

4. Gender, Diversity and Indigeneity (may also be considered for 5. Human Resource Management)

Competitive Session

Line managing neurodiverse employees in the UK transport industry: An exploratory study

A tenth of the working population have a "hidden" disability, yet there is little consideration of such issues in the current HRM literature. Through semi-structured interviews with line managers from the UK transport industry the paper unearths the consideration for workplace practices and support mechanisms required in organisations that make serious commitments towards equal opportunity employment. The paper draws attention to the implications for employees, but also for line managers responsible for the day-to-day aspects of equal opportunity employment. A key issue to emerge from the study is that line managers appear keen and feel capable of supporting employees with a neurodiverse condition, yet in another sense are constrained in such actions by many wider factors out of their control.

Over the past two decades or so, Europe has seen an increasing trend of line management involvement in HRM (Dick & Hyde, 2006). Indeed, there is currently a plethora of research that considers the positives of involving line management in HRM. For example, recent research suggests line managers can make important contributions as agents of the HRM function to strategic HRM outcomes (MacNeil, 2003), through practices aimed at managing employee commitment (Gilbert et al., 2011), learning and development of employees at work (Gibb, 2003), workplace conflict (Teague & Roche, 2011), and rectifying poor employee performance (Goodhew, Cammock & Hamilton, 2008). However, the same crop of literature also suggests an increased involvement of the line manager in HRM is not without problems. Indeed, a sample of the same body of literature indicates a dissonance of opinions between line managers and HRM specialists (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003; Maxwell & Watson, 2006), a lack of support for line managers in their new HRM role (Gibb, 2003), a lack of time and resources to allow line managers to acquire sufficient confidence to take up specialist HRM roles (Beattie, 2006), and there is evidence to suggest there are significant shortcomings in the HRM competencies of line managers (McGuire, Stoner & Mylona, 2008).

Against the backdrop of HRM scholars debating the merits and demerits of an increased involvement of line managers in what could be said to be a mainstay of HRM practices, there has been smaller, yet growing scholarly interest in the increasing trend of line managers expected to be more involved in less conventional HRM practices, such as supporting employees with a legally

recognised disability or impairment. For instance, there have been studies that contemplate the support a line manager can provide when managing the return to work of an employee with a chronic health condition (Munir, Randall, Yarker & Nielsen, 2009; Haafkens, Kopnina, Meerman, van Dijk, 2011), a stroke (Coole, Radford, Grant & Terry, 2012), after receiving treatment for cancer (Amir et al., 2010), a mental health condition (Shift, 2007; Sainsbury, Irvine, Aston, Williams & Sinclair, 2008), and serious illness, injury or disability (Cunningham, James & Dibben, 2004). Predictably, the research reveals a range of similar and unique problems for line managers when putting such practices into action. Indeed, research point towards how line managing an employee with a disability or impairment can be a very time-consuming activity and a distraction from the wider role of the line manager (Roulstone, Gradwell, Price & Child, 2003), line managers are rarely literate in the specifics of disabilities (Irvine, 2001), line managers often have different views to the HRM specialist on what mechanisms enable supported employment for employees with a disability or impairment (Haafkens et al., 2011), line managers face complex emotional and practical issues related to the employee with a disability or impairment (Coole et al., 2012), and line managers often report being unsupported and isolated in such roles (Amir et al., 2010).

Insert Table One about here

Taking this information as one, the emergent picture is of a substantial body of literature that tells us a great deal about the positive and problematic nature of one, but growing aspect of contemporary line management. While commanding a much smaller amount of attention, it is also evident that there has been increased line manager involvement in supporting employees with a disability or impairment, and the shift in practice has also led to a unique range of benefits and problems for the line manager. However, it is evident that there are gaps in the knowledge in this particular area of contemporary line management. One such gap concerns the absence of "hidden" types of disability or impairment also very much covered by equality legislation, that of neurodiverse conditions, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Asperger syndrome. (For the sake of ease and brevity these four neurodiverse conditions are described in Table One, which should

be seen used as a constant source of reference for the paper from now on.) A study that attempted to address unknowns related to supporting an employee with a neurodiverse condition would, as such, make an important contribution to the body of literature on the increased line manager involvement in HRM. Such a study would also make an even greater contribution to the knowledge concerning increased line manager involvement in the management of employees with a disability or impairment.

In order to play a part in the closure of the gap in our knowledge that concerns the line management of neurodiverse employees the paper will be structured as follows. First of all details of neurodiverse conditions will be outlined and discussed, followed by a discussion of the concept of "neurodiversity". Given that reference to neurodiverse conditions is absent in the HRM literature few are likely to be aware of the details of such conditions. Neurodiversity is also a relatively new term and appears to be similarly unknown to HRM academics and practitioners. Second, there will be review of the existing, yet limited literature based on the line management of employees with neurodiverse conditions. This approach will allow what has been written so far about line managing employees with neurodiverse conditions - typically advice on good practice - to be sketched out and evaluated. The rest of the paper is made up of a discussion surrounding research methodology, the presentation and analysis of the findings, and a discussion and concluding comments based on the findings.

