

Current Research and Development

My principal research interest is in high commitment work systems. My thesis is titled :*The Applicability of High Commitment Management Within a Hospital Context : Evidence From a Private Hospital in Queensland.*

HCM is generally characterised by a set of management practices that serve to enhance the involvement, commitment and competencies of the employee. These may be classified into three sets : First, the core practices involve changing the way jobs are designed and executed. In particular, they entail methods for continuous pursuit of improvements in productivity and quality through the concerted efforts to incorporate the ideas of workers at all levels of the organisation including : team working and problem-solving groups. Second, the *HCM* approach emphasises the importance of developing a shared activity and shared organisational goals. It argues that the goal of *HCM* is to ensure committed and competent workers have the knowledge and competencies to do their jobs under the high commitment system. These include : team work for the majority of staff; team-based job design; performance appraisals; and information sharing. Third, the *HCM* strategy places great emphasis on internal promotion as the norm; formal systems for communicating company values and systems to new and existing staff; employment security; regular information sessions from management to shop floor; staff involvement in setting performance targets; HRM policy deliberately integrated with business; HRM policies deliberately integrated with each other; and HR policies which foster worker commitment and retention through employee ownership or other means of encouraging workers to become stakeholders in the corporation.

The main objective of this research is to determine the efficacy of *HCM* within a hospital context, thereby testing in a small way, the applicability of the concept outside the manufacturing sector. The goal is to anchor this study firmly in a deep understanding of the core principles of *HCM* and compare these with the management practices at a private hospital in Queensland. Thus in more specific terms, the study will seek to answer the following questions:

1. **To what extent, and in what ways, has the private hospital embraced the principles of high commitment management?**
That is:
Which of the hospital's current HR practices appear to be aligned with the HCM concept?
 - What have been the strengths and weaknesses of these practices?
 - What problems have been encountered in implementing these practices?
 - What have been the outcomes of these practices?

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2. To what extent, and in what ways, might the private hospital further embrace the principles of high commitment management?

That is:

- Does the hospital have a progressive plan to implement additional 'high commitment practices'?
- What factors have, or might prevent, or facilitate the implementation of additional 'high commitment practices' in the hospital?

This research has used a list of 'high commitment practices', drawn up largely on the basis of what writers have associated with *HCM*. A research instrument was constructed based on the findings of Wood and deMenezes' (1998) study using data contained in the *1990 UK Workplace Industrial Relations Survey* and its sister surveys, the *1997 and 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Surveys*. The analysis also used data from the *1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey* on a range of practices across the whole economy. Additional questions were constructed to cover the specific workplace practices relevant to a hospital setting. Exploratory Factor Analysis was considered the most appropriate statistical technique as the number of potential factors at the commencement of this study was unknown. Principal Components Analysis, Principal Axis Factoring, and Maximum Likelihood analysis procedures were utilised as points of comparison for exploratory factor extraction. In addition, further univariate procedures were utilised namely; Independent Sample Two-Tailed T-Tests, Paired Sample Two-Tailed T-Tests, Regression Analyses, and Discrepancy Analyses.

Following the completion of a pilot study, follow-up in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with key hospital personnel. The major purpose of the interviews was to corroborate certain facts from the questionnaires; to obtain respondents' opinions about notable events; as well as developing a deeper understanding of the issues emerging from the quantitative analysis. Verification of the data was also sought through an examination hospital records, including: the organisational chart, human resources manual, and strategic business plan.

The study makes recommendations for implementation and practice in the private hospital, including the management practices which the respondent groups noted should be given more weight as components of the *HCM* strategy, as well as the study's contribution to future research.