leading to better performance across the TFS. It is not tied to organisational goals; rather the focus is on personal improvement. The feedback system has a focus on conversations, confidentiality and a „no blame’ approach (EMT member, September 2008).

The challenge for managers and supervisors is to be able to effectively communicate with their employees on a regular basis rather than the more traditional performance appraisal approach as —*.it’s probably more on how you go about managing performance rather than what performance management is”* (Manager Divisions, January 2006). Senior managers were clear that the approach was not about. *“It is not to be used for good or bad outcomes for individuals”* (EMT member, September 2008). Put more directly: *“It is constructive feedback and solutions if there are areas that need to be worked on....it is not a butt kicking tool, it’s not connected to pay or promotions”* (Manager Divisions, January 2006).

The overall aim was explained by the Chief Officer as follows:

Well it’s honest communication, it’s giving people feedback. It’s letting people know honestly and it should be a constant thing, rather than being twice a year or something. I guess the objectives really were to have a system that worked and that was owned and understood by the organisation as a whole, at all levels (September 2009).

5.6.3 LINE MANAGERS

Line managers include all levels from first line supervisors to immediately below the level of the EMT. The line managers interviewed saw their role in terms of communication, development and support of the people responsible to them. These two quotes illustrate these points:

Primarily I think it's improving the way we communicate with each other in the workplace. Improving that communication helps us understand each other's needs and we can work towards managing and working in an environment that people feel more confident, comfortable and know there is a process or a procedure that they can follow if they're not necessarily certain about an aspect of their work, without being intimidated (Middle Manager Operations, October 2008).

My role in workplace feedback is to give performance feedback to the people who I directly supervise and to support the people under me to carry on down the line...and my role is to give feedback to the officers and then support them in managing the process to the fire fighters (Supervisor Operations 2, February 2006).

There was explicit recognition of the challenge, from the operational perspective, to break down the conflict barriers that have come into “...this part of the workplace simply from a long history we've had” (Middle Manager Operations, September 2008). The challenge comes in part from “...the history of performance feedback with the brigade is that there is a fear of it because it was used (in the past) for counselling people for negative behaviour rather than trying to support positive outcomes” (Supervisor Operations 2, February 2006). Consistent with the theoretical framework was the recognition of a further “...challenge will be finding a way to educate the middle managers so they are on-side and show this by being supportive and being advocates of the approach” (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2005).

5.6.4 THE EMPLOYEES

Front-line employees reported that they viewed the workplace feedback system in the context of regular communication with their supervisors about “...*their performance in a specific role in the organisation, what they do well and things they could do a little better*” (Employee Operations 2, February 2006). In broader terms, the system was described as providing feedback about:

...how we're travelling at work, how we're going with the practical things we do at work as well as with our studies or any other things we're tackling...and also for us to give information back on how we think they might be going (Employee Operations 1, February 2006).

Employees emphasised the importance of using the information to identify training needs and to assist with increasing the effectiveness of resources spent on training activities. Overall, the system was viewed as being of having “...*great potential in the Fire Service after a few hurdles being overcome...if it's done properly it's an honest means of appraisal*” (Employee Operations 2, February 2006). The Coordinator, Organisation Development suggested that employees would say “...*we do want to be treated fairly, we do want to be recognised and we do want to develop a trust for the people we work for*” (October 2008).

One of the concerns raised was about confidentiality of information that would need to be specifically addressed in the development of the process.

If the employees can be shown there are mechanisms put in place to protect confidence and won't be leaked outside of that conversation then I think the information derived from those interviews will go a long way in getting truthful and honest information which I think is what you need, sometimes things that need to be said don't get said and a little bit of pain sometimes is good in the long term to achieve an end goal (Employee Operations 2, February 2006).

5.7 LEADING UP TO THE WORKPLACE FEEDBACK TRIAL

This section will recap the process leading to the commencement of the workplace feedback trial in June 2005. The EMT committed to a process of internal development in March 2003. A Reference Group, facilitated by the Director Human Services, including employees from all levels and regions and representatives of the two unions (UFU and CPSU) met on four occasions between May and August 2003. There was a 12 month before the final meeting of the Reference Group in August 2004. This resulted from a need to develop policy, procedures and guidelines for the trial (Director Human Services, May 2005). This delay, partly due to logistical factors in convening the Reference Group over the October to April fire season, demonstrated the need for increased level of resources to support the trial. Consequently, a decision was taken to create and fill the position that became the Coordinator Organisation Development.

The Reference Group built on the consultative and consensus processes used for Corporate Planning in 1997 and 1998. The process signalled that the TFS was genuine in seeking and adopting contributions from employees at all levels. It set the tone for how the TFS developed its workplace feedback approach. Once the Reference Group recommendations were accepted in early 2005, the TFS had committed to a process to develop a performance management approach ‘purpose built’ by employees in conjunction with the HR function. The TFS was also committed to see the process to the end of the trial and provide necessary internal resources. The need for additional specialist resources to support the workplace feedback development was explained as:

I don't think we could have made a genuine start on it until we got someone dedicated to the project. So while there was discussion six years ago there was a hiatus until we could dedicate someone to it (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this Chapter was to examine the contextual issues that shaped how the TFS approached the development of workplace feedback. It covers the period from 1979 to December 2004, immediately prior to the commencement of the workplace feedback trial. The Chapter sought to provide information in response to the first of the Research Questions:

Research Question 1: *What are the relevant contextual issues important for an organisation to consider in developing a new human resource policy?*

The results provided in this Chapter have shown that there were a number of relevant contextual factors that influenced how the TFS progressed towards a customised approach to performance management. These factors were a combination of internal and external influences, lead by the Chief Officer, to make the TFS an organisation that operated in accordance with contemporary management principles. The results also provide contextual information into the roles of the four major groups identified in the theoretical framework; the HR function, the executive (EMT), line managers and employees.

In reviewing the impact of the contextual factors, the results in this Chapter also suggest that in considering a specific HRM policy/practice, namely performance management, integration of human resource strategies and the roles of the executive and the line managers are critical to its effective development. The next Chapter will provide the results from the period the training for the workplace feedback trial work groups commenced in February 2005, up to and including the report of the formal evaluation of the trial was presented to the EMT in October 2006.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS PART 2: THE WORKPLACE FEEDBACK TRIAL AND ITS EVALUATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

This Chapter covers the period from January 2005 when the workgroups who were to participate in the workplace feedback trial were identified, to October 2006 when the trial evaluation report was presented to the EMT. During this period, data was gathered in three stages: firstly from a survey administered at the end of the training, secondly from interviews and focus groups as part of a mid-trial review during early 2006, and thirdly by focus groups in July 2006 at the conclusion of the trial.

By gathering data at three time points over an eighteen months period, it enabled an analysis of how the TFS responded to issues raised about how the workplace feedback trial was implemented, supported and managed. Additional key respondent interviews, conducted during the three stages of data gathering and during 2008 and 2009, assisted to provide more complete reasons for the decisions made by the TFS during the period covered by this Chapter. These semi-structured interviews also provided rich data derived from interviewees' reflections on how the evolution of the process.

The primary purpose of this Chapter is to further examine the first research question:

Research Question 1: *What are the relevant contextual issues important for an organisation to consider in developing a new human resource policy?*

The Chapter accomplishes this purpose by providing results of data gathered that illustrated relevant contextual factors considered by the TFS leadership and the HR function in developing

a customised approach to workplace feedback. The Chapter also provides some information relevant to examining the third research question:

Research Question 3: *How can an integrated SHRM process model assist a public sector organisation to design and progress towards implementation of a new HRM policy?*

The Chapter will explain the process used by the TFS in developing, reviewing and modifying the conduct of the trial. In particular, this Chapter will detail how feedback from line managers and employees was utilised by the HR function to increase the level of support across the TFS towards the adoption of workplace feedback.

6.2 THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TRIAL

The oversight of the workplace feedback trial was conducted by a Steering Committee comprised a member of the EMT as chair, the Director Human Services, a member of each of the trial workgroups (chosen by the trial group with the recommendation that it be a non-managerial employee) and the Coordinator Organisation Development as the Executive Officer. Information provided to the Steering Committee resulted in:

...regular organisational communication either in terms of written updates sent around as well as when (the Coordinator Organisation Development) went around to workgroups informing them of what was going on (Director Human Services, September 2008).

The Steering Committee provided a forum for reporting of progress on the trial and for issues and concerns common to workgroups to be discussed. This outcome recognised that workgroups

sought flexibility in the use of the forms, and for more detailed systems and guidelines to be developed. Additionally, there was a:

...role that we put on the Steering Committee to give information back through their workgroup to the trial areas and then to the wider part of the organisation they represented (Director Human Services, June, 2009).

As the Steering Committee Chair and the Director, Human Services were both members of the EMT; there was a direct channel of communication to the Chief Officer and other members of the Executive on how the trial was progressing. The Steering Committee also facilitated the conduct of the mid-trial review and the trial evaluation, and provided the conduit for those evaluations to be provided to the EMT.

6.3 THE PRE-TRIAL SURVEY

6.3.1 CONTEXT OF THE SURVEY

All of the work groups who were to participate in the workplace feedback trial undertook a one-day training course conducted during April to June 2005. There was an opportunity to obtain survey data from participants at the conclusion of their training session. Given the prevailing workplace culture and the lingering negative consequences of the 1980s performance management approach (see Chapter 5), the survey had to be carefully designed and delivered to facilitate cooperation and honesty of responses. The survey form (see Appendix B) included specific information about anonymity and that the results would be kept strictly confidential. The TFS was only provided aggregate response data. Therefore, the survey did not capture any biographical or personal information that could, in any manner, result in the identification of who completed a particular survey. Whilst this aspect contributed to a high response rate (130

useable returns which meant a response rate of 96.3 per cent), it limited the amount of analysis that could be conducted on the survey responses.

The aims of the survey were:

1. To gather baseline information on the attitudes of TFS employees to the workplace feedback approach, in general, and to the survey in particular; and
2. To identify specific issues and concerns that the TFS may need to address whilst the trial was being conducted.

This section sets out the results of the survey in Table 6.1 showing the percentage responses for each cell in the five-point Likert scale used. There were a total of twenty-eight questions in five sections and the correlation coefficients for each of the sections were as follows:

Figure 6-1 Workplace Feedback System Survey

Section 1: General views on feedback Cronbach alpha 0.77	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	No View
1. Receiving regular feedback is important to me	28.5	62.3	6.9	0.0	97.7	1.5
2. I like to know how well I am doing at work	35.4	56.2	3.1	0.0	94.6	3.1
3. Good feedback skills are necessary to be a successful supervisor/manager	60.0	36.2	0.8	0.8	97.6	1.5
4. Improving feedback is important to TFS being a more effective organisation.	45.4	46.9	3.1	0.0	95.4	1.5

Section 2: General views on TFS Cronbach alpha: 0.823	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	No View
5. TFS is a good place to work	30.8	62.3	3.1	0.8	96.9	0.8
6. I would recommend positions at TFS to friends	29.2	56.2	9.2	1.5	96.2	1.5
7. TFS communicates effectively to its employees	1.5	29.2	56.2	10.0	96.9	1.5

8. I trust the statements made by the Executive and senior staff	5.4	43.1	31.5	10.8	90.8	6.9
9. I have a clear understanding of the expectations of my job.	16.9	70.8	9.2	0.0	96.9	2.3
10. I can clearly see how my job makes a positive contribution to TFS.	22.3	63.1	10.8	0.8	96.9	1.5
11. TFS encourages the giving of regular feedback	3.1	30.0	47.7	12.3	93.1	5.4

Section 3; Experience with feedback in current position Cronbach alpha: 0.789	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	No View
12. My Supervisor gives me regular and clear feedback about my performance	1.5	42.3	42.3	8.5	94.6	2.3
13. I am satisfied with the level of feedback about my performance	3.1	41.5	42.3	8.5	95.4	2.3
14. I am satisfied with the amount of information I get about changes that will affect my job	3.1	33.1	46.9	10.8	93.8	2.3
15. My supervisor(s) seek feedback about their performance	0.8	20.8	51.5	13.8	86.9	9.2
16. I don't receive sufficient credit and recognition for the work that I do.(Negatively scored)	2.3	40.8	43.1	3.1	89.2	7.7
17. I have enough opportunity to participate in decisions that affect my job	6.9	51.5	28.5	6.9	93.8	2.3
18. My immediate supervisor takes my views seriously	13.1	63.1	13.1	1.5	90.8	4.6
19. My supervisor informs people higher up when people do outstanding work	4.6	43.1	29.2	4.6	81.5	15.4
20. If I make a mistake, my supervisor is likely to get upset and tell me off (Negatively scored)	3.8	20.8	59.2	10.8	94.6	2.3

Section 4: Expectations of the Workplace Feedback system Cronbach alpha: 0.828	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	No View
21. I am looking forward to workplace feedback	6.9	59.2	10.8	5.4	82.3	14.6
22. I expect to get more feedback	9.2	71.5	2.3	2.3	85.4	11.5
23. I expect my feedback skills to improve	9.2	73.1	4.6	2.3	89.2	7.7
24. Workplace feedback will not disrupt my normal work	3.8	33.8	39.2	7.7	84.6	10.8

Section 5:Concerns about Workplace Feedback Cronbach alpha: 0.802	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	No View
25. I don't think my group will take workplace feedback seriously	0.8	21.5	55.4	8.5	86.2	10.8
26. Workplace feedback will take too much time from more important things	2.3	19.2	53.8	7.7	83.1	12.3
27. I am concerned information from workplace feedback could be used against me	2.3	14.6	58.5	16.2	91.5	5.4
28. I don't think the workplace feedback system will make any difference	4.6	27.7	43.8	13.1	89.2	7.7

6.3.2 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Pearson correlations and a principal component analysis (rotation method with Kaiser Normalisation) were conducted to identify key themes and potential concerns from the survey data. Overall, there was strong level of consistency in the responses with some issues identified. Based on the data analysis, the key results were.

6.3.2.1 General views on Feedback

- Feedback is important to the TFS employees and needs improving;
- Employees are seeking more feedback and it is of relatively high importance.

6.3.2.2 General views on TFS

- The TFS is a 'good place to work' and would be recommended to potential employees;
- The TFS doesn't communicate effectively to its employees;
- A large minority of employees may not trust statements from senior staff;
- The TFS hasn't encouraged the use of regular feedback.

6.3.2.3 Experience with feedback in current position

- There are mixed views about the level of satisfaction with the regularity and level feedback provided by supervisors;
- There is a moderate level of dissatisfaction with information about changes that may affect an employee's job;
- There are a range of views about the extent that good performance is recognised and credit given;
- There was a significantly minority who responded that they did not believe their supervisor reported outstanding work to more senior managers. This question had the highest 'no view' response rate of 15.4 per cent.

6.3.2.4 Expectations of the trial

- There were positive expectations about employees receiving an increased level of feedback during the trial;
- There was a moderate level of concern that the trial would disrupt normal work.

6.3.2.5 Concerns about the feedback trial

- A moderate level of concern was demonstrated as to whether the trial groups would take the trial seriously;
- Whilst the majority was not concerned about information from the trial being used against them, a minority (20.4 per cent of those that responded to that question) did express concern that feedback they gave during the trial may result in negative consequences.

6.3.3 HOW THE RESULTS OF THE PRE-TRIAL SURVEY WERE USED

A summary of the results was provided to the Director Human Services. The degree of support towards the trial provided a level of confidence in proceeding while highlighting the importance of feedback being provided to the level sought. Also, the behaviour of the supervisors was going to be a significant factor in whether the trial would be seen as successful. The results also showed that, whilst the minority of the respondents held negative attitudes towards the trial, managing the communication flow and preserving confidentiality were important factors. The results also emphasised the importance of having clear and unambiguous procedures and guidelines.

6.4 THE MID-TRIAL REVIEW

6.4.1 STRUCTURE OF THE MID-TRIAL REVIEW

A mid-trial review was conducted during January-February 2006. Whilst the trial had initially, being scheduled to run for a six month period from March to August 2005, significant delays in the trial groups being prepared for, and conducting the first round of review sessions, resulted in the trial being extended to a period of twelve months. The mid-trial review consisted of seven individual interviews (covering managers, supervisors and front-line employees) and six focus groups run in a semi-structured manner. The focus groups were comprised of either all employees or all supervisors/managers. In total, the interviews and focus groups included thirty-five people (which is approximately thirty per cent of people remaining in trial groups). The interviews and the focus groups were conducted in both Hobart and Launceston.

6.4.2 OVERALL RESULTS FROM THE MID-TRIAL REVIEW

There was also a high level of consistency in responses from the interviews and the focus groups. Overall, there was a considerable level of support for the concept of a structured approach to the giving and receiving of feedback. For the majority of respondents, this was their first experience of a structured approach to performance feedback; however, they were able to clearly articulate an understanding of performance feedback and what their role would be. There was support for the general approach; although, there was an expectation that it would have progressed more quickly than it had so far. There was a consensus that TFS should have a performance feedback system that contained a level of consistency while providing flexibility to take into account the needs of diverse groups within the organisation. There is a sense that TFS is a unique organisation. There was belief in the importance of dedicated supporting resources being available from Human Services.

6.4.3 FACTORS SUPPORTIVE OF THE TRIAL

A feature of the mid-trial review was support for having a trial that was evaluated prior to the TFS committing to a particular approach to performance management. *—Being involved in the trial and I think that was probably the best thing that the organisation did was roll it out*” (Supervisor Operations, October 2008). Most respondents were able to clearly articulate their understanding of performance management *“...as basically ensuring that you’re doing the right job and meeting expectations”* (Employee Divisions 8, Focus Group 4). From the managers’ perspective *—...it gives us a chance to discuss one on one any changes that need to be made...and then we’d ask them if they had any ideas...and then ask for any general feedback*” (Manager Divisions, January 2006). *“I think the way that it’s been done has been very informative, right*

from the word go the people who have participated in the trial have had plenty ofinformation on what we're trying to achieve and how it's going to be done" (Supervisor Operations 3, Interview February 2006).

A component of the mid-trial review was to get an overall indication of the level of support and comfort participants felt about their trial experience. A number of observations were made that the trial was helping to change the prevailing culture and leadership style, particularly in the operational areas. There was view that the trial was *—...taking down of some of the barriers that previously existed"* (Supervisor Operations, February 2006).

Some participants noted that being involved in the trial, and being expected to contribute to the spread of workplace feedback, developed their confidence and willingness to voice opinions and concerns. A front-line employee stated that: *—One of the positives I guess that came out of that is now I am not afraid to voice my own voice. I'm not afraid now to face my supervisor or my District Officer to say what's on my mind and I'm not afraid of the repercussions that come back"* (Employee 2, Focus Group 1). The process was seen as an opportunity for focus on professional development and self-improvement as *"...the thing about performance management for me is that I see it as something for me in improving myself and my career. I am sure if I did have people problems that I would say it in my interview* (Employee 3, Focus Group1). It was acknowledged that conducting a trial that was well-supported with resources from Human Services was a positive as *—...the information sessions that (the Coordinator, Organisation Development) gave were, very informative ... it was as much listening as well as talking"* (Supervisor Operations, September 2008).

6.4.4 FACTORS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSIDERATION OR DEVELOPMENT

At the time of the interviews/focus groups, not all employees and managers had conducted or participated in a feedback session. As a number of people had been involved in the development of the system, their feedback session had been conducted in front of the team as a demonstration.

For example:

We had an independent person there, who wasn't involved in our work area, and that person's perspective opened our eyes to a few things and now we've come up to some solutions on problems that have been around for a while. The fact that there was that third person there and they were objective certainly helped (Employee 2, Focus Group 1).

From the respondents who had participated in one feedback session, there was a view that the people providing feedback had consciously focused on the positive aspects. Given that the process was part of a trial, and because of overall sensitivity, there were comments that the initial sessions had been conducted in what was described as *‘a gentle manner’*, without challenging issues being raised. This helps develop confidence in the system but suggests careful handling as more *‘constructive’* feedback is delivered as the system matures. For example, as one employee explained: *“I don't know how I'd go with negative feedback...It is easy to think those things but it's hard to actually sit face to face and tell them”* (Employee Operations 6, Interview March 2006). For others *“...I would like to see feedback negative and positive”* (Employee 3, Focus Group 1). The trial did permit some issues that had previously been hidden to come out into the open, however, at that stage, the processes for dealing with such interpersonal matters, was still being developed. As one respondent commented *“...I think there needs to be a system in place to identify these smaller issues and have them resolved before they do become a situation”* (Supervisor Divisions, February 2006).

Most respondents felt comfortable with their level of 'feedback' skills but others required more training. For example; *"Not everybody's good at communication, everybody's different, everyone's got their strengths and weaknesses....so maybe a refresher every now and again"* (Employee Operations, Interview February 2006). There were concerns that some managers required more training, were not clear about expectations on timeframes and/or did not afford the process a level of priority to meet the timetable of the trial. For example: *"I don't think my manager has those communication skills and also I think it was taken as a very low priority, everything else was above it"* (Employee 4, Focus Group 2). This view may have also been affected by delays in getting the trial fully established as one employee explained: *"I'm not sure that those who were delivering the feedback to us were 100 per cent sure of the process themselves also, everything just came about too quickly and now it's just died down"* (Employee 2, Focus Group 1). This contributed to some employees' lack of sureness of the process as: *"I felt that when my supervisor done it they weren't understanding it completely themselves to conduct it properly so I didn't feel that I knew what I was doing properly"* (Employee 5, Focus Group 1).

