

Do Holistic Human Resource Management Practices Make a Difference to Fly-in Fly-out Workers' Job Quality? An Exploratory Investigation

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Abstract

In common with ongoing research into human resource management (HRM), there are attributes of jobs that are associated with job quality, which are considered important in attracting and retaining employees. To date, however, analysis has omitted the fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workforce. It is important to consider whether it is possible to develop a strategic HRM approach for FIFO workers where commuting arrangements deviate from the norm. This article fills a gap in the literature by using a four-dimensional job-quality (JQ) framework to analyse factors associated with job quality and HRM. The research was undertaken at two FIFO-dependent workplaces in Western Australia. The findings show that one workplace was using bundles of HR practices that spanned all four JQ dimensions; the other concentrated mainly on two dimensions, a consequence which is the potential to lead to suboptimal outcomes for the organisation and their FIFO employees.

Introduction

This article reports on the quality of work in relation to two organisations based in Western Australia that employ large numbers of fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workers. Although the findings draw from a larger project, which included various sectors across Australia, the research objectives were to:

1. analyse the factors considered to affect FIFO employees' job quality; and
2. determine what employers are doing to enhance job quality for FIFO employees.

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The project was in two phases: the first phase involved an extensive literature review that resulted in the creation of a job-quality framework. The framework was constructed based on the Eurofound 2012 (p. 20) surveys and various Australian surveys. The purpose of this article is to investigate FIFO arrangements within the context of strategic HRM and in terms of employee well-being. There is an extensive literature concerning how strategic HRM practices can potentially improve employee performance and well-being across a number of criteria (Clarke and Hill 2012). There is also a body of literature that has examined the impact of FIFO arrangements on employment well-being in terms of workplace safety, stress, health, and well-being. The Safety Institute of Australia (2013) claims that one-third of FIFO workers have suffered from mental-health problems linked to their employment and living arrangements. Since FIFO employment involves extended absences away from families and homes, there are also issues that concern the impact of FIFO on families, community, and family life (Taylor and Simmonds 2009). However, there has been an absence of any systematic examination of HRM practices that support FIFO arrangements, especially in the context of where there are a growing number of organisations that are very dependent on a FIFO workforce in their remote regional workplaces.

The two case studies presented here highlight how companies (especially bigger ones such as the two included here where almost 50 per cent of workers have FIFO arrangements) have expanded their holistic approach to well-being and health, whether the workers are physically present at the workplace or not. This approach recognises that the stress and long hours of FIFO travel and work can take its toll, so it is important that care is focused on the whole worker, for the whole time.

The following section discusses the link between strategic HRM and well-being. A job-quality framework is then presented as a basis for analysing the well-being of FIFO workers. The two case studies and the research methods are outlined next. The following sections discuss the findings, and the final section compares and contrasts the findings from both organisations with the Job-Quality framework. Finally, conclusions and implications for research and for HRM practice are presented.

1. Strategic HRM, Employee Well-being and the FIFO Workforce

One of the core principles of strategic human resource management (SHRM) is that organisational performance is influenced by the way that employees are managed. Supporting this argument, certain sets of human resource practices have been found to improve employee effectiveness and to predict higher levels of organisational performance (Gittel et al. 2010). Moreover,

researchers have documented the impact of human resource practices on efficiency outcomes, such as worker productivity (Datta et al. 2005) among many other factors. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) suggest that motivation and discretionary effort underlie the association between human resource practices and performance, which can be triggered by strong human resource systems. However, there may be a need for caution with regard to the methodology used to analyse human resource practices, given the findings of Guest et al. (2003) who surveyed 336 UK companies. They found that when objective measures of performance were used, greater use of HRM was associated with lower turnover and higher profit per employee, but not higher productivity; when subjective performance estimates were used, a strong association was made between HRM, productivity, and financial performance. Guest et al. (2003) concluded that the association between HRM and performance was confirmed, but did not necessarily relate to higher performance.

That said, there is support for the notion that SHRM and, more specifically, human resource (HR) managers have a key role to play in supporting employee well-being (Brown et al. 2009) and in the design of quality jobs. Moreover, failing to pay attention to well-being in the workplace can have a negative effect on the sustainability of organisational performance at a number of levels (Hope-Hailey et al. 2005). As a consequence, there is a need to develop innovative and flexible HR practices that are designed to increase levels of employee engagement, reduce turnover, and maximise skill utilisation when endeavouring to meet both organisational and employee workplace needs (Clarke and Hill 2012).