NEURODIVERSE CONDITIONS AND NEURODIVERSITY

The current study focuses on four commonly cited neurodiverse conditions - dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and Asperger syndrome (see Table One), although it is acknowledged conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, anxiety, Down syndrome, schizophrenia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, Tourette syndrome, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, mental retardation, classical autistic spectrum disorder, are also seen by some to fit under the umbrella term of neurodiversity. The focus on four particular neurodiverse conditions is driven by the priorities of the commissioning body of the research - the UK's TSSA trade union. Details surrounding the TSSA's rationale for commissioning research on neurodiverse can be found later in the paper.

The prevalence of the four neurodiverse conditions in the wider population is open to debate. Further complicating factors include overlap between the descriptions of neurodiverse conditions (Portwood, 2000), as well as individuals commonly being diagnosed with two or more neurodiverse conditions (Hendrickx, 2010). At the general level, however, it is estimated that the neurodiverse conditions cited in Table One affect up to 10 per cent of the adult population (Butterworth & Kovas, 2013). When broken down by individual condition other studies suggest dyslexia affects between 2 and 15 per cent of the population (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2004), dyspraxia affects between 2 and 5 per cent of the population (Dyspraxia Foundation, 2012), ADHD affects between 1 and 4 per cent of the population (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2009), Asperger syndrome affects 1 per cent of the population, although males represent approximately 9 in 10 cases (Brugha et al., 2009). Whatever the true prevalence may be, it is reasonable to assume approximately three million working people in the UK are affected in some way by a neurodiverse condition. Such numbers also suggest most UK line managers should have already managed or expect to manage an employee with a neurodiverse condition.

In terms of more broadly conceptualising neurodiverse conditions, until the beginning of the twenty-first century it was common for conditions described in Table One to be widely understood in relation to medical discourses on disability or impairment. For instance, a person with Asperger syndrome would typically be viewed by medical professionals, as well as the public at large, as deviant and incapable on the basis of bodily or cognitive impairments (Krcek, 2013). Further, this perspective can be seen in terms of the medical orientated language used to describe individual neurodiverse conditions noted in Table One. Also important to note is how the medical language tends to portray neurodiverse conditions in a negative fashion - e.g. "weaknesses", "difficulties" and "disorder" - and therefore having the potential to stigmatise people with such conditions. However, it was not the medical terminology alone that led to the emergence of terms such as neurodiverse and neurodiversity; the impetus came from people with autism who were deeply offended by the media reports of an "autism epidemic" in the late 1990s and the subsequent focus on finding a cure for autism (Baker, 2011). Since then an assortment of organisations representing people with a range of conditions noted in Table One, as well as a small and emergent group of academics, have been

pressing for such conditions to be seen and conceptualised as part of normal human variation and not viewed or treated as abnormal (Paletta, 2013). A key aim of the advocates of neurodiversity is, as such, to have neurodiverse conditions placed alongside other areas of human diversity, such as race and gender (Waltz, 2013).

Therefore, neurodiversity is not just a concept that allows an alternative perspective on a wide-range of medical conditions; it is also a social movement (Armstrong, 2010). Further, neurodiversity has come to denote two things in particular: a segment of the wider population whose brains are "wired" differently from people who do not have the difficulties associated with conditions described in Table One; neurodiversity is also to be seen as a positive statement of difference (Grant, 2009). Having said that, it should be noted that the concepts that surround neurodiversity are not without their critics or problems. For instance, every neurodiverse person is different and how an individual is affected by a neurodiverse condition will be markedly different (Hendrickx, 2010), there are still moral, social, legal and medical problems associated with the ideals of neurodiversity (Herrera, 2013), and that outwith certain academic and political circles neurodiverse conditions, such as Asperger syndrome, are not typically viewed in such a manner (Baker, 2011). In short, the time may have come to rethink conditions such as dyslexia, yet it is also reasonable to suggest new ways to conceptualise dyslexia are not widely recognised, nor are such ideas immune from criticism.

LINE MANAGEMENT, NEURODIVERSITY AND NEURODIVERSE CONDITIONS

An initial search for literature using terms such as "employment", "job", "work", and "X" neurodiverse condition produced a good sample of literature. However, the sample of literature contained only negligible reference to line management. A more focused literature search using terms such as "line manager", "management" and "X" neurodiverse condition led to a smaller sample of literature, characterised by almost no empirical findings concerning line management. As such, the literature discussed below is largely advisory and therefore mostly untested in an empirical setting. The literature is also largely descriptive and bereft of reference to HRM academic literature, as well as the many concepts and theories used and developed by HRM academics. However, it remains prudent to consider what insights might emerge from a discussion of a wide-ranging and eclectic body of

literature as such an approach is likely to at least provide the basis of what issues a line manager may have to consider when managing or faced with the prospects of managing an employee with a neurodiverse condition. Therefore, what follows is a discussion of the limited literature on line management and neurodiversity, followed by separate discussions of line management and the four neurodiverse conditions referred to in Table One.