Across operational respondents, there were differing views about the extent incident debriefs included specific performance feedback:

We're always receiving feedback when we're coming back from a job, especially if it's a big job like a house fire, our supervisor will be saying you did alright there or if you did make a mistake then you talk about it there and it's sorted out. We have our operational analysis which is usually done within a week or two of a large incident where we go through and talk about a lot of different areas, not necessarily about individual performance so much but about the whole job and how it all went (Employee Operations interview, February 2006).

Employee participants stressed that their perception of their supervisor affected their approach to the trial as the interview *—needs to be done by people that you do respect and feel comfortable with to be able to open up and speak with them freely*” (Employee Operations 3, Interview February 2006). Another employee stated *“...if you’ve got someone who you just didn’t get on with who you had to have an interview with....I could see that as a fair bit of a problem, they might take things a bit personally or the wrong way”* Employee 5, Focus Group 2). There were situations where employees expressed concern about the potential consequences of disclosing criticisms about the supervisor who was conducting the interview.

When I had my interview I sort of opened up a little bit more than what I would and now I regret it 100% because I believe that now my earlier interview will be thrown back at me rather than resolved or fixed. The problem I’ve got is that the people that I’ve got the issues with are the people conducting the interviews so I feel like I can’t speak with them openly and honestly (Employee 5, Focus Group 1).

Particularly within operational areas, the degree of movement at supervisors made continuity a significant issue as there is *—a lot of staff movement, people get promoted... so it can be hard to keep track of who is supposed to do the interviews*” (Manager, Divisions January 2006). *“A lot of people are moving into different positions all the time, acting up because someone’s gone on leave or someone’s done this and that moves that person there and that person doesn’t get a lot of continuity in the management side of things”* (Employee Operations, February 2006). A further factor in operational areas was the scheduling of review sessions given of higher fire risk periods and employee leave cycles. This issue was explained by one participant as:

...when you come back after holidays is probably not the best time. It’s probably not the best time to do it just before they go on holidays either because you’re about ready to go then and you might say things because you’ve been getting a bit heated up and you need a bit of a break to sort things out (Employee Operations, February 2006).

For some employees, having some clarity of when meeting were going to occur was seen as important. They would prefer “...*set some timeframes...have some preset time of booking them actually so that we know when things are coming to happen...if it’s just dropped on you or its dumped in someone’s lap without any pre-planning, It doesn’t work* (Employee 1, Focus Group1).

An issue raised was that that matters discussed at review meetings had not been followed up as had been agreed. This was recognized by one manager as follows: “*There are a couple of things that haven’t been followed up for a couple of staff members that have come out of our previous summary sessions*” (Manager Divisions, January 2006). Employees expressed their concerns about a lack of follow up and the need for a clear mechanism to monitor outcomes of review sessions: “*I wrote all my concerns down and expressed them to the supervisor and manager and nothing’s happened that’s all, it just needs to go to that next step, whether they’ve got to be answerable to someone to say hey what’s going on there, nothing’s happening*” (Employee 6, Focus Group 1). A more specific suggestion was that “...*there should be tighter timeframes between you and your supervisor...there should be some follow up there and maybe a second meeting within two months or something*” (Employee 1, Focus Group 3).

Some employees commented that expectations of the trial were not met. This included a concern that the trial scope was too narrow as “...*there’s no general look at how we are actually performing at least in my opinion*” (Employee 1, Focus Group1) or there was lack of clear communication as stated “*I was looking forward to it but I don’t know what’s happening*” (Employee 2, Focus Group 2). Examples of employees who expressed a mixed experience were statements that: “*What I have had so far is a few ups and downs*” and “*Even though we got*

down to the nitty gritty with some of the issues I still don't feel they will be investigated or taken seriously enough" (Employee 2, Focus Group 1). A specific concern was that the trial didn't progress as quickly as employees were led to believe it would, as one employee commented: *"I think it's a bit slower than what I thought it might be...but I suppose it's a trial and we're all still working out how it's all supposed to work"*. (Employee Operations, February 2006). Participants were aware of the need for a clear demonstration of the importance of workplace feedback to the organisation in that the trial *"...has to be given the time and priority "...if it is to be taken seriously by everybody"* (Employee 3, Focus Group 2).

Concerns were expressed that there were some significant inherent obstacles related to whether the workplace feedback trial would be perceived as positive: — *.working against the trial are cultural issues such as there's still a resistance to it, there's still a feeling it's a bit namby pamby and not of value*" (Supervisor Operations, February 2006). There was a view that employees may dwell in the past as — *.past experiences will and still do influence the way the whole place is now*" (Employee 2, Focus Group 4). It was recognised that workplace feedback was a different approach for older employees and one manager stated that. *"We have a couple (of staff) that are in their fifties as well and they're the ones that probably might struggle a little bit more...to adapt to the new culture and way of doing things"* (Manager Divisions, January 2006). In addition, some historical factors may still operate as: *"We hear too much through the rumour mill or from the wrong person which makes you angry and upset the fact that the person that's criticising you hasn't come to tell you that you're doing wrong"* (Employee 5, Focus Group 1).

6.4.5 SUMMARY OF THE MID-TRIAL REVIEW

The mid-trial review was conducted after the trials in the nine workgroups had been going for six months. However, the high fire season had occurred during that period which meant that there had been delays in conducting review sessions. The results of the mid-trial review suggested that progress had been made and that the concept of a trial involving a cross-section of employees had been a positive experience. The results of the mid-trial evaluation were used to refine documentation, and as a basis for the HR function to continue to provide direct support to trial workgroups to the end of the trial period in June 2006. The next section will report on the results of the post-trial evaluation.

6.5 POST-TRIAL EVALUATION

6.5.1 HOW THE EVALUATION WAS CONDUCTED

In June and July 2006, following the conclusion of the twelve month trial period, the researcher conducted focus groups with available members of the four-person monitoring working group in each of the nine work areas that had completed the workplace feedback trial. The focus groups were conducted over a two and a half week period involving a total of twenty-four, ten of whom participated in the mid-trial evaluation. As discussed in Chapter Four, the focus groups responded to a set of questions that had been sent out in advance.

6.5.2 OVERALL RESULTS FROM THE POST-TRIAL EVALUATION

There was a consistent theme of support for the workplace feedback trial. In particular, there was strong support for the manner in which the trial had been developed and implemented across the trial areas. A quote that demonstrated the overall response is that: *“It’s been something that we drove and the organisation actually listened and took on board our views – first time in my experience with TFS this has happened”* (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 6).

The nature of the process was that nothing was hidden and expectations were not set too high. There was a view that for the trial to be successful, it had to be conducted in a manner that was clearly different from previous approaches as *“...key factors that had to be emphasised were transparency and confidentiality and in doing that to lose the ‘boys club’ mentality”* (Supervisor Operations, September 2008). On the other hand, the extended period of the trial was seen as an issue and action was required to regain momentum.

The trial was seen as more than a set of review meetings. For example: *“We had conversations that hadn’t happened before – some were work related and some more general inter-personal”* (Employee Operations, Focus Group 7). Employees expressed that it was pleasing to be given recognition in the form of *“...a quiet pat on the back given in a genuine and appropriate way”* (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 3). The TFS operational firefighter workforce contains both people whose whole career has been in firefighting and increasingly, as described in Chapter Four, those who were mature aged recruits having had experience in other careers. The development and implementation of the trial provided an opportunity for a significant number of people across the whole organisation to demonstrate their capacity to contribute to changing the

‘way the TFS manages its people’. It provided an opportunity that it appears they have not had previously. The mature recruits perceived their prior experience was not to be recognised in terms of capacity to contribute ideas or in the context of developmental aspirations.

6.5.3 POSITIVE FEATURES OF THE WORKPLACE FEEDBACK TRIAL

6.5.3.1 Structure & nature of training

The structure and nature of the training was supported. Prior to the full implementation, the support networks involving Human Services, contact officers and a third-person facilitator pool needed to be established and sufficiently available to help when requested. The particular supports valued by one manager were “...*providing training in a coaching manner including conducting role plays as part of a one-to-one summary meeting*” (Manager Divisions, September 2008). The training was “...*reasonably intensive*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 5) but “...*easy to follow – everybody got it*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 2). One employee commented: “*I liked the background material and the ability to ask questions*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 3). It “...*helped to understand process and what I needed to prepare for the meetings*” (Supervisor Operations, Focus Group 7). As part of the training, “...*I learnt about the power of feedback; it raised expectations that I would get lots more than before*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 4).

Part of the training involved “...*a mock review meeting conducted where we were shown how to conduct a one-to-one meeting*” (Manager Divisions, Focus Group 8). Where requested, Human Services conducted feedback sessions in the trial workplaces which contributed to a greater level of comfort in the process. “*In our team, the trial started with role playing and coaching of*

people through their first experience in giving people workplace feedback” (Manager Divisions, Focus Group 1). In addition, the training was seen as a positive experience as “*...doing the training itself was beneficial as it improved both communication and life skills*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 6).

6.5.3.2 Simplicity & flexibility

The design of the workplace feedback approach received positive responses being characterised by “*...simplicity & flexibility*” (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 4). It was stated that: “*Feedback meetings enabled issues to be brought out into the open more quickly*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 9). The meetings provided an opportunity to be “*...able to talk more freely*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 5), to “*...discuss the „little things’ that can build up and cause frustration*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 2) and it was “*...good to get things off your chest*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 7). A response was that the meetings provided “*...an opportunity to communicate upwards in TFS different to existing channels*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 9). However, it was stressed that it was important not to rush meetings as “*...it’s not a fifteen minute thing: it takes time to say things*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 5).

6.5.3.3 Additional positive factors

Comments from employees indicated additional positive aspects from having review meetings. The increased requirement for feedback has “*...helped with day to day management because everyone is clearer about what is going on*” (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 1). A representative comment was that “*...it means I am more understood as a person*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 8). There were specific comments about increasing understanding of

how and why people behave with comments including that: *“I can understand how my boss operates”* (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 2) and that the meetings *“...provide more reasons why people act in certain ways”* (Employee Operations, Focus Group 5). An indicative comment was that the meetings were positive because of the ability *“...to be able to talk informally about where you are heading – may not be promotion focussed”* (Employee Operations, Focus Group 7). One comment indicated that the skills acquired in workplace feedback were being used more widely in the TFS as: *“I have seen positive examples of leadership in the lunch room as people have used the feedback training techniques”* (Supervisor Operations, Focus Group 9).

6.5.3.4 Overall positive impact of the feedback trial

The overall impact of the feedback trial were that it *“...it encouraged a more open environment where people can go directly and raise issues and not conspire behind their back”* (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 3). The nature of the process was that *“...it forces one to one feedback”* (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 2) where this had not been a normal aspect of the operational areas. It was also seen as introducing a more formal process because *“...we have things in writing to discuss and to follow up”* (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 1). It also means that *“...more things are getting dealt with on the spot”* (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 1).

6.5.4 NEGATIVE COMMENTS IN THE POST-TRIAL EVALUATION

6.5.4.1 Initial negative response to training

Specific comments that showed initial resistance to the training were that *“...it’s not going to work, it’s too touchy/feely”* (Employee Operations, Focus Group 7) or that the existing approach which was that *“...a good bollicking will sort people out”* (Employee Operations, Focus Group

5). Therefore, it was important that the TFS as part of the trial dealt with such negative perceptions that “...we’ve seen it all before and it didn’t work” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 4). It was suggested that the TFS needed to take care with future training groups to minimise the impact of the few negative opinion leaders. There was also a suggestion that the training content should include more role playing and developing of feedback skills.

6.5.4.2 Delays in conducting review sessions

A theme concerned delayed and cancelled review sessions. Over the twelve month period, the majority of participants indicated they had only completed one round of formal review meetings. The overall response from line managers is that they delay scheduling meetings “...through lack of priority or just being overwhelmed with other things”. (Coordinator Organisation Development, July 2006). A specific response was that: “Scheduling can be a problem – meetings are too easy to put off” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 9). From the supervisors’ perspective: “It can be a problem if people had built up expectations of a meeting and it is deferred” (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 2). In operational areas, an expectation was expressed “...that the supervisor will do all of the group in a similar time” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 2). The response to delays was that that: “If this continues to happen, it tends to indicate that only lip service is being given to feedback” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 9). From the HR function’s perspective, it was recognised that there ought to be “...encouragement for people to do review sessions and specific consequences if they don’t. This means that doing review sessions is part of how they are managed” (Coordinator Organisation Development, July 2006).

A specific problem raised in operational areas was the level of movement within workgroups during the review cycle period as explained in the following terms: *“Another aspect is the complexity of staffing in an area with four shifts and people moving to different stations, plus rotations of different length and very varied workplaces in the organisation”* (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008). The consequences were that new people to the group were not able to be sufficiently assessed by the supervisor. During the trial, a number of supervisors moved between workgroups or were in acting roles. A specific issue raised was the need for a protocol so that the *“...current supervisor could access work performance information”* (Supervisor Operations, Focus Group 5).

This pattern of delays impacted on the general views of the trial. *“There has been a problem in maintaining momentum”* (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 1) and the *“...trial took too long”* (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 3). One response was that the time of six months between formal review sessions was too long and there should be more explicit indication that informal sessions could be held *“...if there is something that needs to be discussed, then it’s time to have a yak”* (Employee Operations, Focus Group 5). There was a response that *“...not much happened in last 4-5 months”* (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 8) leading up to the end of the trial.

6.5.4.3 Lack of follow up

A specific concern raised was a *“...lack of follow through with PDP and training agreed in summary meetings”* (Employee Operations, Focus Group 7). In fact, it was reported that PDPs had not been specifically discussed in review sessions. This was compounded by *“...a lack of support systems in place; particularly follow up of learning needs”* (Employee Divisions, Focus

Group 4). One respondent called for the implementation of a specific system “...for capturing, coordinating and following up of training commitments in PDPs” (Supervisor Operations, Focus Group 5). There was a lack of clarity as to whether it was the supervisor’s or employee’s responsibility to follow up and schedule agreed training and development activities. It was viewed that it was —.important that lines of communication between people affected by PDP action items are kept open” (Manager Divisions, Focus Group 2).

6.5.4.4 Insufficient priority given

There was a perception that the feedback system was not afforded a sufficient level of priority. One employee stated that: “The feedback system needs to be seen as important and some supervisors are not showing that” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 7). In addition, there was a view amongst the divisional areas that there should have been “...more explicit top down support during trial. The EMT should have been showing us how important it was” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 1). This view is supported by the comment that: “I would like to see that those at the top are doing it as well, more obvious support from that level will make us feel that the effort is worth it” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 8).

6.5.5 THE EXTENT TO WHICH DIFFICULT ISSUES WERE DEALT WITH DURING THE TRIAL

There was a view that difficult issues and long-standing problems were not really addressed as part of the trial partly because “...all interviews so far have been easy” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 4). One view was that “...we were easing in. Some people are still holding back because they don’t wish to upset others” (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 4). One reason

may have been that there was a high “...level of familiarity within the group which resulted in a lot of little issues being raised (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 1). It was expressed that the coverage of more difficult issues “...will be more common as people have more experience and more confidence in the system” (Supervisor Operations, Focus Group 9).

There have been some different views of what constitutes relevant workplace feedback with a report that the meetings “...were little more than a cosy chat” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 1). A related matter was that the scope of workplace feedback was to be separated by the TFS from issues that required the formal process to deal with instances of overall unsatisfactory performance. “It was important to the integrity of the system that we dealt with performance issues separate from the trial as it is important that separate processes are clearly understood (Coordinator Organisation Development, August 2006).

6.5.6 OPERATIONAL MATTERS

6.5.6.1 Scheduling, length and location of summary meetings

During the focus groups, a theme emerged about operational and procedural aspects of summary meetings. Whilst this section does not include any specific quotes from focus group participants, the results reflect matters of concern. From the focus group responses in June and July 2006, the length of the first summary meeting varied from fifteen minutes to more than two hours. There was a view expressed that as people become more familiar with the process the length would tend towards an average of one hour. A suitable room that is proximate, appropriate in size and furniture and provides confidentiality is relevant for meeting effectiveness. The meeting should

be organised so that (apart from emergencies) there are no disturbances and it was suggested that the meeting be held in ‘neutral territory’.

6.5.6.2 Documentation (to facilitate meetings and to record outcomes)

There was a positive response to the forms used being flexible and having the capacity to customise (and rationalise the suite of five) forms for the nature of different workgroups provided core information is recorded. One response was that it “...*has been good to get involved and work on something that is user friendly for us*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 9) and that it was “...*good that we only needed to fill in the parts of documents that were relevant to us*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 1).

There was support for the usefulness of the ‘prompt sheet’ developed by Human Services to guide the discussion at the summary meetings. However, one respondent indicated that: “*I didn’t see the prompts*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 5). One of the respondents reported that: “*We changed the prompts to suit our needs*” (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 3).

6.5.6.3 Confidentiality and back-up systems

Whilst, the responses provided in the focus groups were that employees were comfortable with the documentation provided and the arrangements for document storage, one of the concerns that flowed through to the HR function was about confidentiality of information. The development of systems to minimise the leakage of confidential information was one of the tasks undertaken by the operations supervisor who was seconded to Human Services in 2007. A specific issue in approaching the trial was a concern about confidentiality of information with the issue being that “...*if I disclose something will it remain confidential?* (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 6).

This was explained that: —*Confidentiality and access to documents will be an issue for a number of employees, mainly the blokes who have been here a long time*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 4). A particular issue was both employees and supervisors moving location that raised the issue of access to documents. Respondents were satisfied with workplace feedback documentation being stored in locked filing cabinets. One employee did point out that confidentiality was not yet an issue as “...so far there has not really been confidential information raised” (Supervisor Operations, September 2008).

6.6 POST-TRIAL EVALUATION OVERALL COMMENTS

The post-trial evaluation found that the trial had been perceived as ‘successful’ by employees. In particular, there was strong support for the manner in which the trial had been developed and implemented. This was summarised by employees as follows: “*The nature of the process was that nothing was hidden and expectations were not set too high*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 5). The process was evaluated by a member of Human Services as indicated below:

In terms of the actual feedback system, I think it has been very good. The consultation with the Reference Group first and the running of the trial across the whole State and then having the evaluation of the trial. And then with the implementation, I think it’s a very well rounded package. To the organisation’s credit, they have given it the priority when it’s become apparent to them...additional resources by way of a secondment have been used (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008).

6.6.1 DEVELOPING A TFS SPECIFIC APPROACH TO WORKPLACE FEEDBACK

There was commentary on the merits of the TFS deciding and then following through on developing a workplace feedback process from ‘scratch’ such that: “*I think we’ve really had to go back to the drawing board for something that would suit our specific organisation*” (Middle

Manager Operations, October 2008). If the TFS had bought an off-the-shelf performance management system, then:

I don't think there would have been any sense of ownership and I think that's what was important about the trial. It was undertaken at different levels, but I think it was sold through the grass roots as this is what it's about, so there is some ownership from the people who went through the trials to say this is pretty good, I can understand what it's all about (Middle Manager Operations, October 2008).

A specific observation made concerned the involvement of employees from across the TFS as:

"A key aspect was that the process was inclusive and involved people from all work environments and geographical areas" (Supervisor Operations, September 2008).

There has been a good balance between being fair and equitable and being flexible: not a one size fits all approach. It is based on principles developed by people across the organisation, regular information has been provided and clear expectations set. It has been inclusive and will continue to be reviewed (Supervisor Operations, September 2008).

On reflecting on the decision to separate feedback from other HR policies and practices, a member of Human Services concluded that the approach used by the TFS has been:

...a big plus: its inclusiveness, the fact that it will be light on paperwork, time and energy for participants. It emphasizes communication not measurement. It is not directly linked to pay or discipline and therefore has more chance of being open and honest (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2006).

6.6.2 THE DEVELOPMENT AND RUNNING OF THE TRIAL

The initial approach of using a reference group was seen as adding value by *—..increasing organisational understanding, commitment, ownership and preparedness to be involved, to advocate the values and to generate interest in trial areas" (Director Human Services, 2006). In*

simple terms: “*I think if we didn’t have the trials we wouldn’t be where we are now*”. (Middle Manager Operations, October 2008). In the view of the Chief Officer:

I think it would have been a total folly to have jumped off on something without trialling it first. One to shape it down and also to ensure the sceptics that this is something worth doing. It was a way of I guess getting some credibility early on....I think it was a good strategy (Chief Officer, October 2009).