Specifically, extensive recruitment, selection, and training procedures; formal information-sharing, attitude assessment, job design, grievance procedures, and labour-management participation programs; performance appraisal, promotion, and incentive compensation systems that recognise and reward employee merit, have all been linked with valued firm-level outcomes (Huselid 1995). Such policies and procedures have been labelled high-performance work practices (HPWP) which, it is generally recommended are introduced in bundles within the workplace. For example recruiting and selecting high-performing employees without developing them, or without providing some level of empowerment, is likely to be ineffective; recruitment, development, and empowerment together are likely to produce greater effects (Wall and Wood 2005). Singh et al. (2012) point out that although there has been some agreement among researchers (see Gittell et al. 2010) that HRM bundles (occasionally referred to as holistic HR practices) can generate greater effects than HR practices in isolation, there has been no agreement as to what they should be or how many.

From an HRM perspective, well-being has been associated with a combination of structural factors such as work organisation and job design, and social and environmental factors (such as supervisor and (or) peer support and work relationships). While not unequivocal, the majority of studies have reported a positive relationship between HR practices and overall corporate performance (Richard and Johnson, 2001), as well as overall job satisfaction.

Such debates and analysis have been ongoing in the expectation that workers are employed under standard conditions and arrangements that include living in commuting proximity to their place of employment. Thus, it is important to consider whether it is possible to develop a strategic HRM approach for workers whose employment arrangements, such as FIFO, deviate from the norm.

Research on FIFO practices has considered a diverse range of consequences, including the psychological well-being of FIFO workers (Parkhurst, 2012), the impact on FIFO families (Gallegos 2005), the impact on local government and local-governance arrangements (Cheshire 2010), and the impact on regional development and regional communities (Haslam McKenzie et al. 2013). Much of the research focuses on the associations between FIFO and, in particular, long shift patterns, health, and well-being. Clifford (2009) found that FIFO and extended working hours had negative impacts on employees' work satisfaction and FIFO was frequently reported to be disruptive to employees' and partners' lifestyles in the long term. In a study on the health of FIFO workers, Joyce et al. (2013) found that—compared with other employment types—FIFO workers were significantly more likely to be smokers, drink alcohol at risky levels, and to be overweight or obese. They were found to be unlikely to report mental-health problems.

Torkington et al. (2011) in a study of FIFO/DIDO workers in Queensland found that a reluctance to accept or discuss psychological problems was associated with long shifts and being away from home for extended periods, together with a reluctance to utilise counselling and support services. While research suggests that there may be an undercurrent of stress linked to FIFO arrangements, and subsequent pressure on personal relationships, these outcomes in part may not be linked to FIFO per se, but to the way that FIFO arrangements are constructed by organisations. This may be for example when workers receive minimal preparation and training, have access to few support services, live in isolated communities, and have very long shift patterns. Not all FIFO arrangements are similar, nor are the HRM practices (or their absence) that support a FIFO workforce.

2. A Job-Quality Framework and its Relevance for FIFO Workers

Research in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia suggests that many jobs are deficient in terms of supporting minimum standards of living or acceptable lifestyles (Goos and Manning 2007, Kalleberg et al. 2000, Knox et al. 2011). Many jobs could be classified as being of poor quality. There are a number of terms associated with job quality that are interchangeable, and these include: quality of working life, decent work, and decent jobs. The literature suggests that issues concerning job quality are both subjective and multidimensional (Green 2006). However, there are issues concerning the measures used to derive job quality and the extent to which they are objective or subjective. Job quality may be constituted by the features of jobs that meet workers' needs from work.

The literature on job quality can be divided into three main areas where the quality of working life is defined as either:

1. a concept that is concerned with employees' job satisfaction (Lau and Bruce 1998);
2. a concept that goes beyond examining job satisfaction, by encompassing subjective well-being (Considine and Callus 2001); or
3. a dynamic, multidimensional construct that incorporates any number of measures relating to employment quality (Eurofound 2012).

While it is clear that job quality matters for individual and collective well-being (Burgess and Connell 2008, p. 408), what is not clear is to what improved job quality leads, or what the consequences are of deteriorating job quality and of bad jobs. Specifically, the job-quality literature is associated with five key factors: health, relationships, family, attachment, turnover, and productivity.