6.6.3 PERIOD OF TIME TAKEN

There was a view that the trial had been protracted as “*...it is taking too long and let’s get on with it*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 8) and “*...there has been a problem in maintaining momentum. Trial took too long*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 5). “*To some extent, there has been a sense of a lot of talk but little action*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, May 2006). From a more senior level, the effluxion of time was explained in the context of the TFS’s objectives. “*It has been a good approach. It has taken too long; it could have been forced by more of a top down approach. It was never going to be overnight as it is critical it is truly embedded*” (EMT Member, September 2008).

The most common view was expressed in the following terms:

We have talked about it taking a long time to implement but it probably helped that it took a long time as there was a lot of engagement right through the organisation (using the jargon of vertical slice) to ensure that the whole organisation had input into the design of the system. A tremendous amount of time went into that and then a lot of time went into process models and then a lot of investment’s been put into the training and roll out of the system. If there were shortcuts taken in any of that, I think it would impact on the success of the programme getting going (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

The TFS could have taken a more directive approach; for example:

In retrospect, we could have done the trial differently, started at the top and cascaded down. This would have improved the visibility of senior people in the process. I would also have had more explicit ways of dealing with excuses for avoiding or delaying review sessions and developed ways to keep up the momentum (Director Human Services, September 2008).

The next sections will report on the roles and relationships commented upon during the mid-trial evaluation and the post-trial review. The results are drawn from the mid-trial review, the post-trial evaluation and, from key informant interviews held in 2008 and 2009. These sections provide results relevant to the second and third research questions.

6.7 ROLE OF THE HR FUNCTION

The trial included explicit roles for the HR function in providing strategic contribution and operational support to the trial workgroups through training, procedures (including a ‘tool kit’) and ‘on-call’ support. The importance of Human Services providing dedicated supporting resources was explained as: *“I guess Human Service’s role would be as a support role...everybody’s informed, everyone knows what’s about...and everyone just thinks this is the way that we do things now”* (Manager Divisions, January 2006). The support from Human Services *“...has been very good as far as asking if there is anything else needed to support me and being available to coach and discuss”* (Manager Divisions, January 2006). One supervisor explained that changes in attitude towards workplace feedback as: *“I was a bit sceptical based on past experiences”*. When asked what had turned around that scepticism, the response was:

Being involved in the trial and I think that was probably the best thing that the organisation did was roll it out there to actually And also the information sessions were, very informative ... it was as much listening as well as talking. When (person from Human Services) had the information sessions, he was trying to gather as much information as much as he thought it was going to work (Supervisor Operations, October 2008).

The Human Services function responded to concerns about confidentiality of information by;

...providing advice to the affected Manager and Employee before access to workplace feedback documentation was provided to a third party, clearly outlining circumstances where information provided during a workplace feedback conversation was required to be disclosed: this would be if serious allegations or a potential breach of the Code of Conduct was alleged; and by clearly defining the potential consequences for breaches of confidentiality (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2008).

6.8 ROLE OF THE EMT

The post-trial evaluation focus groups were not asked any specific questions about the role of the EMT; however, in subsequent interviews, comments were made about employee perceptions of the EMT's contribution to the trial and its outcomes. For this reason, the Deputy Chief Officer took:

...a leadership role with the Executive Management Team because I think that it is very important at the top level of the organisation it is seen that we are doing it and we are using it, so the expectation that it be rolled out across the rest of the organisation is enhanced" (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

EMT involvement in the workplace feedback system was not always seen as obvious to employees. *"The commitment of EMT has been vital but it has not always been visible"* (Director Human Services, September 2008). During implementation, their participation was *"...sporadic and there was a bit of a burst when I delivered training to them, and another burst three months later when I went back and jogged them"* (Coordinator Organisation Development, September 2008). On the other hand: *"The EMT were prepared to put resources into the process- they did show perseverance, allocated people and spent time on training and support resources"* (Director Human Services, September 2008). In the view of the EMT *"...there wasn't any question about whether we should be doing this or how important this was. The only*

issue EMT ever had was how long it was taking and we wanted to have it faster” (Director Human Services, June 2009). Members of the EMT were not uniformly confident of their ability in the area of workplace feedback, as performance results for their managerial subordinates:

are very subjective and qualitative. They are not quantifiable and very much subject to one person’s opinion about the best way of doing things or for the best approach. And so for those reasons, I struggle with performance feedback because I am not always comfortable being critical of others (Chief Officer, 2009).

Some members of the EMT honestly responded about confidence in their feedback skills:

You enter this with some trepidation – to some extent it’s a bit embarrassing because in a perfect world you have these conversations on a fairly regular basis anyway but we don’t think about it – as we go down this process hopefully we will feel more comfortable about having conversations about this subject matter more often. But I don’t think it is necessarily bad to show you are not necessarily 100% comfortable in the whole process – you’re doing your best, it’s the right thing, you’re doing it for the right reasons but we’re all going to vary a lot with the skills we have and you learn as you go through (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

Following the evaluation of the trial, a formal and structured project proposal was submitted to the EMT for the development and implementation of a TFS wide workplace feedback approach. A specific recommendation to the Steering Committee in August 2006, and to the EMT in October 2006, was the importance of the workplace feedback approach being seen to be driven by line managers.

6.9 ROLE OF LINE MANAGERS

There was explicit recognition that: *“A critical aspect is the consistency of behaviour shown by the leaders”* (Director Human Services, September 2008) in being seen to take the trial seriously and to demonstrate a commitment to providing genuine workplace feedback. There were positive comments that it was *“...good to see more senior people coming to workplace and genuinely*

giving positive feedback” (Supervisor Operations, September 2008). Overall there was a view that: *“There is greater willingness to listen to people’s concerns without becoming defensive and managers becoming more supportive and understanding of individual issues”* (Director Human Services, September 2008).

Not all of the managers embraced the workplace feedback trial as according to Human Services —*...there was a level of cynicism about new systems coming out of management*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008). There were delays in people becoming familiar with the processes accessing available support systems as: *—To get the most out of the....feedback sessions, you need to know how to ask or what questions to ask a particular person*” (Manager Divisions, January 2006). Training for all managers to optimise demonstrated support and consistency of information was seen as important.

6.10 TOWARDS FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF WORKPLACE FEEDBACK

During the post-trial focus groups, participants were asked about how the TFS should progress towards organisation wide workplace feedback; provided that was the decision of the EMT. The major responses are detailed in the following sections.

6.10.1 COMMUNICATION OF TRIAL OUTCOMES

Responses stressed the importance of a communication strategy *—to maintain the momentum*’, the development of supportive tools and procedures and a formal evaluation be conducted prior to a decision to implement an organisation wide policy. Communication aspects contained in the post-trial recommendations to the EMT were to confirm that EMT had been using the workplace

feedback and that the future focus be about *‘how we work together’* rather than about organisational outcomes.

Effectively communicating outcomes of the workplace feedback trial were stressed as *“selling system is critical”* (Manager Divisions, Focus Group 3). It was seen important to reinforce that workplace feedback *“...is more than appraisal”* (Manager Operations, Focus Group 7) and to *“...minimise perceptions that the system is a ‘sick’ because there is still some cynicism in operational areas”* (Employee Operations, Focus Group 9). A key message to be conveyed was *“...that feedback is not about saving up and dumping”* (Supervisor Operations, Focus Group 7).

Communication *“...should be face to face and, if possible, include members of the trial contributing factual information”* (Manager Operations, Focus Group 9). The information should provide *“...positive anecdotes”* (Manager Divisions, Focus Group 8) but that that the TFS should not *“...oversell success so far even though the good has outweighed bad in the trial”* (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 3). Suggested content included: good news stories; the pragmatic issues of timing; that it will take time to fully implement; and, that even with the best implementation *“...not everybody will be happy”* (Supervisor Operations, Focus Group 7).

It was stated that communicating the trial outcomes should be *“...part of training”* (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 3) that should be delivered to the non-trial areas as *“...experientially based workshops with people at same level to remove issues of status”* (Manager Operations, Focus Group 9). It was felt that the trial work groups should have some refresher training.

6.10.2 SPECIFIC CHANGES/ ADDITIONS TO HELP IMPLEMENTING WORKPLACE FEEDBACK?

To make TFS wide implementation of workplace feedback more effective, there were suggestions for a “...*clear person in charge of system across the TFS*” (Manager Divisions, Focus Group 1). The implementation should have a service wide start date and the TFS make a “...*big deal of this perhaps having a „we’re all doing it now’ celebration*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 9). The aim is to foster “...*a culture of being something that we want to do not what we have to do*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, September 2008).

For full implementation, it was important to have the support systems of contact officers and third-person facilitator pool up and running. It was felt necessary to have developed clear system and accountabilities for PDP actions. The system to include planning and scheduling meetings with a structured follow up if review meetings don’t happen. Statistics on the holding of review meetings could be part of the TFS monthly reports. In Operations there was a specific comment that there needed to be “...*recognition of increased workload*” (Supervisor Operations, Focus Group 7) in performing day to day feedback and review sessions until there had been sufficient cycles of the system for an adequate level of comfort that benefits are being delivered. Additionally, there should changes to the “...*continual cascading of higher duties in operations which cause severe problems in continuity of supervision for performing workplace feedback*” (Manager Operations, Focus Group 5).

6.10.3 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TO BE INCLUDED IN A PROCEDURE MANUAL AND LIST OF FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)?

The general feedback was to keep procedures “...*as simple and brief as possible*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 1), to “...*condense information when go live*” (Supervisor Divisions, Focus Group 6) and to simplify and “...*modify the FAQs now the trial has finished*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 4). There should be “...*streamlining of forms*” (Supervisor Operations, Focus Group 9) that should “...*emphasise flexibility of documentation*” (Manager Operations, Focus Group 7) and provide “...*greater clarification of what can or shouldn’t be covered in a review meeting*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 4). There should be a strong emphasis on the setting and keeping to a “...*date for review sessions to be locked in*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 9).

6.10.4 RECOGNITION OF GOOD PERFORMANCE

The focus groups were asked to suggest appropriate methods the TFS should use to recognise employee performance. The most common response was informal positive feedback with “...*the boss saying you’re doing a good job*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 5) or that a “...*simple please and thanks*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 9) would be welcome. Such feedback “...*needs to be done carefully*” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 8) and be given “...*individually by the direct supervisor or if it was to a team or larger group, then done by more senior person*” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 7).

Other responses were that there should be “...*individual recognition by being rewarded with development*” (Manager Divisions, Focus Group 8) and/or “...*identified as potential for*

promotion” (Employee Operations, Focus Group 7). There was a suggestion of team based recognition with “...informal arrangements such as beer on a Friday night” (Employee Divisions, Focus Group 1). On manager stressed the importance of having “...industrially and politically some sort of policy if there are going to be opportunities to give movie tickets so it can be done without having to justify every little expenditure. The TFS will need to trust people to allocate rewards fairly and responsibly” (Manager Divisions, Focus Group 8).

6.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This Chapter had covered the period from January 2005 to October 2006 during which a trial of workplace feedback was conducted in nine workgroups across a representative range of function and regions. Data was analysed at three time points: a survey prior to the trial, a mid-trial review and a post-trial evaluation. The mid-trial review was conducted using focus groups and interviews with employees and supervisors/managers while the post-trial evaluation was conducted using focus groups in each of the trial areas.

The findings have been presented to show aspects of the workplace feedback trial that were seen as positive and to outline areas of resistance or areas for improvement in the conduct of workplace feedback. The Chapter described the roles undertaken by the HR function, the EMT (especially the matter of the level of perceived support for the trial) and line managers. Because the data collected contained a sizable amount of material related to procedural issues, that material has also been presented.

Aggregate and summary information was provided to the EMT following the three stages of data gathering. The data from the post-trial evaluation formed part of a formal project proposal to the EMT for workplace feedback to be implemented TFS wide. The next Chapter will contain the findings from post-trial key informant interviews detailing how the TFS moved towards full implementation of workplace feedback.

CHAPTER 7

RESULTS PART 3: TOWARDS TFS WIDE IMPLEMENTATION OF WORKPLACE FEEDBACK

7.1 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

This Chapter covers the period from October 2006 (when the EMT endorsed the post-trial evaluation report and decided to proceed with full implementation of an organisation wide workplace feedback system) to October 2009 when the last of the semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The purpose of this Chapter is to discuss the progress towards full implementation of workplace feedback including the roles of the key actors. The Chapter seeks, in part, to address the second of the research questions namely:

Research Question 2: *What are the challenges for the HR function in meeting the four tests drawn from the Guest framework?*

In describing the roles of the key sets of actors, the Chapter will also address, in part, the third of the research questions:

Research Question 3: *How can an integrated SHRM process model assist a public sector organisation to design and progress towards implementation of a new HRM policy?*

The Chapter, in discussing the roles of the HR function, the EMT, line managers and employees, contributes to an understanding of the complexities of developing and implementing HRM strategy in practice and how the elements of the theoretical framework could interact. The Chapter will also cover the communication techniques that the TFS used to keep the process alive in the minds of the employees during the steps towards full implementation of workplace feedback.

Finally, the Chapter will contribute to the development of the implications derived from the three results chapters which will be elaborated in Chapter 8: Discussion and Implications.

7.2 ROLE OF THE HR FUNCTION

Human Services provided strategic contribution and operational support as the TFS moved towards full implementation of the workplace feedback system. *“The role of Human Service is to provide systems to support workplace behaviour: this involves interactions and relationships in the workplace”* (Director Human Services, September 2008). From the perspective of a member of EMT: *“Human Service’s role is to be a supporter, enabler and helper to the line who are dealing with the new performance feedback system”* (EMT member, September 2008). This was summarised as *“...the overall role of Human Services includes support, coaching, information, reporting and evaluating”* (Director Human Services, September 2008).

In specific relation to the rollout of the workplace feedback system:

The role of Human Services is to design and implement a system that can enable the line managers to do all those things, to support them and to make sure they have the skills to do it, and that we are selecting and promoting people with the aptitude to be doing these things and to keep the emphasis and awareness going so that it doesn’t stop flowing and drop off as other important initiatives become apparent (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2009).

The HR function took a leading role through: providing specialist knowledge; developing the strategy; getting the EMT to support the approach; and, providing the core resources support the approach’s implementation. However, the HR function did not play an exclusive role as: *“HR develops the tools and strategies and things, but clearly the rest of the organisation, well the management in the rest of has got to push it”* (Chief Officer, September 2009). Part of the HR

function's role is to continue to reinforce the process and remind managers and employees of their roles. *It has been a very open and very consultative approach but in the background, they still need to be pushing it and driving it. They are the „engine room' for the whole process"* (Middle Manager Operations, September 2008).

For the HR function to effectively lead the development of an HRM policy that contributes to a change in culture and leadership and style, the credibility of the HR function, in general, and of individual HR specialists is important because *...the place just runs riot on rumours. Particularly I'm talking career brigades; they just work and sleep together. They have got too much time to develop rumours"* (Chief Officer, September 2009). *I believe that Human Services has been seen to be taking an independent approach with no hidden agenda. The role of the Coordinator by his style and how he developed credibility has been important"* (Director, Human Services, September 2008).

Since the TFS took an internal development approach to workplace feedback, the primary focal point became the Coordinator, Organisation Development (Director Human Services, June 2009). The role included development and coordination of the training and the support systems for employees and managers, project management of the production of a DVD and coordination of the development and trialling of supporting documentation and procedures for the system. Additionally, the role included providing an expert consultancy service in problem solving and assisting where serious work performance or behavioural issues emerged (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009).

A ‘toolkit’ of on-line and multi-media and paper based resources to guide managers and employees through the system was developed. During the implementation phase, an operational employee was seconded to Human Services to assist with *“...the development of training materials and support materials so that personnel can operate the system within the organisation”* (Supervisor Operations, October 2008). This increased the available staffing resources and also assisted with the credibility of the system with operational employees. *“If I didn’t have help from volunteers from within the organisation, (the project) would have been more delayed”* (Coordinator Organisation Development, September 2008).

An aspect of the approach was to change feedback styles and leadership behaviour which required strategies to reinforce complementary behaviours. As outlined in section 4.6.2, one such project that occurred in 2007 was a survey of bullying behaviours. This survey was conducted by consultants from the University of Tasmania that obtained data on the frequency and nature of bullying behaviour. In October 2007, an education programme addressing workplace harassment was developed. A component of the intervention strategy was training of twenty-two harassment contact officers to provide advice, support and information for employees. The contact officers’ role includes advising employees who have concerns or grievances arising from workplace feedback (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009).

Changes to other HRM policies were necessary for workplace feedback to be effective. *“The main things have been harassment and discrimination education which was necessary because of huge exposure. In that time, there has also been an enormous amount of time put into OH&S”* (Coordinator Organisation Development, September 2008). A combined focus on providing a feedback mechanism, training in bullying/harassment and the focus on values contributed to the

preparedness for people to raise issues previously hidden or suppressed. Consequently, a number of complaints/issues were disclosed that required formal investigations undertaken by the Coordinator Organisation Development. Historically, such bullying behaviour would have been —.seen as the norm and therefore tolerated” (Director Human Services, September 2008).

Complementary HRM policies and procedures were implemented to reinforce the workplace feedback approach. During 2007 and 2008, position descriptions for all people in supervisory positions were audited. Where necessary, they were amended to give sufficient weight to feedback skills, in managing performance and actively developing employees. Selection criteria for such positions included feedback and leadership as essential capabilities. In addition, the firefighter recruit programme was amended to include training in workplace feedback concepts and skills (Director Human Services, September 2009). The importance of the process of internal development and internal consistency across HRM activities was described as:

I think now Human Services have implemented quite a lot of policies and systems.....bullying and harassment, managing diversity and now the workplace feedback system. Simple things like appropriate use of internet and email. If those things didn't come into our organisation subtly, we wouldn't have been able to change at all (Middle Manager Operations, September 2008).

A range of networks were developed. These networks sought to increase the level of support for workplace feedback across the organisation, to try to keep the momentum for process going and to have a range of people across functions, regions and levels who could act as advisors, coaches and providers of technical support. The internal support comprised regional support persons, qualified internal trainers who are so that employees with questions or concerns can —.talk to a colleague in the same Division and at the same level and not be talked down to or have to go to Human Services” (Supervisor Operations, September 2008). The supports and policy addressed

one of the concerns raised about a need for *“...clarity of what happens when a meeting becomes adversarial”* (Middle Manager Operations, September 2008).

A contracted external Hobart-based training consultant ran a four-day *“train the trainer”* programme for sixteen employees to become *“in house trainers and coaches”* in September of 2008. These in-house trainers then conducted workshops of approximately three-quarters of a day to train workgroups on the content of workplace feedback and then practised feedback processes using the forms and supporting items from the *“tool-kit”*. Internal coaches assist people to get experience conducting feedback and review sessions and provide advice on specific local issues (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009).

The role of the HR function is to develop policies and procedures that support vertical and horizontal fit. *“I think HR in the future is going to be really trying to continue that culture change along, about respect and democratic rights”* (Chief Officer, September 2009). The implementation of workplace feedback helps to lay *“...the foundations for us to build and move on to other things like leadership”* (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008). The importance of leadership as a focus of progress towards being a modern and more democratic organisation was summarised as follows:

The whole philosophy that we’re selling, and we’re now really starting to get some buy in to it, is that our leadership strategy is not a training program. Our leadership strategy is going to be our measuring stick by which we are going to assess and review and evaluate all our policies and systems to make sure they are consistent with that strategy (Director Human Services, September, 2009).

In summary, the findings show evidence of practical challenges for an HR function in seeking to balance day to day requirements with developing and implementing HRM policies. The

importance of individual HR specialist capability and credibility to obtain executive commitment to provide resources and actively support HRM strategic proposals was highlighted. The HR specialists also needed to have credibility with line managers and employees. Such credibility was influenced by communication activities, supporting resources and the provision of technical expertise. The next sections will outline the roles of the EMT, line managers and employees during the process towards full implementation of workplace feedback.

7.3 ROLE OF THE EMT

The role of EMT is *—..firstly to champion it; secondly to use it effectively with middle management, and role model doing it well and role model taking on feedback; and, thirdly to hold middle managers accountable for doing it*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008). This role included promoting the workplace feedback approach in their Division and encouraging their managers to be active participants in the process. *—Part of EMT’s role was to deal with passive resistance in their area*” (Director Human Services, September 2008). The importance of the Executive as role models was emphasised so that *—..if EMT members are not sending the right signals out, if they’re not walking the talk, it’s really a waste of time*” (Chief Officer, September 2009).

The Director Human Services, as an EMT member, provided updates to the EMT and played a role in reinforcing to the EMT that their involvement and behaviour played a significant role in demonstrating to employees the importance of the system. The Director Human Services lobbied to have progress on the performance feedback system *—..as a standard EMT meeting agenda*

item and to encourage EMT to include the scheduling review sessions as part of the normal planning process” (Director Human Services, September 2008).