The measurement of job quality involves the identification and analysis of a vast number of indicators, many of which involve direct and indirect causal relationships. In any study of job quality, it is important to select the particular dimensions that are to be included in the analysis, decide whether they are to be analysed individually or as part of a composite index, and to decide on whether equal or varied weighting will be assigned to each dimension (Crespo et al. 2013).

The issue of job-quality measurement is complex, due to a wide range of influential factors and their various subjective or objective components. While most data are collected through survey methods, and are therefore of a subjective nature, efforts have been made to objectify findings by developing a structured, impartial, standard of measurement (Dahl et al. 2009).

The Holman (2012) review of job quality in Europe proposes that job quality can be defined as the extent to which a job has both work and employment-related factors that foster beneficial outcomes for the employee. Holman (2012) particularly notes the importance of psychological well-being, physical well-being, and positive attitudes such as job satisfaction, stating that these factors are indicative of the level of job quality. In the Australian context, Considine and Callus (2001) argue that the concept of quality of working life goes beyond measuring employee experiences within a particular organisation, encompassing a wider value-set that is specific to individuals. As such, the quality of working life can be regarded as a dynamic, multidimensional construct that includes concepts such as job security, reward systems, training access, career-advancement opportunities, and participation in decision making.

Following Holman (2012) and drawing on the Eurofound (2012, p.13) job-quality framework it is suggested that job quality mainly includes the following dimensions as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptions of the Four Job-Quality Dimensions

JQ Dimensions	Descriptions of Each Dimension
Job Prospects	Refers to aspects of the job that contribute to a person’s need for employment-related benefits, to the need for income (now and in the future), and to the psychological need for employment continuity and enhancement associated with a person’s self-esteem and identity (Eurofound, 2012, p.14).
Extrinsic Job Quality	Refers to the physical work environment and surroundings and concerns factors such as safety, levels of physical hazards, and whether the working environment is pleasant to work in or not.
Intrinsic Job Quality	Concerns aspects of the job that relate to the work itself, its environment, skill development, skill use and skill discretion (autonomy)—important components of productivity enhancement. Four core sets of features concerning work are associated with meeting employee needs: the quality of the work itself, the social environment in which workers are situated, and the intensity or pace of the work (Eurofound, 2012, p.15). Intrinsic job quality also captures the intensity of work; stress and hazards at work, and the demands of work.
Working Time Quality	Work-life balance encapsulates the extent to which a job meets the needs for a good balance between the demands of work and of life outside paid employment (Eurofound, 2012, p.15). This could refer to working hours, scheduling, and access to flexible working-time arrangements. This dimension also considers the evidence of major pressures on many workers and families in reconciling work and care in Australia (Skinner 2012).

A summary of the four dimensions as utilised in the job-quality investigation are presented in Table 2. This is the basis for the case-study analysis that follows. It is suggested that the framework covers the core dimensions of job quality and is applicable to all employment arrangements, including FIFO. In terms of the prior research and public discussion on FIFO work and workers, the key dimensions comprise extrinsic job quality and working-time quality.

Table 2: Framework Summary of the Four Dimensions for the Investigation of Job Quality

Dimension 1 Job Prospects	Dimension 3 Intrinsic Job Quality	Dimension 4 Working Time Quality
Job security Recognition Career progression Contract quality	Work Itself Meaningfulness of work Interesting work Skills and Discretion Skills and autonomy Training access	Work-life balance Duration Scheduling Discretion and flexibility Working hours Shift patterns
Dimension 2 Extrinsic Job Quality	Work Intensity Pace of work, work pressures Emotional/value conflict demands Good Social Environment Relations at work Direct supervision Consultation Social support, absence of abuse	Flexible work arrangements

Source: Adapted from Eurofound (2012, p. 20)

3. Case Study Method

To gain an understanding of the HRM practices that are guiding FIFO placements, two organisations with extensive FIFO workforces were evaluated. Although case-study research can be illustrative and purposeful, it is not representative. However, it can assist in identifying issues and challenges that are likely to be present in the deployment of FIFO workers. Case-study research has a number of advantages that include the ability to target cases towards either representative or extreme case examples, multiple levels of data collection can be employed, convenience and cost savings, and the depth of analysis that it supports (Eisenhardt 1989, Yin 2009). The purpose of the case studies was not to focus solely on issues and challenges concerning job quality, but also to identify effective programs

and (or) initiatives that have assisted organisations in improving job quality and organisational performance.

The two case-study organisations' extensive FIFO workforces are deployed into remote regions of Western Australia. Each case study was given a pseudonym (ResourceCo and MiningCo) and the findings are aligned with the job-quality framework presented in Table 1.

ResourceCo's activities span the world, employing over 70,000 people. They are strongly represented in Australia and North America. ResourceCo has 12,500 employees in Western Australia, with the majority employed in the Pilbara region and 2500 in Perth. Work rosters vary according to the different sites, operations, and the residential options offered at various coastal and inland towns. Forty-eight per cent of the workforce is FIFO workers; females comprise 22 per cent of the workforce; the company is the largest private employer of indigenous people in the country.

MiningCo is one of Australia's leading mining contractors, with around 5000 employees and 1500 contractors working across more than 50 sites in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, South America, and Southern Africa. Although there are three divisions within the organisation, this case study focuses on a mining division based in Western Australia where 1108 employees are based. The gender demographic of the workforce is 11 per cent female and 89 per cent male. Among other programs introduced by the organisation, the Corporate Family Program supports employees with caring responsibilities, whether they have children or ageing family members, allowing for the provision of practical support and services such as online booking arrangements for carers.

The focus of the research was on the presence (or absence) of a HRM strategy to support FIFO employees. For this purpose, the interviews were confined to managerial, supervisory, and HR-division employees. The intention was to establish the breadth and the depth of HRM programs within each organisation with respect to job quality in particular. Given the small sample of FIFO employees included in the study, we cannot, however, establish the total effectiveness of the HRM programs. Employee responses were not sought, hence the research cannot indicate whether the practices were effective in terms of their impact on employees' job quality. Initial contact was made through the most senior workplace manager or the HRM manager. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analysed according to the outlined job-quality framework.

Sixteen interviews were conducted in the two organisations during July, August, and September 2013 (see Table 3). Participant details are provided in Table 4. Interviewees were asked to review the job-quality framework

(Table 2) and then indicate the top three factors that they believe had both positive and negative impacts on the quality of their work. HR managers, line managers, and supervisors were asked to report on the workplace culture; management approach, workplace measures, and assessment; employee attraction and retention; aspects of quality work; offshore operations; programs or initiatives perceived to influence the quality of work; benefits of quality work; quality of work challenges; and levels of employee autonomy.

Table 3: Case Study Employee Numbers and Interview Sample

Case Study Identifier	Industry	Managers	HRM Division Employees
ResourceCo	Resources	3	3
MiningCo	Mining	5	5
Total		8	8

Table 4: Quality Work Case Study Participant Demographics (n = 16)

Gender	Number	Tenure (organisation)	
Male	11	≤ 1 year	4
Female	5	1 – 5 years	4
		≥ 5 years	8
Age (years)		Hours Worked per Week	
25-44	6	40 to 50 hours	6
45-54	5	≥ 55 hours	10
≥55	5		

For each case study, the interviews were considered to identify relevant key themes and issues linked to the job-quality framework for FIFO workers.

4. Findings

4.1 Case Study 1 – ResourceCo

Mine and equipment operations are the most common FIFO job classifications, followed by fixed-plant operators, mobile-equipment maintainers, and fixed-plant tradespeople, professional, and operational roles. Turnover was approximately 8 per cent at the time of the interviews. The findings around the job-quality framework were as follows.

Dimension 1—Job Prospects: Training and development or job rotation and promotion is offered at every level. An integrated strategy operates throughout the business, from manual workers to experienced professionals and to fast-track graduates. This strategy has been designed in order to attract, develop, engage, and retain talented individuals. It includes a three-year learning roadmap to support the development needs of employees at all levels, in all roles, across all operations. The HR Manager stated that employees *'can learn to do other jobs if they are interested and if they show aptitude they can train to be a supervisor as there are a lot of options to move around and try new roles'*.