The Deputy Chief Officer, (who was appointed to the position of Chief Officer in October, 2009 to replace the retiring Chief Officer), took on the role as the executive champion of the system and promoted it when meeting with managers and employees. As confirmed by the Chief Officer, *“I wasn’t the face of performance feedback”* (September 2009). The role of the Deputy Chief *“...was more important out in the field, in going out and talking about it”* (Director Human Services, June 2009). Having a senior member of the Executive taking a role of ‘champion’ of the approach contributed to the support of the process. *“I have been pleasantly surprised by the commitment shown by EMT from the Chief Officer down. The role of the Deputy Chief as champion is very important”* (Operations Supervisor, September 2008). The nature of the role of ‘champion’ was explained as follows:

I have had a leadership role in promoting and marketing the feedback programme. I visited all career shifts across the State, with an Agenda of 4 items one of which was the Feedback process: when they could expect the training and what kind of benefits they could expect to get out of it. I had a role in the DVD..... developed to promote the feedback process and with my role currently with The Chief away, I have been taking a leadership role with the Executive Management Team because I think that it is very important at the top level of the organisation it is seen that we are doing it and we are using it, so the expectation that it be rolled out across the rest of the organisation is enhanced. That has been my role as I see it (Deputy Chief Officer, September 2008).

The support of the EMT for the workplace feedback approach was recognised as illustrated by the statement: *“It has been driven down and given the support from the senior management of the organisation, so that’s good”* (Middle Manager Operations, October 2008). However, the involvement of EMT in the workplace feedback system was not always seen as obvious to

employees: during the implementation their participation was *—..sporadic and there was a bit of a burst when I delivered training to them, and another burst three months later when I went back and jogged them*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, September 2008). The importance of the EMT demonstrating explicit support was explained as *—..the commitment of EMT has been vital but it has not always been visible*” (Director Human Services, September 2008). Part of showing such support is in the manner this is communicated to the organisation’s employees. *—EMT should give organisational leadership: lead by example. I think EMT has been fairly poor communicating how they have been doing it*” (EMT member, 2008). The role of the EMT is pivotal because *—..you can send out all the information and training, but if it wasn’t supported by EMT, there is a perception that the organisation is not taking the process seriously*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008). The importance of the EMT in being seen to take a leading role was described by an EMT member as follows:

The most important part is that the foot just can’t come off the accelerator – put it to the floor and make sure everyone is going along at roughly the same pace and we keep on going with it. I think the process we have set up is pretty good so if people feel that the feedback is not working, if the boss is not doing it right or it’s not happening then, in each region, there are contact officers and they can come and raise and come back through (Human Services) and make sure we can find out what the problem is (Acting Chief Officer, September 2008).

From the time EMT committed to develop and implement a new approach to leadership and managing people, there were implications for other HRM policy areas. For the overall changes to HRM policy and organisational culture to be successful:

It’s going to be really important that with each of the strategies we are working on about behaviour was that senior managers were ready to in terms of their understanding of the changes that needed to be made, as well as their ability and skill level to be actually able to start showing those behaviours (Director Human Services, September 2009).

In August 2009, EMT approved an accountability framework for reporting on the number of summary meetings and on the follow up of agreed development opportunities (Coordinator Organisation Development, April, 2010). Accountability fell to EMT members in how they delivered workplace feedback to their managerial reports, and how the EMT held those managers accountable for delivering workplace feedback to supervisors and employees.

7.4 ROLE OF LINE MANAGERS

Line managers play a central role in the implementation of a new HRM policy such as workplace feedback. *“Line managers have the day to day contact with the staff so their role is critical. Spending time giving and receiving feedback is very important. Informal feedback is more important than formal review sessions”* (EMT member, September 2008). How line managers accept responsibility for the process and in following up outcomes is important. *„It is important that line managers organise and manage the process and take responsibility for outcomes. Performance Development Programmes outcomes are a shared responsibility”* (Director Human Services, September 2008) between the employee and the line manager.

A line manager's response to their role in supporting effective implementation of workplace feedback was:

Well it's crucial. Not just in my level, but at every level. If we can't have some consistency and a bit of cooperation at all levels, and one link in the chain breaks, then it's going to be difficult to make it work. Because if one level doesn't want to play, then it's just not going to work (Middle Manager Operations, October 2008).

Line manager support, particularly by those in the operational fire fighting divisions was variable. This was influenced by the general level of interest, the degree to which the regional

representatives have been active and the distance from Head Office (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009). There was also a degree of variability in the level of feedback skills partly as *“...line managers are not formally assessed on feedback skills – put it on their position descriptions. However, as time goes by people are focusing more on improving their feedback skills”* (EMT member, September 2008). The overall level of *“...training and the uptake have been slow which has partly been due to the issue of accountability”* (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009). How the TFS approached this issue is addressed as discussed in Section 7.8.

7.5 EMPLOYEE RESPONSES

The TFS sought to use workplace feedback as a component in changing the organisation culture and leadership style to facilitate a range of desired employee behavioural outcomes. The Director Human Services expressed the view that core organisational values are outcomes more than they were inputs: *“They are a fundamental part of organisational culture”* (October 2008). That was why it was decided not to formally implement the set of values prior to the development and implementation of the workplace feedback approach. Values need systems to support them.

The fourth of the Guest (1987, 1997 & 2002) tests of SHRM is employee responses. The extent to which employee behaviour is influenced by HRM policy and how they are delivered impacts on the outcomes from those policies. The employee behavioural responses sought by the TFS were articulated as follows:

- Engagement and commitment shown by explicit support for organisations objectives and the way in which they are to be achieved;

- Contribution to organisational performance and a willingness to display OCB;
- To accept shared responsibility for achieving outcomes whilst individuals accept primary responsibility for their own performance. Relationships between supervisors and employees will be on an adult to adult basis rather than parent to child that was reflective of the previous dominant culture;
- To reflect on their behaviour and to seek assistance to display appropriate behaviours;
- To be proactive;
- To be willing to share ideas; and
- To be willing to raise issues and genuinely held concerns without fear of being unfairly treated (Director Human Services, June 2008).

The TFS sought to move to a position where *—...motivated employees being more willing to think about alternatives, to look ahead at possibilities and to actively share those with their organisation across the board*” (Acting Chief Officer, September 2008). If these changes to HRM practices and leadership style were not followed through or were unsuccessful, then the outcomes would be *—...lower morale, lower productivity, increased turnover of personnel and a general atmosphere of dissatisfaction*” (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

Typical responses by employees to the workplace feedback system as at the middle of 2009, as assessed by the Coordinator Organisation Development would be: *—It was good and I’ve got a development plan....A couple have been I don’t think my manager has been very good at it. But that has been the minority of the people I have talked to*” (June 2009). From the perspective of the operational fire fighters; *—...generally I would think they’d say; it’s a great idea. I think we*

really need this, but I haven't done one. Some will be able to say I've done all mine recently" Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009). The TFS recognises that the workplace feedback system would have to have gone through a number of annual cycles before there is a critical mass of support for the approach. Perceptions will develop over time so *"...I don't think it is necessarily bad to show you are not necessarily 100% comfortable in the whole process – you're doing your best, it's the right thing, you're doing it for the right reasons"* (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

7.6 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

A two-level communication strategy was established to provide information from the establishment of the Reference Group in mid-2003:

One is regular organisational communication either in terms of written updates that are sent around as well as when (the Coordinator Organisation Development) went around to workgroups informing them of what was going on. The second was the role that we put on the Steering Committee to give information back through their workgroup to the trial areas and then to the wider part of the organisation they represented (Director Human Services, June 2009).

The importance of an explicit communication strategy was demonstrated by as follows: *"I guess communication is really the cornerstone of the whole thing. There has got to be constant communication, but also having said that, there are so many things that we've got to communicate"* (Chief Officer, September 2009). A reason for establishing a communication strategy was to counteract the organisational grapevine.

The nature of our organisation is that fire fighters will believe what they hear from fire fighters before what they hear from management. We knew that the system would sink or swim based on the reputation that it gained. If it gained a poor

reputation, it was going to be very hard to get it up elsewhere (Director Human Services, June 2009).

The TFS used information from the Reference Group in 2004 and the evaluation of the workplace feedback trial in 2006 to target the communication on subjects and towards areas where there was greater resistance. *—Positive communication was important from the start to overcome fears. We aimed to sell it through champions and to target the „hardnuts’ in the TFS who we knew were going to be hard to convince”* (EMT member, September 2008).

The Coordinator Organisation Development was the primary person in communicating messages through formal means such as publication and visits as well as part of his normal day to day duties. This position provided a specific resource that permitted the workplace feedback approach to be *—..marketed in a way that is sounded like something worth going ahead with”* (Acting Chief Officer, October 2008). We needed to get the message across that feedback is not about *—..saving up and dumping”* (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2006). The Coordinator Organisation Development was assisted by *—..trainers/coaches, a regional representative for each of the three regions and Human Services staff”* (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009).

The communication, particularly between the end of the trial and the start of the full implementation, could have been improved. *—There was even a gap in hearing about the system for up to six months, so it went out of people’s consciousness”* (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008). The communication strategy aimed to keep employees informed of progress and to facilitate increased support for workplace feedback as the TFS needed *—..to encourage more good news stories and encourage informal advocacy of the system”* (EMT

member, September 2008). This was done using regular newsletters, articles in the TFS quarterly magazine ‘Fireground’ and through the role of the Deputy Chief as the workplace feedback ‘champion’. A further medium used, for example in August 2009, was informing employees of the availability of contact officers through posters which were placed in lunch rooms and by placing a flyer in employees’ pay envelopes. (Coordinator, Organisation Development, October 2009). *“If people feel that the feedback is not working, if the boss is not doing it right or it’s not happening then, in each region, there are contact officers and they can come and raise it with them”* (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

The TFS developed a DVD using scenarios relevant to the TFS (but performed using professional actors). It contained an opening from the Deputy Chief. The response to the DVD has been *“...very good. Some of the scenarios they don’t see as being realistic, but it starts good discussions”* (Director Human Services, June 2009). The next sections will provide a summary of the overall approach to workplace feedback taken by the TFS and its progress towards full implementation of the policy.

7.7 OVERALL APPROACH TAKEN BY THE TFS

A key theme was the importance of the TFS being consistent in the manner in which it developed workplace feedback. There are two aspects to the matter of consistency: firstly, to be consistent with using a consultative approach; and secondly, once the decision had been made to develop the approach ‘inhouse’ it had to be followed through until the end of the process. If the TFS has taken a traditional approach to performance management by purchasing a commercial product and implement it in isolation from other HRM policies, the consequence *“...would just*

have reinforced the hierarchy and it would have been seen the same as the last performance management system was, as an arse kicking exercise” (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2008). To be consistent with the desired employee responses (see Section 7.5), the process for development of workplace feedback needed to:

...provide the opportunity for people to contribute ideas and where people have the mindset of the old regime you’ve got to be providing them with opportunity to move their head and give them some guidance about moving their thinking (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

The interviewees were positive about the process being inclusive and responsive to comments from employees with an important aspect being that *—there was engagement right from the ground floor. It was necessary, and in a shift environment often difficult, but it did help to ensure understanding and buy in from the organisation as a whole”* (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008). This was supported by the view that *—one of the real features of our system in its implementation is that our people feel that it was their system. And this was the first time that the organisation had actually listened to them and developed a system that met their needs rather than imposing a system”* (Director Human Services, June 2009). A further element of consistency was providing an opportunity for employees to try workplace feedback approach rather than being required to implement a system formally that was new to them. This was explained as follows:

A majority of people by virtue of their human nature want to hear it, like to use it and feel it and like to think that they have something of value to add. And I think that’s pretty indicative of ... operational background of most fire fighters are that way inclined. They are very hands on type people so just telling them isn't really going to get through in most cases. Most of them would like to try and get their hands around it and actually use it. It goes back to listening again, actually listening and observing it (Supervisor Operations, October 2008).

The development of workplace feedback commenced with the Reference Group in 2003 and at the time the research period ended in October 2009 had yet to be fully rolled out across the whole of the organisation. The reasons for the delays are covered in Chapter 4: Case History and Chapter 5: Context and Key factors. By October 2009, *—...the TFS had showed perseverance in what became a long process although we still have a long way to go. The roll out is now happening but it will take time to grasp the full impact of workplace feedback*’ (Manager Operations, October 2008). However, the protracted period did have some benefits as follows: *—If there were shortcuts taken in the training and roll-out, I think it would impact on the success of the programme getting going*” (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

7.7.1 FLEXIBILITY OF APPROACH

A key challenge was to emphasise core aspects of workplace feedback approach to facilitate consistency while permitting variations where justified by local circumstances. *—Given the nature of our organisation and the level of differentiation, it had to be flexible and adaptable to the different areas*” (Director Human Services, June, 2009). The operational areas were to be reasonably consistent *—...but they needed to tailor it exactly to their own needs*” (Director Human Services, June, 2009). This level of flexibility was influenced by both a recognition that different work groups believed they had different needs and to demonstrate that employee suggestions were adopted. This was explained as follows:

...a lot of effort has been put in to ensuring that these programmes are leaving people some comfort in where they are going. It hasn't been too prescriptive. We are quite happy for it to run without being dictated by forms and templates providing the principles are still there as long it is two-way, that records will be kept and there will be agreements made and those agreements will be followed up on (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

Operational employees supported this approach in the following manner:

I don't think that there is much else that we could have done. Just putting something in which we could have and said one size fits all. But we tailor made this and made it flexible to suit as many people as we possibly can and involved as many people as we possibly could (Supervisor Operations, October 2008).

The timing of review sessions vary from workgroup to workgroup: the aim is for intervals of between six and twelve months. For employees with rotational shift cycles of seven months followed by annual leave, the optimal period is in the middle three months of the cycle (EMT Member, September 2008).

7.8 TOWARDS FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF WORKPLACE FEEDBACK

In reflecting on the pattern of events since 2002 when a decision was made by the TFS to develop an organisation specific approach to employee performance, the Chief Officer observed:

I have seen the complexity grow, there are so many competing priorities...and people's working lives have become so complicated. If we'd had the luxury of more time, not more people doing it, I don't think that if we'd spent more money we'd have got a better result. We're forever asking for so many other things that people have to deal with that performance is just another thing (Chief Officer, October 2009).

To get managers on side, some recognition of increased workloads in the short to medium term is necessary (EMT member, September, 2008). Managers need to be convinced that putting effort into learning about workplace feedback and implementation so it becomes a part of day to day activities and will save them time and energy on people issues in the longer run. Until that stage is reached, *—...there needs to be encouragement for people to do them (the Review sessions) and clear consequences if they don't*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2008). The prevailing view is expressed as follows:

It's too easy and it's still currently too easy for an area to give it lip service or even not do it and not to be caught for a fair while.....I think once it's embedded it will drive itself – once you provide the systems to ensure everyone is getting it but you have to track that carefully at the beginning (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

To enable the full implementation of workplace feedback — *we certainly needed to make changes to our information systems in order to record the outcomes*” and the full development is needed of a — *reporting system so that each work area can, on a quarterly basis, identify the number of summary discussions held and Personal Development Plans completed in a quarter*” (Director Human Services, June 2009). The TFS is working to implement systems that — *ideally, what we'd be able to do is build the accountability below (managerial level) and build trust above that line*” (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009).

There was an understanding that it will take at least two full annual cycles of feedback and review sessions before workplace feedback is fully implemented.

I suspect in three years, we'll see whether or not people are willing to keep the momentum going. If it is still going in ten years, then we've embedded it and it is a part of how the organisation works because people want it to work. If people don't want to do it, it will just fall over (Director Human Services, June 2009).

Even after a period of full implementation, effective participation — *will not be one hundred per cent for a long time, but we've got to keep the pressure on to remind people what it's all about and gradually get it embedded in the culture*” (Chief Officer, September 2009). Contextual factors such as being a Government owned Fire Service implementing evolutionary change mean that — *memories are long, turnover is low, credibility is critical and it takes time for people to try out, refine, accept and then integrate that so that the suspicion goes*” (Director Human Services, June 2009). The levels of skills and comfort in the process will develop over time.

I don't know that any of us can say we are 100% and I'm the best feedback provider and we probably never will be but it's important we've got the principles laid down and the training and what we've been marketing promotes the principles as the most important part and we'll just learn from it as we go through it (Acting Chief Officer, November 2008).

Workplace feedback will be embedded when:

It would be the norm that people address issues directly with each other in a constructive way. The way people give feedback is more skilled and successful. It has become a part of what we do, not another thing to do, and the summary meetings are actually quite slick and easy, not a pain. There will be less issues (of poor behaviour) and need for performance improvement processes, because they will have been dealt with earlier and more skilfully, and by people who are less scared to deal with issues (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2008).

7.8.1 EVALUATION OF THE WORKPLACE FEEDBACK APPROACH

The TFS has considered how to evaluate the effectiveness of workplace feedback. When this happens depends and after: *—probably two or three reviews, I guess the first one was testing the water a little bit for both the supervisor and the person we're actually talking to" (Manager Divisions, January 2006). Therefore by —...2012, I hope it's just part of normal business, normal management. I suspect it will be in some parts, and in other parts it might not. It depends a lot on the leadership and individuals" (Chief Officer, October 2009). From the perspective of the HR function, the view is that:*

Realistically, if we wanted to do a good organisational perspective on it, I would say two years because I think the first discussion (review session) is going to be very tentative in most areas. The second discussion people will start to be a bit more comfortable in discussing the more difficult and challenging topics. So it is probably about three years (Director Human Services, June 2009).

From the operational perspective, it may even require a longer period before the outcomes can be fully evaluated was argued as follows:

I think in five years' time it will be really interesting to see how we're going because I do believe we've done the hard work and now, once we get to the roll out and people are able to practice and have more sessions and get a bit more confident with what we've got, I think in four to five years time it will just be something else that we do and it won't be anything extra (Middle Manager Operations, June 2009).

In terms of the factors that would be assessed as part of the evaluation process; it may include:

...the proportion of staff getting or participating in a feedback system summary session with their supervisor. I'd also like to measure their satisfaction with the meetings....and I'd like to measure people's skill at giving and receiving feedback....and whether they feel more connected with their role (Coordinator Organisation Development, June 2009).

It would be reasonable to also assess broader issues to determine whether the workplace feedback approach has made a demonstrable positive contribution to broader aspects of people management and organisational culture and such issues could include:

...the number of performance issues that we're having to deal with, the subjective measure of the climate of the organisation and how engaged people feel, a measure of how much people respect their supervisors and managers and a measure of employee perception of the level of transparency of the organisation and how much they understand how certain decisions are being made (Coordinator Organisation Development, October 2008).

7.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Chapter has discussed the experience of the TFS from the evaluation of the trial towards full implementation of workplace feedback. It covered the roles of the key actors and helped illustrate the level of interdependence and level of cooperation necessary for consistent progress to be made.

The HR function, during this stage, remained cognisant of the contextual factors and issues surrounding both vertical and horizontal fit. The results have highlighted the importance of complementary HR initiatives such as addressing harassment and bullying, as necessary building blocks to support the effective implementation of workplace feedback. The discussion in this Chapter has contributed to addressing Research Question 2:

Research Question 2: *What are the challenges for the HR function in meeting the four tests drawn from the Guest framework?*

The multiple demands on time and resources available to the HR function impacted on the timetable and to be consistent with the philosophy of the approach had to be primarily supported from internal resources. A level of persistence and need to seek regular explicit support from the executive and line managers to sustain the momentum was also highlighted.

The Chapter also provide data that responded to Research Question 3:

Research Question 3: *How can an integrated SHRM process model assist a public sector organisation to design and progress towards implementation of a new HRM policy?*

Information was presented that demonstrated the challenge of maintaining a consistent approach so employees perceived that the TFS was seeking their participation, responding to employee suggestions, and providing sufficient levels of support both physical and advisory resources.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE CHAPTER

The objectives of this chapter are four-fold. Firstly, the results of this research will be discussed in the context of the research questions posed in Chapter Two. In particular, the findings are related to the theoretical models and frameworks analysed in the literature review. Secondly, the implications of the research are outlined in relation to the preliminary tabular framework, of linkages between an organisation's HRM policy development and its outcomes presented in Figure 2-6. These sections cover the implications for SHRM theory and research, as well as practical implications for HR specialists. Thirdly, the results are utilised to propose an integrated SHRM process model, which highlights the process outcomes important to be considered for an organisation seeking to achieve the performance outcomes. The model seeks to include process aspects (the _how_) as well as content aspects (the _what_) of SHRM. Finally, the chapter closes with a report of the parameters of the research and suggestions for further research.

The broad research opportunity identified in Chapter One of this thesis was: *What factors underpin an integrated Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) approach to the development and implementation of a new human resource policy?* In order to answer the broad research opportunity, three research questions were posed:

Research Question 1: *What are the relevant contextual issues for an organisation to consider in developing a new human resource policy?*

Research Question 2: *What are the challenges for the HR function in meeting the four tests drawn from the Guest framework?*

Research Question 3: *How can an integrated SHRM process model assist a public sector organisation to design and progress towards implementation of a new HRM policy?*

The questions were investigated through an extensive review of primary and secondary data relevant to the TFS's approach to workplace feedback gathered over the period 2003 to 2009. The findings relevant to the research questions are summarised and discussed below.