Dimension 2—Extrinsic Job Quality: Challenges for the HRM division mostly concerned the physical challenges for FIFO workers on-site. They are according to the HR General Manager, *'in the middle of nowhere'* and living in camps, working 12 hour shifts. *'The fact is that it is tough work to work in the mines and ports, so we need to make it as high quality as possible'*. The occupational health and safety (OHS) supervisor commented that the ResourceCo culture is quite powerful; it influences mindsets and helps people to go home safely. There are a number of programmes offered such as mental health, diet, and other programs that overlap. For example mental-health problems can be associated with fatigue. The OHS supervisor stated that the bulk of her work in OHS is with FIFO employees *'FIFO workers need different resources and support than those people who are going home every night'*. ResourceCo's remote sites are being rejuvenated, the company is building homes and providing new facilities in order to help to retain staff. Prior to these upgrades, the site facilities had not been touched for 40 years. Currently, there is a dramatic housing shortage and ResourceCo cannot build accommodation quickly enough in the Pilbara.

Dimension 3—Intrinsic Job Quality: ResourceCo's workplace culture was reported as being as much about social well-being as other factors. As the OHS supervisor pointed out:

'People are social creatures and need a balance between the workplace and home. People spend more time with us than at home. So we need to take a holistic approach. It is not just about their time here [at work] it is about how they look after themselves. We have holistic strategies targeted at that—they don't stop when they walk out the door'.

In addition, a senior manager stated that *'this involves communicating clear goals for the organisation, where they are going, mechanisms to get there, and employees' role in the process'* and was considered *'a key factor in terms of engaging staff, so they feel part of the operations, it helps job quality, provides context to their work, and makes them feel part of something bigger'*.

Direct supervision was considered to have the greatest impact on the quality of work by all interviewees at ResourceCo: *'I have been in jobs that I have not liked but have stuck them because the leader is fantastic'...* (HR personal services employee).

However, the HR director noted that with regard to FIFO workers, they had to *'over promote people—frontline supervisors don't grow on trees. If a role needs to be filled and a good operator has potential you skill them up quickly.'*

The ResourceCo leadership model concerns supervisors or leaders having a direct and open relationship without third parties involved. The company prides itself on how well those direct relationships are developed, and offers different levels of leadership training and support. Direct supervisor–employee engagement is advocated and practised, for example shift co-ordinators enable FIFO supervisors to spend time in the field with the staff on-site, rather than always sitting behind a desk. However, the span of supervisor control ranged from 10 to 40 or more team members, and several interviewees noted that it was questionable as to whether supervisors can communicate effectively in the larger teams. The ability for employees to develop at ResourceCo, change jobs, and change sites were considered key factors for employee retention.

Dimension 4—Working Time Quality: ResourceCo have developed a range of different lifestyle options for FIFO workers that employees can choose. Rosters vary between sites, with some requiring nine days on then five days off, or eight days on then six days off. These are referred to as 'family-friendly' rosters which was important for one of the interviewees who had just moved to office-based work from the FIFO environment.

'Site is where the work is done—there are a lot of people there—they are communities that evolve and they are very tight and supported. A bit like a large family. I don't think people who haven't had the experience understand the difficulties—you can't go to the shop and buy something when you want to, due to the remoteness. It is a beautiful place, but work is very fast-paced and you do very long hours [12 per day]. The nine days on and five days off or eight days on and six days off shifts are more sustainable than five days on and two days off. Otherwise, I found that my health was affected and I was stressed and chronically tired. This impacts on your mood—some days you don't want to talk at home because you know you have to get back on a plane the next day.'

Although other rosters with more days on offered higher pay, they are not considered as family-friendly due to longer absences from home. However, these options may suit some workers who are without family responsibilities. Rosters are fixed, as consistency is needed for operational effectiveness,

although there is reportedly a lot of movement between sites (and hence roster changes). Offering a range of different roster options or changes is reportedly an effective way to retain employees. Managers have had feedback that employees join ResourceCo because of the good rosters. As one of the personal services employees said, *'This company is better than other companies, particularly the smaller operations where they have longer rosters on and have shorter periods off'*.

When workers were scarce, part-time and job-share FIFO contracts were also offered to retain staff—such as those who might otherwise retire, and to attract new mothers back into the workplace, although these comprise only approximately 3 per cent of the total workforce. Table 5 summarises the findings using the job-quality framework as it applies to ResourceCo.