8.2 LITERATURE ISSUES AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE METHOD

8.2.1 USE OF SHRM LITERATURE

The research indicated the practical difficulty in developing and implementing a performance management related HRM policy in a dynamic organisation. By incorporating published research evidence on performance management systems, the TFS was able to adopt an evidence-based approach that assisted with the development of the principles and pre-conditions that were outcomes of the 2003 to 2004 Reference Group process. The TFS utilised SHRM literature, particularly the Preliminary Framework detailed in Figure 2-2 to assess the vertical fit and horizontal fit of their HRM approach. One specific outcome was the set of recommendations from the Reference Group to separate the workplace feedback approach from the organisation's poor performance and grievance processes.

8.2.2 CONTRIBUTION OF THE METHOD

The research methodology sought to address some of the issues in SHRM research identified in Section 2.3.1. In particular, the choice of a longitudinal and predominantly qualitative method permitted an exploration of the process (the ‘_how’) of HRM development such as how the TFS addressed practical issues of scheduling, resourcing and implementing a HRM policy. Using qualitative research also permitted an examination of the role of the key actors in the development of the HRM policy, and highlighted the importance of ‘_management visibility’ and managerial behaviour on employee perceptions of the value of the policy.

The gathering of data from multiple respondents at different organisational levels demonstrated that, in a medium-sized but geographically dispersed organisation, there can be a variety of perceptions about the effectiveness of its approach to human resources, the value of the HR function, and, in particular, of individual HRM policies. Therefore, obtaining valid data, that could be used to demonstrate a causal link between SHRM and organisational outcomes based on respondent assessment, is a matter of significant practical difficulty. The time-lag between the decision to embark on the new policy, using an approach designed to facilitate employee acceptance, suggests that assessing the impact of HRM policies on organisational performance could require a longer period of time than has been the norm in previous studies. The use of the preliminary tabular framework (presented in Figure 2-6) helped to inform the TFS’s HR function of relevant factors in the development and implementation of a new policy area.

The longitudinal aspect of the research enabled consideration of the factors that comprise the so-called Black Box between HRM policy and organisational outcomes. The results suggest that the

nature of the relationships between key variables that result in employee behavioural change, consistent with desired organisational outcomes, is both complex and fragile. Employee perception of the effectiveness of the HRM policy is influenced by the credibility of senior managers, the HR function, and, the employees' perception of their direct manager's capability to effectively implement the policy, as they understand it to be. This illustrates the theoretical and practical importance of the distinction between the intentions of a HRM policy, and how it is received by employees.

8.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: CONTEXT

8.3.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

This section will review the first research question and the results as they relate to the relevant contextual issues that influenced the TFS' approach to the development of its workplace feedback policy.

Research Question 1: *What are the relevant contextual issues for an organisation to consider in developing a new human resource policy?*

Contextual factors are contained in the Harvard model (Figure 2-1) and the vertical fit component of the preliminary framework (Figure 2-2). A consistent theme reflected in the Case History Chapter, and each of the three Results Chapters, was the importance of understanding historical and current organisational contexts in shaping employee attitudes and responses to a new HRM policy. The position that the organisation held in the broader Tasmanian community, and the perception of how that needed to change, was one of the Chief Officer's considerations

in seeking to alter the organisational culture. To effectively meet community expectations of how new functions should be delivered, in the view of the Chief Officer, required a consultative and inclusive approach. The existing autocratic culture was perceived as a barrier to employees' effectively engaging with community representatives and a potential threat to employee attraction and retention. The Chief Officer saw this factor as potentially limiting the organisation's capacity to increase the diversity of its workforce.

The Harvard model (Beer et al, 1984) incorporates relationships between the HR Function and key stakeholders, which included the two unions (with the major focus being the union representing the firefighters). The unions were invited to be part of the Reference Group, were kept up to date during the trial, and were partners in the strategy to combat bullying and harassment. Recognising the role of key stakeholders and other contextual factors, the Executive Management Team (EMT) accepted the relevance of considering organisational pre-conditions necessary to support the development and implementation of a new approach to managing employee performance.

The SHRM vision of the Chief Officer, and the Director Human Services, was to use workplace feedback as a core element of cultural and leadership behavioural change, to position the organisation as an employer of choice able to attract and retain 'employees of choice'. Therefore, it was important that the development of the workplace feedback policy, from the beginning, to be undertaken using an inclusive approach consistent with a philosophy to increase employees' understanding and commitment as an antecedent of engagement in OCB. This would be demonstrated by employees being prepared to use skills, experience and ideas not currently utilised due to the existing culture stifling creativity. The Director Human Services emphasised

that workplace feedback was more about improving the quality of communication and organisational processes rather than outcomes such as appraisal scores or promotion decisions. This relates to the HRM outcome of ‘commitment’ from the Harvard Model and assists in specifying desired employee behaviour from the Causal Model of Employee Performance (Figure 2-3).

Achieving desired outcomes from a SHRM approach required the HR function to be cognisant of contextual factors in its interactions with executive managers, line managers and employees. The monitoring of these interactions was shown to be relevant to the employee response components of the preliminary framework and the causal model of employee performance. Given the extended period it has taken the organisation to progress from a decision to implement a new HRM policy in 2003 until its adoption in 2010, having continuity in the top management and HR specialist positions played a role in maintaining commitment to the approach.

8.3.2 COMMENTS ON RESEARCH QUESTION 1

The discussion in this section has shown the relevance of the contextual and cultural factors in informing and shaping the issues to be considered, and the manner in which the organisation developed its approach to workplace feedback. It confirms the relevance of environmental or contextual factors, including organisational culture, suggested by the Harvard model (Beer et al, 1984). Had the contextual and cultural aspects not been explicitly recognised and taken into account, it is likely that the level of support for workplace feedback would have been diminished. With regard to the first research question, the relevance of historical, organisational and cultural factors, as well as the external factors, has been shown. This finding has added to the

literature by demonstrating the impact of contextual factors on the process of SHRM. This discussion also shows the importance of the behaviour of the various levels of managers and the inter-relationships between these levels and the HR function, and on the responses by employees. The research has contributed to theory building towards an integrated SHRM process model by showing the role of cultural factors, and the importance of maintaining a consistent approach, given that the development and implementation of a new HRM policy can be protracted.

The next four sections (8.4 to 8.7) will discuss the second of the research questions by focussing on the relevant elements of the preliminary tabular framework provided in Figure 2-6. The challenges for the HR function in managing relationships, in performing multiple and competing roles, and in using effective communication to support change initiatives and in building the credibility of the HR function will be discussed.

8.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: CHALLENGES FOR THE HR FUNCTION

This section will discuss the second research question and outline the challenges for the HR function in developing and implementing SHRM. The development of the HR function as detailed in Chapter Four will be assessed for its contribution to theory building, specifically in relation to the Ulrich framework (see section 2.6.2) and the Competing Values Framework (CVF) (see section 2.6.3).

Research Question 2: *What are the challenges for the HR function in meeting the four tests drawn from the Guest framework?*

The four tests as set out in the representation of the Guest framework (see Figure 2-2), provided a lens for examining the operation of SHRM in a single organisation during a longitudinal piece of research. One of the results of the research was that the four tests contain a level of interdependence. For example, the data from line managers and supervisors on their response to the review sessions showed that their perceptions of the level of vertical and horizontal integration impacted on the level of support of the workplace feedback approach.

8.4.1 VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL FIT IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Since the introduction of a structured and consultative approach to strategic planning in 1998, the TFS has explicitly integrated SHRM with organisational planning. Whilst the literature emphasises the importance of vertical fit (link to organisational strategic objectives), and horizontal fit (congruence between HRM policies/practices), it does not clearly detail the inter-relationships between the HR function and the various levels of management in producing suitably high levels of fit. The results of this research illustrate the important role of the EMT and of line managers' contribution and commitment to developing and sustaining the horizontal and vertical dimensions of fit. The results show the importance of vertical and horizontal fit in contributing to a changing culture and leadership style. They also show evidence of the dynamic and potentially unstable nature of vertical and horizontal relationships. The perception of how the EMT and line managers supported the strategies designed to increase the levels of fit, impacted on how the policies were delivered, and hence on employee responses.

Consistency between HRM policies was found to be a relevant and important factor for the organisation developing and implementing its approach to workplace feedback. Basing the

workplace feedback approach on a clear set of principles - which also formed the basis for the organisation's approach to leadership and HRM policy contributed to horizontal fit. As a consequence of the results of the mid-trial review and the trial evaluation, the organisation decided to implement an anti-bullying and harassment strategy prior to the full implementation of workplace feedback. During the period of the research, position descriptions were modified to increase the focus and weighting on effective performance management. The firefighter recruitment programme was modified to include training in workplace feedback.

Consistency of HRM policy is not confined to the content, as the results indicated that the perception of the consistency and fairness of policy implementation was a feature commented upon by employees. The results of the post-trial evaluation indicated that keeping the workplace feedback process simple and flexible were important factors. As the organisation had designed the workplace feedback approach using an internal approach, it meant that it was easier to obtain consistency with existing and new HRM policies.

8.4.2 AIMING FOR A SHRM FRAMEWORK IN A DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT

The Results chapters and the Case History chapter demonstrated the level of complexity that can occur in the development and implementation of a new or revised approach to an important area of HRM policy. The impact of the organisation's annual cycle (being busier during the summer high fire risk season), limited the period for the introduction of, and training in, new initiatives. This contributed to the length of time taken to develop and implement the workplace feedback approach. The results also showed the impact that factors such as additional responsibilities for the organisation and industrial action can have on delaying the implementation of HRM policy.

Having a rigid approach to policies and procedures reduced levels of trust between employees and managers. Therefore, the organisation was prepared to accept flexibility in how various workgroups implemented workplace feedback, provided they maintained consistency with the core components.

The results of the mid-trial review, post-trial evaluation and later interviews, indicated that the predominant approach to feedback and review sessions had been to focus on positive and non-confronting matters, with potentially challenging issues, or those likely to lead to uncomfortable situations, not being discussed. The post-trial evaluation had found that more difficult and protracted matters were held back until there was a greater level of comfort in discussing difficult and uncomfortable matters. A specific challenge for the HR function was maintaining an effective balance between consistency across each of the trial workgroups while permitting flexibility of documentation and processes. This contributed to the acceptability of the administrative aspects and also the degree of acceptance for the overall workplace feedback approach. The results indicated the importance of the HR function balancing their response to issues as they arose, while planning for supporting processes and systems to be in place prior to implementing the next stage of an HRM strategy. For the full implementation, this would include accountabilities, documentation and reporting requirements.

8.4.3 COMPETING VALUES IN THE PRIORITY AND SEQUENCING OF SHRM ACTIVITIES

The results demonstrated the impact of competing values in the resources available and the timing of the development of the workplace feedback policy. The decision, in early 2003, to

develop workplace feedback ‘from the ground up’, in an incremental and inclusive manner, had implications for a range of other HRM policies. To maintain credibility, it was necessary for the organisation to continue with developing and supporting the workplace feedback approach with internal resources. These internal resources contributed to the HR function being able to monitor employee responses as the workplace feedback policy was developed.

Part of the overall HRM strategy was to influence leadership style and behaviour. It became evident from the initial survey, and the post-trial evaluation, that there were a number of employees who were concerned that more senior employees would react negatively to feedback and may wish to ‘punish’ those responsible. Therefore, the full implementation of workplace feedback was delayed during 2007 whilst a ‘bullying and harassment survey’ was implemented. This was followed by publicity about ‘bullying not being tolerated’, and support systems were implemented to respond to complaints and to support those who sought assistance to modify their behaviour. One element was the establishment of a pool of twenty-two harassment contact officers whose role was extended to providing advice to employees about concerns or grievances arising from feedback or review sessions.

The research demonstrated the persistent challenge for HR specialists in balancing the competing demands of key stakeholders and in maintaining a sufficient degree of focus in each of the quadrants of the Ulrich framework. A challenge in maintaining a strategic partnership role was to maintain the momentum by keeping the EMT supportive and committed to follow through with an internally developed approach. It required maintaining the integrity of the commitment to an inclusive approach with continuing employee participation when it would have been quicker to

purchase a commercially available system. Developing a sense of employee ownership remained a key aim of the approach.

8.4.4 THE HR FUNCTION OBTAINING FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The results demonstrate the importance of the organisation being prepared to allocate specific and sufficient resources to the development of the new HRM policy. The results of the mid-trial review and the trial evaluation highlighted the role of the HR function (particularly the Coordinator Organisation Development), in conducting training and information sessions, in participating in role plays of feedback sessions, being available for advice, and by providing the supporting resources including checklists and answers to FAQs. The Director Human Services expressed confidence in the continuing support for the workplace feedback approach from the EMT over the period, whilst acknowledging that the level of available resources did contribute to delays during the overall process. The Coordinator Organisation Development indicated that the secondment of an operations employee to assist with documentation and guidelines helped to keep the process moving and avoid further loss of momentum.

8.4.5 EMPLOYEE RESPONSES

The results demonstrated the importance of employees having a sense of ownership and commitment to the workplace feedback approach. This was illustrated by continuing a consultative and inclusive approach to workplace feedback development. Use of external resources, an approach developed centrally by the HR function, or shortcuts taken in the training and roll out phases, would have reduced levels of credibility and support, particularly in operational areas. The analysis of the results indicates that a reason that the workplace feedback

approach retained such a high level of support was because it was perceived as something developed by the organisation to suit its particular circumstances. Achieving employee support for an off-the-shelf policy package would have been more difficult. Maintaining levels of employee support and commitment was shown to be a relevant component of a process towards achieving desired outcomes from SHRM. Additionally, the results indicate that employees perceived that the organisation was committed to seeking their views, and had appropriately responded to requests for flexibility in implementing the workplace feedback approach.

The use of a trial, independently evaluated prior to full implementation, added to the perception of employee ownership and the level of acceptance by the Unions; however, this view was not universal. It was recognised that obtaining one hundred percent support from employees was not realistic. The time and resources devoted to the trial and its evaluation contributed to the period of development period being much longer than anticipated.

8.4.6 COMMENTS RELEVANT TO CHALLENGES FOR THE HR FUNCTION

The discussion in this section has demonstrated the relevance of the Ulrich (1997, 1998) framework, as modified, and the CVF (Panayotopoulou et al., 2003). It has also demonstrated the relevance of the link between vertical and horizontal fit for HRM policy development. These findings have contributed to answering the second research question by elaborating on challenges for the HR function in understanding the complexity of maintaining horizontal fit in a dynamic organisation. The challenges in the sequencing of HRM policy development and implementation and obtaining sufficient resources were highlighted.

This section has confirmed the importance of maintaining vertical and horizontal fit when developing HRM policy. In particular, the interdependent relationships between the HR function, executive managers and line managers were shown to impact on employee responses. The findings discussed have assisted in answering the second of the research questions by demonstrating the importance of consistency and persistence in maintaining a consultative approach to sustain the credibility of the workplace feedback approach.

These findings add to the existing literature by showing that the test of a consultative approach is the extent to which the front-line employees perceive it to be consultative. The findings highlight a set of challenges for the HR function including: the importance of considering pre-conditions necessary to support a particular HRM initiative; the development of principles to underpin policy development, and the importance of clearly setting the boundaries of the workplace feedback approach. The findings also show that consistency extends beyond the content of policy development to also encompass consistency in implementation. The communication between the HR function and employees helped in the process of HRM policy implementation and the achievement of desired employee responses.

The results demonstrate the importance of considering the impact of executive management and line manager behaviours on employee responses. Monitoring of process elements such as the various sets of relationships, and employee perceptions of the credibility of the process of policy development, were shown to be elements that contributed to the organisation's progress towards achieving desired outcomes from the policy. These findings contribute to theory building towards an integrated SHRM process model by demonstrating the importance of the relationships with key stakeholders in maintaining consistency within an overall change strategy

to achieve outcomes. The broader context of the workplace feedback policy also demonstrated the importance of flexibility and an incremental approach in obtaining and maintaining stakeholder support. The HR function's role in the monitoring of relationships and assessing responses as the HRM policy is developed are important elements of the integrated SHRM framework. The next section will cover issues relevant for the HR function is influencing credibility across the TFS.

8.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: CREDIBILITY OF THE HR FUNCTION

The results demonstrate the importance of the HR specialists understanding the nature and issues that managers and employees saw as important. In order for the HR function to seek to meet the challenges set out in the second research question, the perceptions of the executive, line managers and employees, as outlined in the three Results chapters, will be discussed.

8.5.1 HR CREDIBILITY WITH EMT, LINE MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES

The results showed that the line perception of the HR function's value, specifically by the individuals centrally involved in the development of workplace feedback, influenced the managers' and supervisors' level of acceptance and willingness to genuinely participate. Time spent by the Director Human Services and the Coordinator Organisation Development, with groups of employees, in directly providing training to trial groups, and participating in the organisation wide 'roadshow', contributed to the credibility of individual HR specialists and the HR function.

The Director Human Services operated in the strategic partner quadrant of the Ulrich framework, by keeping the workplace feedback trial, and development of progress towards full implementation, as a regular EMT agenda item. In relation to the change agent quadrant, matters relevant to the workplace feedback approach were considered when other strategic change issues were discussed. Members of the EMT were reminded of the importance of showing their commitment and were provided with support as requested. In the administrative expert quadrant, the provision of supporting resources and of technical expertise was highlighted. The Coordinator Organisation Development provided demonstrations of how to conduct feedback and review sessions. Provision of technical advice, supporting documentation, guidelines and production of the DVD, all contributed to the visibility of the HR function during the process.

One of the impacts of the workplace feedback approach was the improvement in skills and confidence in dealing with grievances and instances of workplace conflict. Providing support to managers with such issues assisted in developing and enhancing the credibility of the HR function. If managers were spending less time dealing with instances of conflict; it demonstrated the value of workplace feedback and this became a selling point for involvement in workplace feedback. If managers can be convinced that investing time in improving their workplace feedback skills will save them considerable time in the future, then they are more likely to accept and support the new approach. The results highlighted the importance of HR specialists being responsive and proactive in asking workgroups if they required additional assistance during the trial. These examples demonstrate the usefulness, for the context of this research, of renaming the bottom right hand quadrant of the Ulrich framework (1997, 1998) as a ‘problem solving’ role.

This section discussed aspects of the perceived credibility of the HR function and confirmed that the roles of strategic partner and problem solver were relevant in developing and maintaining the credibility of the HR function and of individual HR specialists. The importance of ‘user friendly’ supporting resources demonstrates the relevance of the administrative expert quadrant of the modified Ulrich (1997, 1998) framework. The CVF (Panayotopoulou et al, 2003) was shown to be relevant in the importance of balancing stakeholder interests. The results contribute to theory building in SHRM by showing the importance of expressly including the credibility of the HR function as a specific component of a SHRM implementation framework. Accessibility, visibility and responsiveness are relevant factors for credibility. It is also necessary, in order to obtain support and resources from the executive level, for line managers to be confident in implementing the HRM policy, and in influencing employee responses.

8.6 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: COMMITMENT AND PERSEVERANCE

8.6.1 UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF HRM POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The results demonstrate the level of complexity and range of factors that can impact on the development and implementation of HRM policy in a modern and dynamic organisation. One of the key reflections of the retiring Chief Officer was the increase in the levels of complexity of the managerial role over his thirteen year period in office. The development and implementation of workplace feedback did not occur as a linear process. It involved a series of incremental steps with consideration of the overall organisational objective and potential changes to other HRM policy areas before moving forward. The results indicated that it would take a number of full

annual cycles to embed the workplace feedback approach in the culture. Levels of skills and degree of comfort in such a process develop over a period of time.

8.6.2 KEEPING FOCUS AND MAINTAINING THE MOMENTUM

One of the challenges for the organisation was to maintain the momentum in keeping and improving the level of support for new HRM policy implementation. These were shown from results about process delays and in the communication flows. Having effective and accessible support services in place was also seen to assist in maintaining the flow and level of support. Having supporting systems and people to help with technical issues, and to resolve concerns, was a key difference from the 1980s performance appraisal approach. It was seen as important to develop a network of people in operations and support divisions to help spread the message and reinforce that responsibility for workplace feedback extended beyond the HR function.

Obtaining funds to develop resources was also an important factor in maintaining momentum. The EMT accepted that Human Services required assistance that was provided through the secondment of an Operations Supervisor to assist with the development of procedures. A professionally produced DVD performed by professional actors, but using scenarios relevant to the organisation's context, provided evidence of the EMT's commitment to resourcing the workplace feedback approach. A recurring theme was the importance of meetings taking place within scheduled periods and outcomes agreed from the meeting being properly documented and acted upon. The main area mentioned was the follow up of development activities for employees. It was a source of employee frustration if, at the succeeding meeting, the development activities had not occurred, or had not been scheduled. While the philosophy of the cultural change process

emphasised providing flexibility and responsibility, the results also highlighted the importance of having clear accountability measures that are effectively implemented.

8.7 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN SHRM

The TFS recognised the importance of communication in delivering stable, timely and consistent information about the progress of the workplace feedback approach. It had an active informal communication network (or ‘grapevine’). A challenge in developing a new HRM policy was to provide accurate and timely information so diminish the impact of the grapevine. The use of specific communication releases countered rumours and inaccurate information. The communication strategy was developed as part of the Reference Group process in mid-2003. Given the residual negative views of the previous performance appraisal approach, and the strength of the organisational grapevine, a communication strategy designed to enhance the reputation of workplace feedback was seen by the Director Human Services as an integral component of the overall HRM strategy.

A factor behind the organisation’s decision to focus on feedback as a central to managing employee performance was employee concern with the historical quality of communication on employee performance, particularly how people had been informed of unsuccessful promotion applications. The aim was to increase the frequency and quality of positive feedback to employees, and the level of willingness to discuss performance issues and matters of concern. Therefore, communication about the workplace feedback approach was designed to support the overall change in communication style necessary to support the changes in culture and leadership style. The inclusive approach and the size of the trial increased the number of people advocating

the benefits within their workgroups and their internal networks. The communication strategy was targeted towards areas where there appeared to be greater resistance. The focus was on delivering good news whilst maintaining accuracy of information provided. Specific measures included the nature of workplace feedback, the principles adopted by the organisation and the scope of the approach. A feature of the communication was the focus on feedback rather than appraisal, that it was based on regular feedback, and that it was separate from disciplinary and poor performance processes.

The results showed the importance of a multi-level communication strategy to support the development and implementation of a new HRM policy. Such a communication strategy included: direct communication from senior managers and HR specialists to employees; formal publications; communication messages on pay-slips; and, encouragement of local level positive commentary from people who had been part of the Reference Group, or the Steering Committee, who had been in trial work groups, or had been trained as facilitators/contact officers. It was the focus on people hearing positive comments (without the message being ‘sugar-coated’) about workplace feedback that was the cornerstone of the communication strategy. The organisation was conscious of not overselling the benefits and success of the trial as this could have resulted in increased levels of cynicism and lower levels of subsequent support across the organisation when it came to full implementation of workplace feedback.

The Coordinator Organisation Development had the primary responsibility for the communication strategy through formal communication, production of the suite of supporting material and through his day-to-day responsibilities as project manager. Despite this explicit focus on communication, there were periods during the trial, and between the trial and the full

implementation, where there were gaps in formal communication that reduced the level of focus and support for the workplace feedback approach.

8.8 OVERALL COMMENTS ON RESEARCH QUESTION 2

The discussion in sections 8.4 to 8.7 illustrates the complexity of the challenges for the HR function in seeking to meet the four tests of SHRM drawn from the ‘Guest framework’. The results contribute to theory building by indicating a greater level of real world complexity in the development and implementation of HRM policy than is currently suggested in the literature. Maintaining consistency across the various HRM policies was found to be a continuing challenge. For the HR function to meet the challenge of the third (i.e. managerial support) and fourth (i.e. employee responses) tests, meant that developing and maintaining credibility with all levels within the organisation was an important factor. The role of a planned, consistent and sustained communication strategy was highlighted as a key factor in the process of SHRM. Consequently, the organisation was conscious of the need to continue to communicate, promote the approach, and remind people of the availability of tools and supporting resources.

In discussing the second research question, the relevance of including additional theoretical elements in a proposed integrated SHRM framework was highlighted. Modifying the Ulrich Framework to designate the bottom right hand corner as ‘Problem Solver’ in lieu of ‘Employee Champion’ was shown to be relevant to the Australian context of the TFS. The CVF informed the HR function of considerations relevant to the four tests drawn from the Guest framework.

The discussion highlighted factors that impact on employee responses to policy development and implementation and suggested how other actors impact on elements in the causal model of employee performance (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Monitoring of horizontal fit and managerial support, in addition to that of employee response are also components of the process model of SHRM implementation. The results highlighted the role of a communication strategy in sustaining change processes associated with HRM policy development. Effective communication was shown as a core element in the level of credibility of the HR function.

8.9 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: AN INTEGRATED SHRM PROCESS MODEL

8.9.1 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section reviews the third Research Question to assess theoretical and practical aspects of a proposed integrated SHRM process model:

Research Question 3: *How can an integrated SHRM process model assist a public sector organisation to design and progress towards implementation of a new HRM policy?*

This section will review the role of the key groups of actors - the executive, line managers and employees - in the development and implementation of a specific HRM policy. It will then assess the extent to which the third research question has been answered.

8.9.2 THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE (EMT)

The results demonstrated that the role of the EMT was central to how the workplace feedback program was conceived, developed and implemented. The role of the EMT was articulated by other managers, the HR specialists, employees and by members of the EMT, both as a collective role and also in terms of the behaviour of individual EMT members. The public statements of the Chief Officer, the role of the Deputy Chief Officer being the project ‘champion’, and the decision to have a member of the EMT as chairperson of the Trial Steering Committee, all played important roles in reinforcing the approach to workplace feedback.

The results confirmed the key role of the EMT in the effective development and implementation of the new HRM policy. Line managers, employees and supervisors all assessed the statements and actions of EMT members to determine the extent to which they judged whether the support for workplace feedback was more reality or more rhetoric. The challenge for the EMT members was to regularly and honestly communicate with their direct reports and to encourage them to provide feedback and to keep to deadlines in conducting the review sessions. During the trial period, the HR specialists and operational employees indicated they believed that members of the EMT could have been more explicit in publicly showing their support. These results demonstrate that the third of the Guest’s tests (effective implementation) includes how employees perceive the manner in which their direct manager implements a HRM policy, and how managers and employees perceive the extent to which the executive actually support the policy.

8.9.3 THE ROLE OF LINE MANAGERS

The results show that the role of line managers was a key factor in the overall effectiveness of an HRM strategy. The quality of the working relationship between managers and individual employees was highlighted as affecting employee preparedness to fully contribute and speak honestly. Employee perception of supervisory behaviour contributed to whether the trial was perceived as successful. The results indicated that the main factors that influenced the line managers were the individual's personal interest, the level of general support in the region/area, and the distance from head office, which was found to lower the perception of demonstrated support. In addition, the behaviour of an individual's direct manager was important. The line managers saw their role as contributing to an improved level of communication, and to increasing understanding of people's feelings of confidence and being supported. The line managers articulated their role as giving effective feedback to their staff and supporting the supervisors to continue the process to the employee level. In the mid-trial review, two employees directly raised that the low level of comfort experienced in feedback sessions negatively impacted upon the session's effectiveness.

The results indicate that not all managers were supportive of the focus on workplace feedback due to cynicism towards new HRM systems. There remained people who were more comfortable with the existing culture with its focus on negative feedback. The HR specialists recognised that it was unrealistic to have one hundred per cent support for the new approach. There was a varying level of exposure to workplace feedback resulting from limited areas in the TFS being part of the trial, and due to the extended process of rolling out the full implementation of the policy. An issue raised in section 8.7.2 was the delaying and cancelling of review sessions. The

Coordinator Organisation Development viewed this as being partly due to managers being overwhelmed with competing tasks, leading to a reduced priority being given to the review sessions. This has implications for the role of the HR function in encouraging line manager commitment to the effective implementation of the policy in accordance with the timeframe guidelines. The results imply that during the period a new policy is being implemented, explicit support from more senior managers and the HR function can assist to reduce perceptions that the new system is merely increasing the workload of line managers. In addition, the HR function can liaise with employees to mitigate the impact of unrealised expectations for meetings that do not happen.

The results also demonstrated the need for follow up and for resources to be provided beyond the initial period of training and support. A combination of individual support, refresher programmes and formal training for new managers contributed to improvement in skill levels and in confidence to address more difficult issues. This was supported by development and refinement of procedures and guidelines to improve clarity, simplicity and flexibility, as well as to respond to issues as they arose.

8.9.4 EMPLOYEE RESPONSES

The results show that monitoring of employee responses is a role for the HR function in conjunction with senior managers. In particular, the results demonstrate that it is important to have effective mechanisms to encourage implementation of agreed development opportunities, and other review session outcomes. The results of the survey indicate that employees saw feedback as important and were seeking more feedback. Their previous experience with

feedback in the organisation and with previous employers had been mixed and there was a moderate level of concern as to whether the trial would be taken seriously. The post-trial evaluation results suggested that the organisation had been at least partially successful in demonstrating that it was genuine in seeking and in responding to employee contributions.

An outcome of the altered leadership style was that employees generally became more willing to take a more proactive approach to their work and to honestly share ideas and opinions, within the constraints of emergency response situations. The results indicate that the employees had perceptions about managers responding negatively to employee feedback. The organisation responded to these perceptions with the provision of support resources and by conducting the bullying survey to identify and put in place strategies to deal with behaviour defined as being unacceptable. The results demonstrate that this organisational response improved the level of trust in the policy and its implementation. It demonstrated the operation of horizontal fit in practice and the importance of maintaining a consistent approach over the period of HRM policy development and implementation.

8.9.5 COMMENTS ON RESEARCH QUESTION 3

The current longitudinal research provided an opportunity to develop a more detailed and integrated SHRM process model by adding additional theoretical components to the preliminary tabular framework. An integrated SHRM process model has thus been developed which combines elements of the Harvard model, the Guest four tests, the Ulrich HR framework, as modified, the CVF and the causal model of employee performance. Whilst the preliminary tabular framework (see Figure 2.6) assisted the organisation to remain aware of relevant

contextual and process factors to be taken into account in HRM policy development, an integrated framework would have provided greater clarity. Particular areas of importance are the interactions between the various key sets of actors and the sequence of steps within the so-called Black Box. The results of the research show that the development and implementation of SHRM is not linear. It also is not discrete; as soon as a policy has been fully implemented, it is time to review its effectiveness and impact on other HRM policy areas. The process is therefore cyclical and this aspect has been incorporated into the proposed integrated model of SHRM implementation.

8.9.6 PROPOSED INTEGRATED SHRM PROCESS MODEL

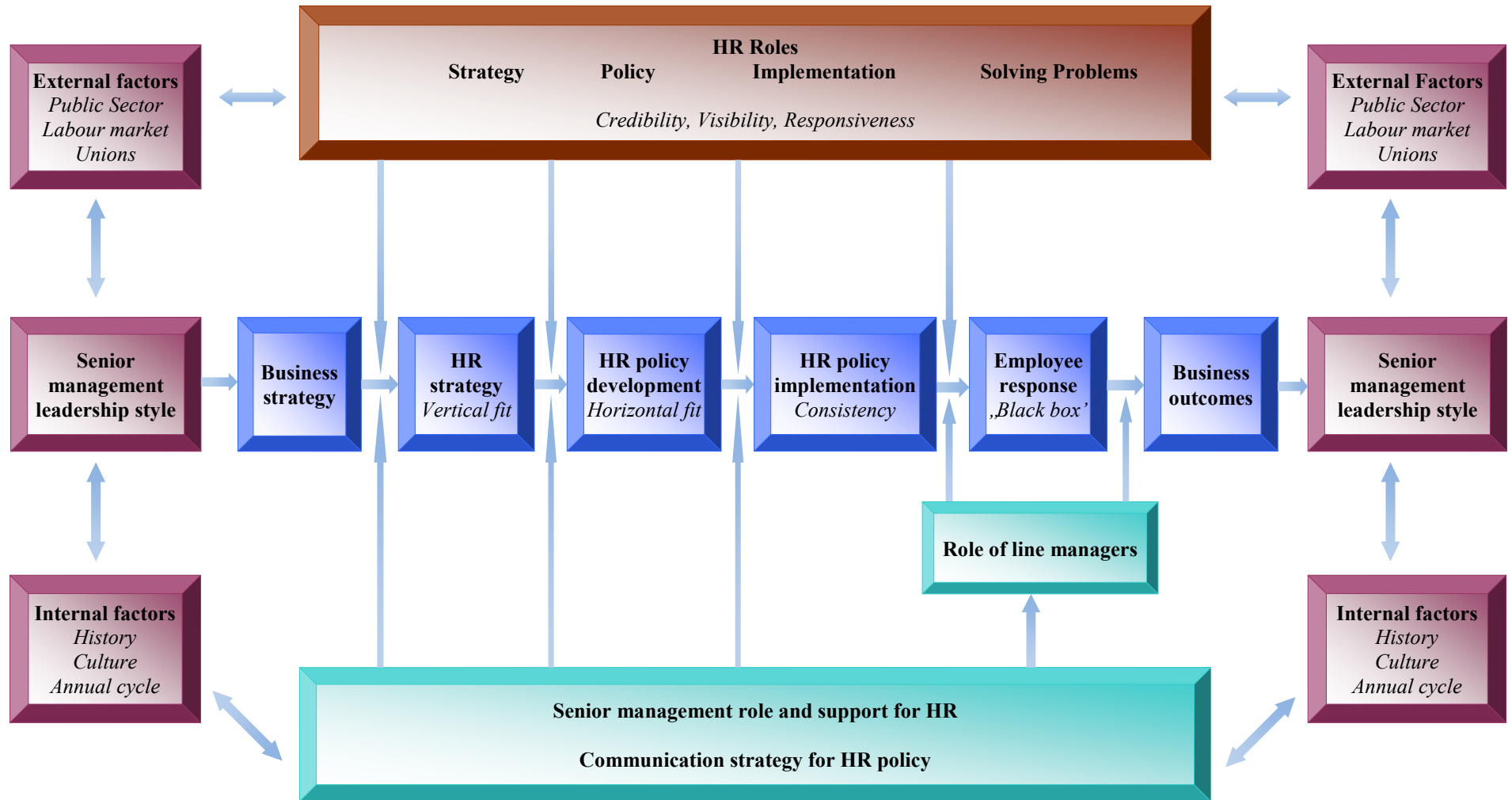
A proposed integrated SHRM process model was developed from the tabular framework (see Figure 2.6) and is shown as Figure 8-1. Its aim is to demonstrate the factors, drawn from the research that impact on HRM policy development and implementation. The major purpose of the model is to inform the process (that is, the ‘_how’) of SHRM. The answers to the three research questions have informed the content and structure of the model. It incorporates a number of theoretical frameworks by building on the Harvard Model. It includes contextual factors, such as stakeholder considerations, on the far left and far right sides. These factors illustrate the beginning and end of an individual HRM process as an alternative to complicating the diagram further by including feedback loops. The results show that the development and implementation of HRM policy and practice is a continuing series of processes without a clearly identifiable end.

The proposed model shows a set of inter-relationships and competing factors that influence the capacity of the HR function to achieve effective and practical vertical and horizontal fit. It

illustrates the complexity of involving senior managers, line managers, employees and the HR function in developing and implementing a new HRM policy, with its associated procedures, guidelines and supporting mechanisms. The top part of the model includes implications from the research findings about the multiple roles for the HR function that draw from both the modified Ulrich framework and the CVF. The research shows the importance of the HR function achieving credibility, demonstrating visibility and being responsive to the executive, line managers and employees. The model highlights the role of a communication strategy to support HRM policy development and implementation.

The central part of the model sets out the key components of the process of HRM policy development and implementation. It specifically incorporates vertical fit, horizontal fit, implementation by line managers and employee responses. It thus provides some guidance on the factors that influence employee responses that occur inside the so-called Black Box. These have been informed from research findings on relevant aspects of the causal model of employee performance. Arrows linking HR specialist roles, the behaviour of senior managers and, in particular, the impact of line manager behaviour are central features of the proposed model. Whilst the model includes business outcomes such as productivity and efficiency, it has a specific focus on the key processes between the HRM policy and the desired outcomes. The research findings demonstrate the importance of monitoring and responding to these process elements as integral components of effective HRM policy implementation.

Figure 8-1: An Integrated SHRM Process Model



8.10 IMPLICATIONS FOR SHRM THEORY AND RESEARCH

The proposed integrated SHRM process model provides a useful approach for conceptualising the various competing factors, and their inter-relationships, which are relevant in considering the development of a new HRM policy. Utilising the contextual aspects of the Harvard model assisted in understanding relevant stakeholder issues. Adapting Guest's work provided the organisation with a way of identifying the key aspects of vertical and horizontal fit. Including the Ulrich framework, as modified by the research findings, together with the competing values framework (CVF) provided key considerations for the HR function in balancing its priorities, and guiding its strategy, for dealing with internal and external stakeholders. In particular, the Guest tests of line manager support and employee response were utilised to inform the process of inclusion, internal development and flexibility of approach. Including the causal model of employee performance provided a theoretical basis for investigating aspects of the so-called Black Box that impacted on employee perceptions, attitudes and behavioural responses to the workplace feedback trial.

Whilst not an explicit component of the preliminary tabular framework, the importance of a communication strategy to explain the process of policy development, to keep people up to date, and to reduce the impact of information communication associated with an internal 'rumour mill', is highlighted by the analysis of the key components of the CVF. A key aspect of the communication process is the visibility and availability of members of the HR function, and their preparedness to respond to manager and employee requests for simplicity and flexibility in policy and procedures.

There are six findings from this research that have implications for HRM theory and research. Firstly, the impact of SHRM on organisational outcomes is more complex than is suggested

by the literature. In seeking to develop an integrated model of SHRM implementation that addressed the issues and tensions identified in Chapter Two, it became evident that the role of intra-organisational relationships between the various levels of management, and between HR specialists and line areas, played at least as important a role as did the content of the policy. Secondly, the process of effectively developing and implementing contextually relevant HRM policy is time-consuming and subject to operational constraints and organisational priorities.

Thirdly, the relationships between the HR function, managers at all levels, and employees, play an important role in determining whether policy development and implementation occurs effectively. It is necessary for the HR function to demonstrate a blend of strategic and operational capabilities, with credibility and accessibility as key factors. Fourthly, in contemporary organisations with defined groups of workers, who may differ in terms of how they operate and their expectations of treatment, there are grounds for having increased flexibility or even multiple versions of HRM policies. This challenges the orthodoxy of having a single HRM policy to cover all workers. Fifthly, the success of any given HRM policy implementation can be evaluated by the extent to which employee behaviour is consistent with the objectives of the suite of HRM policies. In this sense, the third of the 'Guest tests' (the degree of line manager support for HRM policies) was shown to be a relevant factor. The perception of line managerial competence in delivering and implementing a new HRM policy was found to be a consideration in the so-called Black Box of employee attitudes and behavioural responses. Lastly, the integrated SHRM process model could provide a basis for a diagnostic tool to assess the strength of the HRM system in effectively implementing HRM policies (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Gratton & Truss, 2003).

8.11 IMPLICATIONS FOR HRM PRACTICE

From the experience of the TFS, a challenge for the HR function is in balancing a strategic approach with providing effective operational support through simple and effective policies, procedures, guidelines and forms. The strategic approach includes developing credibility at all levels within the organisation. Having the most senior HR specialist on the executive can assist in obtaining resourcing for the development, implementation and on-going support for the new policy.

From a SHRM perspective, the HR function played a core role in the process of developing a new HRM policy as a component of a broader strategy of organisational change. Using the model could help the HR function consider strategic and operational components necessary to support changes in leadership style, acceptable behaviour and strengthen the relationships between managers and employees. The process model also can enable the HR function to focus on, and measure, process outcomes relevant to a specific context. This increases the likelihood of the desired employee behaviour being consistent with any cultural change objectives. The use of an inclusive and iterative approach that persisted from the original EMT commitment, despite a range of operationally induced delays, improved the employees' perceptions of the HRM policy and contributed to its level of support across the organisation. This approach contributed to the workplace feedback policy enjoying ownership across the organisation and reduced it being seen as simply an HR functional responsibility.

The experience of the organisation provides support for considering the use of trials across a representative cross section of workgroups. It also supports having a formal evaluation of the trial prior to a commitment to an organisation-wide implementation of the HRM policy. Linked to this implication is the importance of supporting HRM policy development with an

effective communication strategy that provides current and accurate information about the policy development and its impact on the organisation.

The model could be used to develop diagnostic tools to assess the process of HRM policy development and implementation. Such tools could be used to: assess the degree of vertical and horizontal fit (Gratton & Truss, 2003); measure the effectiveness of the HR function in balancing the competing values and managing the relationships with the key internal and external stakeholders; and, evaluate key process milestones towards the implementation of a HRM policy. The overall model could be utilised to assess the strength of the HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

The results show the importance of the HR function providing clear documents and other resources to increase the confidence and level of comfort of the managers and employees in trialling a new policy. The visibility, accessibility and responsiveness of the HR function in providing technical and supportive advice were also perceived as important factors in the positive evaluation of the trial. Additionally, the results showed the relevance of having linking documentation to other HRM areas such as position descriptions; of having mechanisms in place to support managers who implement the policy in accordance with the timelines, and of the necessity of providing acceptable solutions to concerns such as the confidentiality of information.

8.12 PARAMETERS OF THE RESEARCH AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

8.12.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHOD

The findings of this research need to be assessed in relation to the limitations of the chosen methodology. This research was conducted as an embedded single case study, utilising organisational secondary data to contextualise the position of the TFS prior to its decision to undertake a new HRM policy in the limited area of workplace feedback. A limitation was the protracted time for the TFS to develop a workplace feedback policy and that it was not fully implemented when the research period completed. This meant there was not an opportunity to evaluate the full impact of the new HRM policy.