Table 5: Summary of the JQ Framework as It Applies to ResourceCo

ResourceCo	Key Factors Identified	ResourceCo Strategies
Dimension 1 Job Prospects	Job Prospects was identified as a significant factor with respect to recognition leading to career progression. Opportunities throughout the company for progression	Three-year roadmap provides ability for staff to develop a career, change roles and locations was considered a major factor towards retention.
Dimension 2 Extrinsic Job Quality	Good physical environment very important, given 48% of workforce are FIFO workers. Safety and well-being is 'front of mind' especially for remote workers	ResourceCo has invested heavily in improving work sites—a retention factor. Pay not as high as some but overall package good
Dimension 3 Intrinsic Job Quality	Direct supervision and relationship with supervisor very important. Meaningfulness of work also important—how employees see their role fits with the goals of the company	Using skills and having autonomy identified as key, along with being able to grow in the job. Together with good leaders and direct supervision strategy very important
Dimension 4 Working Time Quality	Work-life balance not identified as a key factor influencing the quality of work. Given the workforce comprises almost half FIFO workers, they know the roster situation when they start work.	ResourceCo organise flights directly from regional centres allowing FIFO workers and their families to stay in country towns, providing income for rural areas, and less travel time.

Dimension 3 of the JQ framework that concerns intrinsic job-quality factors relating to leadership, communication and the meaningfulness of work. These were identified as the most important factor by several interviewees that influenced quality of work and the most important factor maintaining employee engagement. There was evidence that ResourceCo used a variety of HRM practices that embodied programs encompassing the four key job-quality dimensions. These ranged from the three-year employee roadmap relating to Dimension 1, job prospects to the focus on family friendly rosters associated with Dimension 4, working time quality. The strong holistic focus on employee well-being included Dimension 2 of the JQ framework, the extrinsic job factors of providing a good physical environment. This was evident in the heavy investment in new facilities on-site, the organisation of flights directly from regional centres to work sites which allowed FIFO workers and their families to stay in their homes, and provided important income for the rural economies and a workplace culture where safety and well-being are 'front of mind', especially for remote workers. ResourceCo clearly considered that employee well-being was important regardless of whether the FIFO worker was physically at work or not, given their health and state of mind impacted on their work regardless.

4.2 Case study 2—MiningCo

Dimension 1—Job Prospects: During 2011 and 2012, the HR team maintained a focus on improving recruitment and retention processes, developing a plan to increase the diversity of the workforce, improving leadership skills and succession-planning processes, enhancing the benefits available, while increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of HR systems and processes. Work quality is not assessed as such, although there is a yearly staff-satisfaction survey that is undertaken, and managers and supervisors participate in 360-degree feedback processes. That is, they were subject to formal evaluation by their subordinates. The outcomes of the satisfaction survey are followed up to deal with any issues. With regard to job prospects, the General Manager noted: *'We are a big contracting organisation, so for us at the management level there are opportunities because there is growth. For the employees, because you have got bigger size [and] bigger critical mass, there is less likelihood of fluctuation of jobs up and down, and there is going to be somewhere we will rehouse you when the contract finishes'*.

The Operations Manager commented on recognition at MiningCo. *'We have an innovation awards program and so we encourage innovation on-site with work practices, or people have invented tools and things that make the workplace safer. With that we recognise them with innovation awards ... the*

healthy-heart program, for example, has been rolled out across other sites, has been nominated for an internal innovation award'.

Dimension 2—Extrinsic Job Quality: MiningCo have taken a proactive role with regard to employee health and workers undergo health checks under the healthy-heart program, including diabetes checks, which have already helped to avert potentially serious health problems for some staff. This concerns preventative care, as the General Manager explained that they found one person falling asleep at work and, when tested, they found that he had sleep apnoea. Another had been in danger as, following the workplace check-up, he had a quadruple bypass. This holistic approach to employee well-being concerning health checks covers the whole workforce.

The MiningCo physical environment on-site was considered to have a big impact on the retention of staff. One of the sites was set up in 2010 and initially FIFO workers tolerated very poor conditions. However, this has changed now as a site supervisor noted: *'All those factors meant that the atmosphere on-site was quite depressed and turnover got to 70 or 80 per cent... but the opposite is now the case. The camp is as good as it could be, the flights in and out operate well. The management of the accommodation is good, the facilities are good, and supervision is improving. All those factors have meant a significant drop in turnover'.*

Dimension 3—Intrinsic Job Quality: MiningCo focuses on visible and active leadership, the development of the organisation's culture, capability and management systems. MiningCo operates under guiding principles which are integrated with a set of values that focus on: working collaboratively; striving for improvement and innovation; demonstrating integrity and responsibility; striving for excellence through strong leadership; being responsible and accountable for the care and protection of peers, the business, the communities, in which they operate, and the environment.