Primary data was gathered using focus groups and interviews to analyse the development and progress to implementation of the workplace feedback approach. There are limitations with these methods that require some discussion. The secondary data gathering process, for example, may be characterised by contextual misinterpretation of the critical events of the period, especially where the researcher may be unable to directly ascertain the motivations of the actors involved (Andrew, 1985; Breisach, 1994; King, 1983). The use of both focus groups and semi-structured interviews also posed methodological difficulties, as they are time consuming, and therefore, reduce the respondents' willingness to participate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In addition, the validity of the interview process may be affected by poor interviewer recall and interviewer bias.

8.12.2 HOW THE LIMITATIONS WERE ADDRESSED

Steps were taken with these methodological limitations. The secondary data gathering process was employed solely to create the context from which the focus group and semi-structured interview questions were framed. Consistent with the recommendations of Andrew (1985) and Breisach (1994), this research method provided each participant the opportunity to comment upon the specific approach taken by the TFS, and to provide additional contextual information otherwise unavailable to the researcher. With respect to the limitations inherent in the use of semi-structured interviews, the following steps were taken:

- Access to the participants was organised through the HR function;
- Individuals were invited to participate in the focus group and/or an interview and then contacted the researcher directly. This was at least one week in advance of the focus group or interview process;
- Each participant was sent a copy of the interview or focus group set of semi-structured questions in advance of the meeting, allowing them the time to ponder and therefore provide more considered responses.

The response to this method of recruitment was the participation of twenty-seven people in six focus groups and seven individual interviews as part of the mid-trial review, and twenty-four people in the post-trial evaluation focus groups. With regard to the problem of poor interview recall, the use of a tape recorder and subsequent transcriptions provided an accurate record for later analysis. The issues surrounding the problem of interviewer bias were also reduced with the use of a semi-structured interview schedule that was consistently used across interviews and focus groups. Additional questions were asked to clarify responses or to seek richer information than contained in the answers provided.

8.12.3 THE TRANSFERABILITY OF THE RESEARCH

In relation to the generalisability of the research, the use of an embedded single case study method suggests that the implications of the research must be considered as specific to a public sector organisation operating with a stable senior management structure. Therefore, generalising the findings of this thesis for differing organisational types and sectors, and for organisations with more regular changes in executive personnel, may be problematic. It is a recommendation of this thesis that additional research be undertaken into the contextual factors and the applicability of the integrated SHRM framework utilising other HRM policy areas and across a range of different contextual environments.

8.12.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis examined one aspect of HRM policy development, being workplace feedback as a component of performance management. Research on broader areas of HRM policy, and on bundles of HRM policies, would further clarify the usefulness of the SHRM framework beyond a focus on a single topic. Further research could contribute to closing the theory-practice gap by developing and testing diagnostic tools to assist firms and their HR functions to monitor key steps in the process of HRM policy implementation. Additionally, the full implementation of workplace feedback was not completed prior to the research period concluding. Therefore, a full evaluation of the implementation of HR policy, once it has been given time to embed, would enable further examination of the processes within the so-called Black Box and process outcomes that lie between HRM policy and organisational outcomes.

8.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The broad aim of this thesis was to analyse the processes used by an Australian public sector organisation that wished to use an evidence-based approach to develop and implement a new HRM policy in a dynamic environment. The results of the longitudinal embedded single case study were used to examine the impact of contextual factors, competing priorities and the role of the HR function in conjunction with executive managers, line managers and employees. In seeking to provide an evidence based approach, a preliminary framework was developed. This preliminary framework was enhanced by integrating a range of theoretical frameworks/models into a proposed integrated SHRM process model.

This research has sought to bridge the theory practice gap in SHRM. It has provided an example of the complexities and competing priorities for a HR function in seeking to achieve vertical and horizontal integration of HRM policies to achieve desired employee behavioural responses. The importance of the complexity of the inter-relationships between the HR function and the various external and internal stakeholders was highlighted by the analysis of the results. The research has shown the usefulness of a longitudinal approach and the capturing of data from all levels of the organisation in addressing some of the methodological issues associated with SHRM research identified in the literature. The use of qualitative data, gathered over a an extended period of time, permitted an analysis of the changing views of the actors and permitted a degree of reflection about the way in which the organisation developed and moved towards the implementation of a new HRM policy. Overall, this research has contributed to both theoretical development in SHRM and provided guidance for HRM practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Case Study Protocol

Appendix B: The pre-trial survey

Appendix C: Interview guide

Appendix D: Sample information sheet

Appendix E: Complete coding system

Appendix F: Sample node

Appendix G: TFS Corporate Plan extracts

Appendix H: Agreement between the TFS and the UFU on Workplace Feedback

Appendix I: Extracts from State Service Commissioner's Direction on Performance Management

Appendix J: Trial Evaluation questions

APPENDIX A: CASE STUDY PROTOCOL

1. PROPOSED TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Putting Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) into Practice: an Australian case study.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To explore the impact of contextual factors that impact on an organisation's approach to developing a new HR policy;
- 2) To examine the competing values and inter-relationships faced by a HR function in seeking to develop and implement a new HR strategy that meets business objectives, is consistent with other HR policies areas and is accepted by managers and employees;
- 3) To assess the suitability of an integrated SHRM implementation framework to inform the process of HR policy development.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PHENOMENA OF INTEREST

The current SHRM theory provides limited contribution to knowledge of how SHRM contributes to positive changes to organisational outcomes. To date, there has been limited theoretical development that links the disparate frameworks that can be used to develop SHRM theory and to put HR policy into practice. In particular, there has been literature on the 'what' of SHRM but limited coverage of an integrated approach to 'how' SHRM can be effectively implemented.

An opportunity exists to utilise a framework drawn from Guest (1987, 1997, 2002) to examine how the TFS developed its approach to workplace feedback. The research is significant as that involved a longitudinal study to gather data over a five year period.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the research objectives set in this thesis, the following research questions will be posed by the researcher.

Research Question 1: *What are the relevant contextual issues important for an organisation to consider in developing a new human resource policy?*

Research Question 2: *What are the challenges for the HR function in meeting the four tests drawn from the Guest framework?*

Research Question 3: *How can an integrated SHRM process model assist a public sector organisation to design and progress towards implementation of a new HR policy?*

In order to allow the researcher to answer these research questions, the research design involved three components: firstly, a survey to obtain base line data on employee's views about workplace feedback; secondly, the use of focus groups and interviews with managers and employees who participated in the workplace feedback trial; and, thirdly, a series of key informant interviews with HR specialists, senior managers and line managers. The focus groups and interviews will be 'semi structured' with questions of a similar nature whilst allowing the researchers interview skills to draw out the participant's participation in and/or

their views on how the TFS has undertaken the development and implementation of workplace feedback. Broadly, there are two main areas of inquiry:

1. General information the approach taken by the TFS in developing workplace feedback; and,
2. Specific questions related to participants responses to their direct experience of the workplace feedback trial.

Copies of the interview and focus group questionnaires are attached (see Appendix C).

5. SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH RESPONDENTS

The identification of potential participants will be as undertaken in conjunction with the TFS HR function. Employees undertaking the training prior to the workplace feedback trial will be invited to complete an anonymous survey. Potential participants for focus groups and interviews will be contacted by the HR function and invited to contact the researcher. In this manner, the researcher will not know the complete list of people invited and the TFS HR function will not have access to those who contacted the researcher and subsequently agreed to participate in the research. In addition, exploratory research will be undertaken in the form of secondary data and preliminary interviews with people from the HR function.

6. RECRUITMENT OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

When potential participants contact the researcher by telephone, the purpose of the research will be made clear to them (i.e. the TFS workplace feedback approach). At the end of the telephone conversation (a preamble is attached), the participant will be asked whether they would agree to take part in the research project. Upon their agreement, the participant will be informed that the telephone conversation would be confirmed by mail, and that a ‘_consent’ and ‘_information’ form would be sent to them detailing the project and the nature of their direct involvement. The ‘_consent’ form will clearly state the time and location of the interview or focus group (as would have been determined as part of the initial phone call) and the ‘_information’ sheet will provide the participant with the specific questions to be asked of them. The participants will be informed that the interview is to be recorded onto audiotape, and that these tapes are to be held in secure storage for a period of five years.

7. DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The respondents will be asked to comment, where possible, on their involvement in developing the TFS approach to workplace feedback, their perceptions of workplace feedback and/or their experiences participating in the workplace feedback trial. Informants will not be asked to comment on the actions of others during the interview process, only their own particular involvement and perspective. This information will be gathered through the use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus groups, recorded onto audiotape. An example of such an interview questionnaire is attached.

Upon meeting the respondent(s), the investigator will request the consent form prior to the commencement of the interview/focus group process, and ask whether the respondent is happy to answer the questions provided. Where possible, interviews will be conducted at the participants’ workplaces. Where this is not possible, arrangements will be made to locate the interview in a time and place convenient to the respondent. Focus groups will be held in

suitable locations within TFS facilities. Further permission will be requested to audiotape the interview/focus group to ensure that the respondent(s) is at ease with the recording process. It will also be made clear how the information they provide will be stored, and that any papers generated from the research, that may identify them, would be sent to them for prior approval before publication.

8. DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

The data gathered during the interview process will be imported into the NUD*IST (version nine) software program, where concepts pertinent to the research questions (and their interrelationships) will be coded for further analysis. The coding of the interview data will facilitate the researcher in analysing the responses by the various types of employees to how the TFS developed its approach to workplace feedback. The coding will assist to identify the contextual factors and the extent to which the HR function was able to achieve vertical and horizontal integration of HR activities.

APPENDIX B

The pre-trial survey (Section 3.6.4)

WORKPLACE FEEDBACK SYSTEM SURVEY

Purpose

The purpose of this survey is to obtain information from TFS employees who will be participating in the Workplace Feedback System.

- **We are seeking your views anonymously;**
- **Everyone's view will be given the same weight.**
- Your responses will be treated in the strictest confidence.
- Please do not put your name on this form.
- Individual Survey responses **will not** be made available to any TFS employees.

The Survey

The Survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete.

When you have finished, place it in the envelope provided. All surveys will be forwarded to an external, independent person, (Simon Fishwick, School of Management University of Tasmania) who will analyse them. A broad summary will be provided to the Chief Officer.

The Survey contains a number of statements for your response. Your views are important so please answer every question.

Please respond to each question by putting a tick in the column that is closest to your view.

General views on feedback	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No View
Receiving regular feedback is important to me					
I like to know how well I am doing at work					
Good feedback skills are necessary to be a successful supervisor/manager					
Improving feedback is important to TFS being a more effective organisation.					

Section 1.01 General views on TFS	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No View
TFS is a good place to work					
I would recommend positions at TFS to friends					
TFS communicates effectively to its employees					
I trust the statements made by the Executive and senior staff					
I have a clear understanding of the expectations of my job.					
I can clearly see how my job makes a positive contribution to TFS.					
TFS encourages the giving of regular feedback					

Experience with feedback in current position	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No View
My Supervisor gives me regular and clear feedback about my performance					
I am satisfied with the level of feedback about my performance					
I am satisfied with the amount of information I get about changes that will affect my job					
My supervisor(s) seek feedback about their performance					
I don't receive sufficient credit and recognition for the work that I do.					
I have enough opportunity to participate in decisions that affect my job					
My immediate supervisor takes my views seriously					
My supervisor informs people higher up when people do outstanding work					
If I make a mistake, my supervisor is likely to get upset and tell me off					

Expectations of the Workplace Feedback system	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No View
I am looking forward to workplace feedback					
I expect to get more feedback					
I expect my feedback skills to improve					
Workplace feedback will not disrupt my normal work					

Concerns about Workplace Feedback	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No View
I don't think my group will take workplace feedback seriously					
Workplace feedback will take too much time from more important things					
I am concerned information from workplace feedback could be used against me					
I don't think the workplace feedback system will make any difference					

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY

APPENDIX C
Interview Guide (Section 3.6.4.2)
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What experience do you have with performance feedback?
 - With the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS);
 - In previous organisations.
2. What is your definition of performance management?
3. What factors do you think will help performance feedback be implemented in TFS?
4. What factors do you think may impede the implementation of performance feedback in TFS?
5. What are your views on the approach taken by TFS in the development of performance feedback?
6. Has the development of performance feedback been as you have expected?
7. What do you think the role of a line manager is in performance feedback?
8. What do you think the role of Human Services is in performance feedback?
9. How would you assess your performance feedback skills?
10. In what areas, if any, would you seek additional training or development in specific performance feedback skills?
11. Are there any additional specific initiatives you think TFS should implement to ensure an effective implementation of performance feedback?
12. Are there any other comments on this topic you would like to make?

APPENDIX D
Sample information sheet (Section 3.6.4.3)
Interviewee's Information Sheet.

The development and implementation of performance management in an emergency service organisation

Chief Investigator: Professor Michael Hess

Dear xxx

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview as part of the Workplace Feedback program.

The interview is scheduled at xxxxxx on xxxxxx at xxxxxxxxxxxx

This research forms part of my PhD research requirements, under the supervision of Professor Michael Hess from the School of Management at the University of Tasmania, and deals with the development and implementation of performance management in the Tasmania Fire Service.

Criteria for inclusion or exclusion

You have been chosen for possible participation in this research, in consultation with Human Services, so experience and views can be obtained from a representative cross-section of people within the Tasmania Fire Service who are participating in the Workplace Feedback System.

Study Procedures

It is expected that our meeting will include a recorded interview session dealing with the development and implementation (to date) of performance management. A list of the interview questions is attached for your convenience. You are not obliged to answer any question if you do not wish to do so.

It is thought that the meeting itself will take approximately between 30 minutes and 1 hour of your time.

Confidentiality

Because of the nature of the research, it is possible your participation will be known to the TFS. To protect your confidentiality, I undertake to treat information you provide in manner that no information, of an identifying nature, will be provided to the TFS.

Please note that your responses will be recorded as set out in the attached consent form. A summary report will be prepared for the TFS. This will contain clear themes but not any quotes or any material that would identify individuals.

A thesis will be completed in 2-3 years that will call the TFS an "Emergency Services Organisation" and may include quotes you make during the interview as indicative of participants' views. Any quotes used will be attributed to an "Interviewee".

Given the nature of the research question, you may be asked to reveal some potentially confidential information. If this is the case, please feel free to either state that the information is too important to divulge, or that it is of such a nature to be treated with the utmost care by the researcher. I undertake from the beginning of our research relationship to ensure that all data, including the audiotapes, will be treated confidentially, and will be securely held at the

School of Management in a locked filing cabinet, and on a password protected computer system for a period of at least 5 years after which it will be shredded/deleted.

Further, any transcripts from the audiotapes written dealing with this interview data will be provided to you before publication to ensure that you are happy with the representations made concerning the information you provide. You will be provided with a copy of the summary report of the findings that will be prepared for the TFS.

Freedom to refuse or withdraw

Your participation in this process is entirely voluntary and you may agree to participate by reading and signing the attached consent form.

Given that you have agreed to undertake the interview for this research project, please be aware that you are not bound to remain part of it should you wish to withdraw. Upon notification that you no longer wish to participate, please be assured that I will remove you from the research project altogether and immediately.

If you have any questions concerning any aspect of your participation in the interview, feel free to contact me on the details below.

Contact persons

Should you require any more information concerning the research project, please feel free to contact either myself on the detail below, or my supervisor, Professor Michael Hess on 6226 1936 or Michael.Hess@utas.edu.au

Concerns or complaints

This research has the ethical approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network. If you have any concerns of an ethical nature or complaints about the manner in which the project is conducted, please feel free to contact the Executive Officer, Social Sciences: ph 6226 7459 or email: human.ethics@utas.edu.au.

If you wish to participate please read the attached copy of the “research consent” form and complete this form before the interview date. You will of course receive a copy of this consent form for your records. Also, please find attached a copy of the indicative interview questions for discussion.

Regards,

Simon Fishwick.
PhD Candidate
University of Tasmania.
(W): 6226 1768.
(E): Simon.Fishwick@utas.edu.au

APPENDIX E
Complete Coding system (Section 3.7.2)
APPENDIX C: The QSR NUD*IST Coding Index Tree

(1) The TFS context

- (1 1) TFS History
 - (1 1 1) Amalgamation in 1979
 - (1 1 2) State Sector
 - (1 1 3) Corporate Planning
 - (1 1 4) Relationship with Unions
- (1 2) Key people
 - (1 2 1) Chief Officer
 - (1 2 2) Deputy Chief Officer
 - (1 2 3) Director Human Services
 - (1 2 4) Coordinator Organisation Development
- (1 3) The Executive Management Team
 - (1 3 1) Original presentation by researcher
 - (1 3 2) Commitment to inclusive process
 - (1 3 3) Establishment of the Reference Group
 - (1 3 4) Role in the workplace feedback trial
 - (1 3 5) Visibility of support
 - (1 3 6) Managing workplace feedback processes
 - (1 3 7) Trial Evaluation
 - (1 3 8) Involvement with implementation
- (1 4) The Reference Group
 - (1 4 1) Establishment
 - (1 4 2) Composition
 - (1 4 3) Processes
 - (1 4 4) Outcomes

(2) The Workplace feedback trial

- (2 1) Establishment of trial
- (2 2) Trial groups
 - (2 2 1) Selection of groups
 - (2 2 2) Pre-trial training
 - (2 2 3) Pre-trial survey
- (2 3) Support provided to trial
 - (2 3 1) Steering Committee
 - (2 3 2) Roadshow
 - (2 3 3) Providing Infrastructure
 - (2 3 4) Supporting documentation
 - (2 3 5) Extension of trial period
- (2 4) Mid-trial review
 - (2 4 1) Focus groups
 - (2 4 2) Interviews
 - (2 4 3) Report to Human Services
- (2 5) Post-trial evaluation
 - (2 5 1) Focus groups
 - (2 5 2) Positive aspects of trial
 - (2 5 3) Negative aspects of trial

- (2 5 4) Report to EMT
- (2 5 5) Steps toward full implementation

(3) Human Services

- (3 1) Establishment
- (3 2) Appointment of Manager
- (3 3) A SHRM approach
- (3 4) Resources
- (3 5) Relationship with Chief Officer
- (3 6) Role within EMT
- (3 7) Relationship with Unions
- (3 8) Coordinator Organisation Development
- (3 9) Resourcing matters
- (3 10) Providing supporting materials
- (3 11) Access and visibility

(4) Line Managers

- (4 1) Attitude to workplace feedback
- (4 2) Role in workplace feedback
- (4 3) Need for further training
- (4 4) Relationship with Human Services
- (4 5) Timing and follow through of review sessions
- (4 6) Willingness to raises difficult issues

(5) Employees

- (5 1) Previous experience with performance feedback
- (5 2) Participation in policy development
- (5 3) Perception of the workplace feedback trial
- (5 4) Response to training
- (5 5) Expectations of feedback
- (5 6) Concerns about the workplace feedback trial
- (5 7) Following up of agreed development
- (5 8) Confidentiality of information
- (5 9) Access to support and advice
- (5 10) Response to forms and supporting guidelines
- (5 11) Willingness to engage in OCB

(6) Communication strategy

- (6 1) Need for communication strategy
- (6 2) Human services role in visiting workplaces
- (6 3) Role of EMT
- (6 4) Person taking role of “champion”
- (6 5) Formal communication methods
- (6 6) Accessing informal communication networks
- (6 7) Gaps in communication

(7) SHRM

- (7 1) Vertical fit
 - (7 1 1) Organisational context
 - (7 1 2) Impact of culture change strategy

- (7 1 3) Resourcing of HR
- (7 2) Horizontal fit
 - (7 2 1) Impact of dynamic environment
 - (7 2 2) Complementary HR strategies
 - (7 2 3) Pre-conditions for policy development
 - (7 2 4) Complexity in implementation
 - (7 2 5) Impact of competing priorities and values
- (7 3) Role of HR Function
 - (7 3 1) Relationship with Chief Officer
 - (7 3 2) Coordinating policy development
 - (7 3 3) Developing procedures, guidelines and supporting tools
 - (7 3 4) Relationship with EMT
 - (7 3 5) Relationship with Managers
 - (7 3 6) Relationship with unions
- (7 4) Role of managers
 - (7 4 1) Attitude to HR matters
 - (7 4 2) Involvement in policy development
 - (7 4 3) Implementation of HR policies

APPENDIX F
Sample node (Section 3.7.5)

(7) SHRM

(7 3) Role of HR Function

(7 3 5) Relationship with managers

(7 3 5 1) Establishing credibility

(7 3 5 1 1) Operational orientation

(7 3 5 1 2) Visibility

(7 3 5 1 3) Responsiveness

(7 3 5 2) Communicating with managers

(7 3 5 2 1) Communication channels

(7 3 5 2 1 1) Through EMT

(7 3 5 2 1 2) Formal communication

(7 3 5 2 1 3) Informal communication

(7 3 5 2 2) Visits to workplaces

(7 3 5 2 3) Presentations to work groups

(7 3 5 3) Providing training

(7 3 5 3 1) Consultancy

(7 3 5 3 1 1) Problem solving

(7 3 5 3 1 2) Assistance with performance issues

(7 3 5 3 1 3) Assistance with behavioural issues

(7 3 5 4) Providing support materials

(7 3 5 4 1) tool-kit

(7 3 5 4 1 1) Policies

(7 3 5 4 1 2) Procedures

(7 3 5 4 1 3) Forms

(7 3 5 4 1 4) FAQs

(7 3 5 4 2) DVD

APPENDIX G
TFS Corporate Plan extracts (Section 4.2.2)

STATE FIRE COMMISSION
CORPORATE PLAN

Prepared by the State Fire Commission
for the financial years 1997-98 to 1999-2000

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1. Executive Summary

The State Fire Commission's Statement of Corporate Intent has been prepared in accordance with Section 73G of the Fire Service Act 1979 and summarises the Commission's objectives for the period covered by the corporate plan.

Part 1 Business Definition

The State Fire Commission's primary purpose is to minimise the social, economic and environmental cost of fire to the Tasmanian community. This goal is pursued through the delivery of a broad range of fire protection and prevention programs, and through rapid and effective response to emergencies.

The Commission is also responsible for managing unplanned incidents involving hazardous materials.

The Tasmania Fire Service which is under the control of the State Fire Commission includes both career and volunteer personnel who for the purpose of the corporate plan are referred to as employees.

Part 2 Strategic Direction

The Commission has a number of long term goals and objectives. The major emphasis is currently placed on:

a. Delivery of efficient and cost effective protection from fires and hazardous materials incidents.

The Commission's delivery of an efficient and effective fire protection service is rated highly on both a national and an international front. Tasmania has the only fully integrated state fire service (metropolitan and rural) in Australia, and its ability to mobilise both its career and volunteer firefighters at short notice is well recognised.

The maintenance of an efficient and effective fire service continues to be the major goal of the Commission.

b. Promotion, coordination and delivery of fire safety education to the community.

The Fire Service has steadily devoted more resources to fire prevention and community fire safety education. This proactive approach to fire protection is of the utmost importance. The community is supportive of the Commission's efforts to raise public awareness to minimise fire risk, and the Commission is committed to increasing this awareness through projects such as the school fire education program and through fire management area committees.

c. Standardisation of brigades and the provision of resources in accordance with need and strategic priorities.

The Commission has placed significant emphasis on brigade standardisation and rationalisation over recent years to ensure the provision of optimum resources to meet estimated needs. Rationalisation of volunteer brigades is almost completed; rationalisation of career brigades is scheduled for completion in 1997/98.

Part 3 Other Business Issues

The State Fire Commission is a non-profit organisation and as such is not required to make provision for income tax, sales tax, dividends or returns to the State Government.

The pricing policies of the Commission are primarily determined by external market forces and the ability of users to pay for services.

The major sources of revenue to the Commission are contributions from rate payers, the State Government, insurance companies and motor vehicle owners. The Commission and brigades raise limited revenue from interest on deposits, alarm monitoring fees, plan approval fees, avoidable false alarm charges, fire reports, the sale and maintenance of fire equipment, and the sale of training services to both the public and private sector.

Pensioners and health card holders receive discounts on rates and motor vehicle levies from the Commission.

Part 4 Major goals and expected outcomes

Major Goals	Expected Outcomes
Delivery of an efficient and cost effective service relative to other Australian fire agencies and emergency service providers.	A reduction in the social, economic and environmental costs of fire and hazardous materials incidents to the community.
Promotion, coordination and delivery of effective fire safety measures in the Tasmanian community.	A reduced incidence of fire in the community, contributing to a reduction in the social, economic and environmental costs of fire.
The delivery of timely and effective responses to emergencies.	A reduction in the average cost of emergency incidents in the community.
Rationalisation of regional administration and communications centres.	Increased administrative and operational efficiency.

2. VISION, MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

Our Role

Our role is to protect life, property and the environment from fire and other dangers with an emphasis on fire prevention through education, and to pursue opportunities for providing complementary value adding services to the Tasmanian Community.

Our Vision

Our vision is for Tasmania to enter the 21st century with a reduction in both the incidence and impact of unplanned fires and other emergencies.

We will measure our success in terms of:

- keeping in touch with stakeholder expectations
- comparing performance with industry benchmarks
- achieving our periodic goals and objectives
- maintaining financial strength and viability.

Our Guiding Principles

In carrying out this role we will demonstrate a commitment to the following key principles:

- remaining at the forefront of international best practice
- providing development opportunities for all members
- displaying strength and unity in leadership
- promoting the traditional Tasmanian volunteer ethos.

3. MAIN UNDERTAKINGS

The functions of the State Fire Commission are put into effect by the Tasmania Fire Service which consists of career and volunteer fire brigades and a number of Divisions including Finance and Administration, Community Fire Safety, Training, Communications, and Mechanical Services and Fabrication.

Tasmania Fire Service includes permanent brigades located in Hobart, Launceston, Devonport and Burnie, and 237 volunteer brigades located throughout Tasmania.

The Finance and Administration Division provides the financial, human resource, information technology, industrial relations, purchasing, asset management and stores functions of Tasmania Fire Service.

The Community Fire Safety Division's role is to provide educational and technical advice to the Tasmanian community on all aspects of fire prevention and safety. This includes technical advice and education on fire engineering, fire safety, fire prevention and hazard management. The Division also provides an educational fire safety program for school children and fire prevention and emergency response training to the public and private sectors. The Division also provides a fire safety equipment maintenance and sales service to clients across the State. This service includes the supply, installation and maintenance of all portable fire safety equipment in accordance with Australian Standards.

The Communications Division is responsible for the efficient operation of Tasmania Fire Service's communications networks. This includes purchasing, programming, distribution, installation and maintenance of all communication equipment. The Division also installs and maintains Tasmania Fire Service's fire alarm monitoring network.

The Mechanical Services and Fabrication Division, through its workshops in the Glenorchy, Bridgewater, Launceston and Burnie maintains the organisation's fleet of fire-fighting vehicles and builds fire tankers and other vehicles.

Inservice Training provides technical fire training to both career and volunteer firefighters throughout Tasmania Fire Service. In partnership with the Hobart Institute of TAPE, nationally accredited competency-based training programs are delivered at a number of locations around the State, including the Service's hot-fire training facility at Cambridge.

4. OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

The current economic environment is perceived to be relatively stable and as such the Commission does not consider that it will adversely impact on its performance.

The State Fire Commission is a non-profit community safety organisation and provides through the Tasmania Fire Service, its operational arm, protection from fire and other hazards with an emphasis on fire prevention through education.

The Commission operates under the Fire Service Act 1979 and its career employees are covered by the State Service Act 1984. The functions of the Commission are:-

- a) to formulate the policy in respect of the administration and operation of the Fire Service;
- b) to co-ordinate and direct the development of all fire services throughout the State;
- c) to develop effective fire prevention and protection measures throughout the State;
- d) to develop and promulgate a State fire protection plan;
- e) to standardise, as far as is practicable, fire brigade equipment throughout the State;
- f) to establish and maintain training facilities for brigades;
- g) to conduct such investigations into fires as it considers necessary, and to prepare reports and recommendations to the Minister arising from those investigations;
- h) to conduct such investigations into the use of fire as it considers necessary, to instruct the public in the wise use of fire, and to disseminate information regarding fire protection measures and other related matters;
- i) to advise the Minister on such matters relating to the administration of this Act as may be referred to it by the Minister, and on matters that, in the opinion of the Commission, should be brought to the attention of the Minister; and
- j) to exercise such other functions vested in or imposed on it by this Act or such other functions relating to the preventing or extinguishing of fires as may be imposed on it by the Minister from time to time.

Technological changes are enhancing the Commission's ability to provide an efficient and effective fire service.

The Commission is increasingly aware of the expectations of the community and its environmental responsibilities. Recent changes to legislation have provided a greater opportunity for community input into fire management.

5. KEY RISKS

The Commission is aware of its responsibilities to the Tasmanian community and as a result a number of amendments have been made to the Fire Service Act 1979 to update legislation in line with stakeholders expectations. Given the timeliness of these recent amendments to the Act the Commission, in the immediate future, does not foresee any financial or operating risks.

Over the past three years the SFC has invested in high quality IT systems and now is at the cutting edge with operational systems and communication systems. The SFC has robust administrative and financial proprietary systems and has the ability to transfer to two other sites in Tasmania.

The Fire Service Act requires councils to collect a fire service levy on behalf of the SFC. The Act prescribes how the levy is to be calculated and as such amalgamation of councils will have no impact on the amount of money collected as it is based on the assessed annual value of land of each land owner.

The most significant risk to the community from fire occurs on the rural/urban interface of major metropolitan areas. While Tasmania Fire Service has been effective in controlling the spread and resultant damage from wildfires, history demonstrates that every few decades, fuel and weather conditions combine to produce fires which are unable to be controlled. It is in this the knowledge that the Commission has actively supported the practice of fuel reduction as part of responsible land management.

6. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Key Result Areas:

- 1. Fire Safety and Prevention**
- 2. Emergency Response**
- 3. Community Relations**
- 4. Human Resource Management**
- 5. Financial Management**
- 6. Information Management**
- 7. Physical Resource Management**

Key Result Area 4 - Human Resource Management

Objective 1 - To improve staff selection practices

Strategy:

1. Review recruitment policies and procedures by June 1998.
2. Identify tasks, skills and knowledge required for each position by June 1998.
3. Review position descriptions and selection criteria for all positions by December 1998.
4. Develop and use appropriate selection procedures, including work-sample tests.

Objective 2 - To achieve a healthier and safer workplace

Strategy:

1. Maintain workers rehabilitation, compensation and workplace health and safety procedures.
2. Develop an occupational, health and safety policy for all employees by December 1997.
3. Implement the Safety MAP (initial level) auditing system by June 1999.

4. Continue to reduce injury within the workplace by targeting unsafe work practices and commonly occurring employee work injuries.
5. Promote, encourage and monitor the health and fitness of career employees.

Objective 3 - To maintain equal employment opportunities and a non discriminatory and harassment free workplace

Strategy:

1. Provide an appropriate internal reporting/accountability mechanism to enable all career employees to be free from discrimination and harassment by December 1997.
2. Identify and train suitable career employees as Contact Officers for all EEO matters including complaints by December 1997.
3. Review present Policy Statements in relation to EEO by December 1997.
4. Implement a formal mechanism to ensure appropriate action is taken on receipt of complaints of harassment or discrimination, by December 1997.
5. Develop and implement an EEO management plan by June 1998.

Objective 4 - To provide appropriate training and development opportunities

Strategy:

1. Establish an equitable system to recognise prior learning by January 1998.
2. Review the current training and education status of all career employees by December 1997.
3. Establish an appropriate training database by December 1997.
4. Develop and implement competency-based training programs for career employees by January 1998, and for volunteer employees by December 1999.

Objective 5 - To increase productivity and job satisfaction

Strategy:

1. Enhance job satisfaction by providing a challenging and rewarding work environment.
2. Commence a comprehensive leadership training program for supervisors by December 1997.
3. Develop an internal communications strategy by June 1998.
4. Establish and monitor workplace performance indicators by June 1998.
5. Implement a performance management and appraisal system by June 1998.

Objective 6 - To enhance employer/employee relations

Strategy:

1. Establish Statewide consultative mechanisms in consultation with the various employee representative bodies by September 1997.
2. Establish working parties to address issues impacting on the employer/employee relationship by September 1997.
3. Provide training programs in conflict resolution and negotiation skills by December 1997.
4. Encourage enterprise agreements throughout the Tasmania Fire Service which meet the needs of workplaces.
5. Foster a closer working relationship with employee representative organisations.
6. Encourage and support the amalgamation of the two volunteer organisations.

APPENDIX H
Agreement between the TFS and the UFU on Workplace feedback

Workplace Feedback System
Agreement 2007

between the

Tasmania Fire Service

and the

United Firefighters Union of Australia (Tasmanian Branch)

1. TITLE OF AGREEMENT

This agreement is to be known as the *Tasmania Fire Service Workplace Feedback System Agreement 2007*.

2. PARTIES TO THE AGREEMENT

The parties to the Agreement are the United Firefighters Union of Australia (Tasmanian Branch) (UFU) and the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS).

3. APPLICATION

This Agreement applies to all members occupying positions classified under the *Tasmanian Fire Fighting Industry Employees Award 2000*.

4. TERM OF THE AGREEMENT

This Agreement will take effect from the date on which it is signed by the parties and will cease when it is replaced with a new agreement.

5. DEFINITIONS

„Agreement’ means the *Tasmania Fire Service Workplace Feedback Agreement 2007*.

„Award’ means the *Tasmanian Fire Fighting Industry Employees Award 2000*.

„Employee’ means a person whose conditions of employment are covered by the *Tasmanian Fire Fighting Industry Employees Award 2000*.

6. PURPOSE OF THE AGREEMENT

The parties agree that a feedback system is to be implemented for all employees covered by this agreement. The purpose of this agreement is to outline the major features of the agreement. As the system is implemented and reviewed, the detail outlined in this agreement may be varied through consultation and agreement between the parties.

7. PRINCIPLES

The effective operation of a feedback system is underpinned by a number of principles. The parties have identified the following principles as being essential.

Flexibility

The TFS is made up of diverse work groups with varying management arrangements and work cultures and individual diversity. It is important that the system is flexible enough to meet the needs of these groups.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is essential to the integrity of the system. People will usually gain significant benefits when they can openly and honestly discuss skills and behaviour that affect performance. People may not participate openly and willingly if they believe their privacy will not be respected.

Discussions that occur as part of the feedback process are confidential. The issues discussed are to remain between the people who participated in the discussion unless:

- it is part of the discussion which forms a development plan or part of that plan;
- the participants in the discussion have agreed that information is to be shared with others and what information is to be shared and with whom it is to be shared;
- information is raised that could legally affect the TFS; or
- the actions of individuals may be inconsistent with the State Service Code of Conduct. In this case, the person sharing the information must be prepared to justify in writing the reasons why the information needs to be shared and with whom it has been shared.

Consistency with TFS Values

The feedback system needs to be developed, implemented and operated in a way that is consistent with the TFS Values and Behaviours. It is particularly important that the following values are evident in the way the system works:

(a) Honesty

It is important that people participating in a feedback discussion can be honest about how well they are performing in the workplace, both technically and behaviourally. Feedback needs to be given in context and supported by examples to assist with understanding.

(b) Fairness

People are to be treated at all times with respect and dignity, and without bias.

To this end, each person is to be treated as an individual and be given feedback that takes into consideration the attributes and abilities of that person alone. Feedback is to be based on the genuine work-related requirements of the position the person occupies. Feedback is not to be based on comparisons with the abilities or performance of other members of a work team.

(c) Commitment

(d) For the feedback system to have credibility and effectiveness, it is critical that:

- people make time to have the discussions;
- discussions occur on a timely basis; and
- outcomes agreed in discussions are implemented and can be achieved.

(e) Consideration

Discussions need to take place in a manner that is diplomatic, tactful and constructive. The aim at all times is to improve performance and not to humiliate or demean individuals. Recognition is to be given for good performance. Constructive feedback is to be delivered in a way that focuses on the issue and not the individual.

People will trust a system that they believe is there to help them and not “catch them out”. With feedback existing as a normal part of the way we do our work,

people need to participate in formal discussions without fear that issues will be raised with them „out of the blue’. An underpinning philosophy, then, is that formal discussions will occur on the basis that there are „no surprises’.

8. RESPONSIBILITIES

TFS is responsible for providing:

- the environment for individual and organisational goals to be met; and
- the training and resources for the system to operate.

Each employee is responsible for their own behaviour.

Each supervisor and employee is responsible for participating in general and summary discussions in a constructive and considerate manner that is consistent with the following principles.

9. FEEDBACK SYSTEM

The Feedback System provides for two forms of feedback, General and Summary.

Section 1.02 General Feedback

General Feedback refers to the giving and receiving of two-way feedback as part of normal work routine. This should occur frequently.

Section 1.03 Summary Feedback

Summary Feedback refers to a structured discussion that occurs between the participants on a regular basis. The aims of the discussion are to:

- summarise any general feedback discussions and other issues that have occurred since the last summary feedback session (including self-evaluation);
- review progress on the achievement of the plan developed as part of the last session; and
- develop a new plan based on the outcomes of the formal feedback session.

The feedback system is not designed to manage disciplinary issues or continuing poor performance issues that require a specific performance improvement plan. These issues are to be managed through a poor performance system or a disciplinary process. The documented outcomes of any formal discussions are not to be used as part of TFS promotional processes.

10. TRAINING

All members will have the opportunity to participate in training to enable them to effectively participate in the feedback system.

11. RESOLUTION

From time to time a member may have a concern regarding the manner in which a feedback discussion has occurred or the content of the discussion. Should this occur, the appropriate way for the concern to be resolved is through the TFS Resolution Process (available on TFS intranet). Employees have, at all times, the right to seek advice from their union.

12. EVALUATION OF THE SYSTEM

The performance of the feedback system will be evaluated on a regular basis using performance indicators that can measure the effectiveness and outcomes achieved by the system over time. These indicators will be developed in consultation between the parties.

13. REVIEW OF THE SYSTEM

The feedback system is to be reviewed on a regular basis, at least every 4 years, to ensure that it continues to:

- meet its objective;
- operate in accordance with the principles contained in this agreement; and
- meet the requirements of Commissioner's Direction 4.

14. GRIEVANCES AND DISPUTE SETTLING PROCEDURE

In the event of the agreement being disputed, the parties will take all steps to resolve the issues through internal processes. Where resolution cannot be achieved, the matter will be referred to the relevant industrial tribunal.

This Agreement is made at Hobart on this day of 2007.

SIGNED BY

Chief Officer, Tasmania Fire Service

.....

SIGNED FOR AND ON BEHALF OF

Secretary, United Firefighters Union of Australia (Tasmanian Branch)

.....

APPENDIX I

Extracts from State Service Commissioner's Direction on Performance Management State Service Commissioner's Direction No 4

Issued: 11 November 2002

Performance Management Principles and Standards

- 3.2 In the context of performance management, the State service Principles require a Head of Agency to put in place measures to:
- (a) manage performance and achieve results;
 - (b) develop leadership of the highest quality; and
 - (c) establish a workplace that encourages communication, consultation and input from employees on matters that affect their work and workplace.
- 3.3 Section 34 (1) (g) of the *State Service Act 2000* requires Heads of Agency to ~~develop~~ and implement systems to evaluate the performance of employees in that Agency to ensure that the difficulties of the employee are performed effectively and efficiently.”
- 4.2 The following principles underpin effective performance management systems:
- (a) there is an appropriate level of understanding of the connection between individual duties and performance and broader organisational goals and performance;
 - (b) there is sufficient flexibility in the system to accommodate diverse working arrangements within each Agency;
 - (c) there is a clear and agreed understanding of performance objectives, criteria and standards on the part of both supervisors and employees; and
 - (d) performance evaluations relate to agreed objectives, criteria and standards, and these are clearly communicated to, and understood by, employees; and resources and training needs relevant to performance objectives are clearly identified and agreed upon and a strategy put in place to address them.
- 4.3 A performance management system must comply with the following minimum standards. The system must:
- (a) promote and maintain State Service Principles;
 - (b) be fair and equitable;
 - (c) be aligned with corporate objectives, priorities, strategies and processes;
 - (d) have clearly defined objectives and be well documented;
 - (e) ensure confidentiality and appropriate use of all information generated in the performance management process;
 - (f) operate on a regular cycle with performance reviews occurring on at least an annual basis;
 - (g) include measures to report on its effectiveness; and
 - (h) be reviewed on a regular basis (at least every four years as prescribed by 7.1).
- 4.4 The system must not disadvantage, discriminate, harass or victimise any individual on the basis of gender, race, disability, sexuality, age, linguistic or cultural background, being an indigenous Australian or any other attribute not relevant to the workplace.

APPENDIX J

Trial Evaluation questions

Section 1 General overview

1. What went well including the benefits of the trial?
2. What didn't go well?
3. Were any difficult issues dealt with during the trial?
4. What impacts/ implications has it had on the way your work place does business?

Section 2 Specific aspects of the trial

5. How effective was the training/ coaching? What worked & what didn't? What else will be needed?
6. Any comments about the content of the Summary meeting (what level of structure is needed –what prompts were used)?
7. How do you plan to manage the follow up of PDP's?
8. How did you manage timing, scheduling and location of Summary Feedback meetings?
9. What documents did you use? What worked and what didn't? What changes did/ would you make? What is the core information needed and what could be optional?
10. How do you store the confidential documents? What do you need for safe storage? What else do you need for confidentiality?

Section 3: The future

11. How do you think the trial and outcomes should be communicated across the TFS?
12. What would need to be added or taken away with full implementation?
13. What sort of recognition/rewards could be used in conjunction with the full implementation of workplace feedback?
14. What information would you like to see written into the procedure manual or FAQ's document?
15. What changes in the organization (such as staffing, logistics or structure) will help the Feedback System?