The level of consultation was considered to be determined by the supervisor. *'We have pre-shift meetings and toolbox meetings in which [the workers] can express their concerns and any improvements they want to make. Whether the supervisor wants to take them on board is up to them [site supervisor]'.*

Dimension 4—Work Time Quality: In common with ResourceCo, the MiningCo FIFO workers do not have autonomy with regard to their roster patterns, although there had been some changes to rosters that were found to be particularly positive in limiting divorce rates. Table 6 summarises the findings using the job-quality framework as it applies to MiningCo.

Table 6: Summary of the JQ Framework as It Applies to MiningCo

Dimensions	Key Factors Identified	MiningCo Responses
Dimension 1 Job Prospects	This dimension was significant for managers but less so for workers on-site.	Awards encourage innovation but it was felt that more local acknowledgement may be needed.
Dimension 2 Extrinsic Job Quality	For site workers, this was a significant dimension.	Earnings and a good physical environment have an impact on productivity for workers on site—improvements appreciated
Dimension 3 Intrinsic Job Quality	Autonomy considered an important issue for majority of workers. Degree of autonomy affected by level within the organisation. Consultation also important and dependent on supervisor	Productivity and innovation can be affected by supervisor—possible area for attention
Dimension 4 Working Time Quality	Work–life balance affected by rosters for site workers. Majority of managers on call over the weekends, particularly in relation to safety issues	‘Better rosters’ have affected family life (that is, divorce rates) positively.

It was evident that MiningCo management has expended considerable time and effort to encourage diversity in their workforce, and have been recognised externally as a result. The effectiveness of HR practices was more varied at MiningCo than at ResourceCo. Dimension 1, job prospects, appeared to require some attention, as career paths were not evident for all employees. Dimension 2, extrinsic job quality, had greatly improved according to interviewees. Here, effective practices included a strong focus on employee well-being, with regular health checks covering the whole workforce. This strategy served to identify some serious health issues. There had also been extensive investment and improvements to on-site accommodation. Other areas that appeared to require attention concerned Dimension 3 of the JQ framework (intrinsic job quality), as it relates to attention to supervisor development, given the level of consultation, autonomy, and a sense that suggesting new ideas would not always be welcome. Dimension 4, working-time quality, had improved for MiningCo FIFO workers being given changes in rosters. MiningCo had also introduced diversity programs concerning the recruitment of indigenous workers and women, and had made efforts to promote women to more senior positions.

5. Discussion

This study set out to answer the following research questions in relation to two organisations based in Western Australia that employ large numbers of FIFO workers:

1. what factors affect employee' quality of work life; and
2. what are employers doing to enhance the quality of working life for FIFO employees?

Each of the four dimensions and the factors included in the JQ framework were considered important by some participants, although the intrinsic JQ dimensions were consistently ranked as more important overall. Here, there appears to be some resonance with the Herzberg et al. (1959) two-factor motivational theory, whereby hygiene factors such as job security, earnings, and working conditions do not give positive satisfaction—dissatisfaction results from their absence. Conversely, the motivators (the intrinsic work factors) were considered to motivate employees in the respondent group and to lead to higher performance. Specifically, a good working environment and reasonable earnings were expected among our sample group. However, it was the other factors such as job prospects, recognition, the meaningfulness of their work, the quality of supervision, and the ability to balance their work and life that were considered more important overall.

Comparisons of the two case studies against the four job-quality dimensions are outlined below.

Job Prospects—Job prospects were particularly enhanced at ResourceCo where workers have a large internal labour market so that staff can develop a career and change roles within the organisation. These were considered key elements for employee retention. This was not evident in MiningCo and some of the senior managers admitted that developing career paths needed attention with regard to some jobs.

Extrinsic Job Quality—having a safe and clean working environment was regarded by many of the respondents as an important factor contributing to job quality in the workplace and considerable improvements to the FIFO sites at both ResourceCo and MiningCo had been made in recent years. Both organisations had introduced comprehensive health and well-being programs aimed at caring for workers, whether they were at work or at home. Frequent reference was made by both ResourceCo and MiningCo interviewees to the need to offer support for FIFO workers, due to the potentially stressful nature of their work.

Intrinsic Job Quality—At ResourceCo, leadership and communication were identified as the most important factors influencing the quality of work and, combined, are the biggest lever for employee engagement. Direct employee engagement is advocated and practised. This aspect was considered to require attention by some interviewees at MiningCo due to variation in the quality of workplace supervision and its impact on consultation, communication, and workforce autonomy.

Work-Life Balance—The rosters and family-friendly arrangements for FIFO workers at ResourceCo were regarded as key positive factors in balancing work and life, and were mentioned by several case-study participants as factors that ensured their retention with their respective organisations, even although they could earn more money elsewhere. ResourceCo organise flights directly from regional centres allowing FIFO workers and their families to stay in country towns, providing income for rural areas, and saving travel time. At MiningCo, better rosters had reportedly affected family life (that is, lowered divorce rates).

Overall, it is clear from the findings presented that there are features of jobs linked to JQ that are important in attracting and retaining employees, and facilitating commitment. While JQ is important, it is apparent that the quality of management can also influence it strongly. Moreover, intrinsic job features were identified by our sample group as an important factor. What is evident from the case studies is that ResourceCo has a strong focus on HR strategy and practice and is offering comprehensive, holistic bundles of HR practices particularly focused on their FIFO workers. Conversely, MiningCo has focused on extrinsic job quality and, to some extent, work-life balance with attention to better rosters, but needs to pay attention to career-path opportunities and job prospects and direct supervision to achieve the best results for workers and the organisation. Currently, MiningCo appears to be missing some opportunities for empowering workers and gaining input with regard to possible worksite innovations.

The case-study findings support the notion that SHRM and HR managers have a key role to play in supporting a job-quality framework (Brown et al. 2009) and in the design of quality jobs. As pointed out earlier, HPWP which comprise various HR bundles of HR practices are important, because if employees are recruited without development or empowerment (as reported by some MiningCo interviewees) the outcomes are less likely to be effective (Wall and Wood 2005). However, we present evidence on the design and operation of HR programs, not their impact on employees.

6. Future Research

This article considered whether it is possible to develop quality jobs using strategic HRM for workers whose employment arrangements, such as FIFO, deviate from the norm by asking 'do holistic HRM practices make a difference to FIFO workers' job quality?' We argue that holistic HRM practices resulting from a strategic HRM framework do make a difference, given the case-study example of ResourceCo. MiningCo had apparently not effectively achieved job quality for its FIFO workers with regard to all four of the dimensions used in the JQ framework. Its focus on HR in general did not appear to be as strategic as the approach taken by ResourceCo. Were the findings different to those that may have applied to standard workers? The answer is both yes and no. Some of the job-quality findings would almost certainly apply to standard workers. However, issues related to flight convenience (airports with proximity to homes), standards of accommodation, and rosters that stretch for 12 hours a day and days at a time, are all particular to FIFO workers whereby the issue of job quality and holistic HR practices becomes even more important.

The benefits to organisations of ensuring that the various job-quality factors are recognised and dealt with appear to be multiple and include: attracting and retaining employees and creating a supportive work environment. The JQ framework was able to capture all of the elements that were identified by managers and employees with regard to the case-study organisations as being important in terms of their contribution to job quality. Thus, if managers deal with the factors included in the JQ framework they will be dealing with many of the broader workforce challenges identified, as well as better meeting the aspirations of their workers.

Having addressed the research questions posed in this article, it is important to note that the findings are limited by the number of case studies conducted, the small number of interviews for each case study, and the absence of input from FIFO employees. The selected organisations are large international companies that depend on FIFO employees. Hence, they offer career opportunities within the organisation and they have extensive experience in managing FIFO employees. However, the template created and the key issues identified do afford an opportunity to identify cases of successful JQ programs or recurring JQ issues within specific workplaces that could be replicated elsewhere. Future research could be directed at surveying workplaces using the JQ framework dimensions, incorporating FIFO employee experiences, and thus providing a broader and more representative sample than these case studies here were able to cover.

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