Line managing neurodiverse employees

The literature on line management and neurodiversity is typically of an advisory nature. For instance, the TUC (2011) suggest training on neurodiverse conditions will allow line managers to make a clearer distinction between the potential to introduce reasonable adjustments and taking disciplinary action. Hendrickx (2010), moreover, suggests good practice involves line managers recognising current and prospective employees with a neurodiverse condition often have an atypical educational and career history, a fragile ego due to previous educational and employment experiences, and deploy a range of hidden strategies to avoid line managers and colleagues becoming awareness of their difficulties. Many of such issues were discussed in the only empirical study to make clear reference to line managing neurodiverse employees. However, the main finding to come from Babineau's (2010) study was that line managers regularly made reference to being stuck in a dilemma between accommodating the needs and recognising the medical confidentiality of neurodiverse employees, at the same time as aiming to improve company productivity and employee morale. However, the imbalance of priorities leads often leads to the line manager taking frustrations that result from conflicting demands out on the neurodiverse employee.

Line managing employees with dyslexia

The following advice and guidance was typical across the literature on line managing an employee with dyslexia. Sumner (2009), for example, suggests good practice involves line managers playing a part in publicising and implementing disclosure procedures. The message as such being employee disclosure of dyslexia is officially acceptable and welcome. Reid & Kirk (2001) believe line managers need to be more aware of the learning style of dyslexic employees. Indeed, employees with dyslexia are known to prefer "hands on" learning, rather than being shown what do. Fitzgibbon & O'Connor (2002) note how it would be advantageous for line managers to be skilled in terms of both recognising

dyslexia in employees and knowing what to do with this information. As such, line managers would benefit greatly from seeking out and taking part in dyslexia awareness training. Kindersley (2009), moreover, deems keeping changes in line management practices and line management styles to a minimum to avoid bringing to light a dyslexic employee's difficulties. As such, line managers should go to extra lengths to prepare the employee with dyslexia for, for example, the introduction of a new performance appraisal system, or transference to the responsibility of another line manager. A further issue raised by Sanderson (2011) concerns how line managers require an understanding of how to make the most of assistive and mainstream technology, in that technology is widely known to have positive benefits for employees with dyslexia. For instance, line managers can support an employee with dyslexia by facilitating access to technology that aids writing, organisation and memory skills.

Empirical research that considers the line management of employees with dyslexia appears to be very limited. An exception to the advisory texts being a study conducted by Morris & Turnbull (2007) on nursing and career advancement in the UK. Even then only fleeting references are made relating to the line management of an employee with dyslexia. The findings are quite mixed in that nearly 40 per cent of nurses did not disclose their dyslexia to their line manager because they feared such a revelation would lead to repercussions from their line manager. More worryingly, however, only 14 per cent of nurses diagnosed with dyslexia felt supported in relation to this issue by their line manager.

Line managing employees with dyspraxia

According to Howard (2009), while it may be the case that line managers are aware more than ever aware of the difficulties associated with dyslexia, few line managers are aware of the condition of dyspraxia and even less appear aware of how dyspraxia can cause significant problems for employees with the condition. That said, it is suggested that line managers can offer practical support for employees with dyspraxia and one of those ways involves the line manager working out work-related routines in order for the employee with dyspraxia to learn orderly habits. A further suggestion, where relevant, is for the line manager to speak slower to reflect differences in the information-processing skills of the employee with dyspraxia. Hagan (2004), moreover, suggests a range of practical remedies and adjustments that most line managers could introduce to support an employee with dyspraxia.

Remedies and adjustments that line managers could introduce the provision of written procedures for operating office machinery, such as photocopiers and fax machines. Further practical input from the line manager could come via methods to reduce everyday distractions that can make working life uncomfortable for the employee with dyspraxia. Standard changes that most line managers could arrange include allowing the employee to wear earphones, putting partitions between desks, as well as allowing the employee with dyspraxia to come in early or stay late. Moody (2010), however, takes the view that line managers can make a difference in terms of making the employee's colleagues more aware and therefore more likely to be understanding of how employees with dyspraxia can have poor social skills. In general, it would appear that supporting an employee with dyspraxia should be well within the capabilities of the typical line manager.

Line managing employees with ADHD

The support a line manager can practically implement to help support the employee with ADHD follows on in many ways with the cases of employees with dyspraxia. For instance, Adamou et al. (2013) believe line managers could be useful in such situations by providing structure, flexible time to work, and the use of headphones. However, also suggested in this work is for the line manager to consider making supplementary minor and practical adjustments. Such minor and practical adjustments include the introduction of a "buddy system" to keep the employee focused. Further suggested adjustments include providing alarms or beepers to counter memory problems. Carnes & Holloway (2009) contribute an additional range of practical strategies that line managers can set out to support the employee with ADHD. These include encouraging the employee to take several short breaks throughout the day to help cope with a sedentary job, follow up oral conversations with emails so the employee has written records, and frequently ask employees with ADHD for progress reports. A broader issue raised here is that line managers should experiment with leadership styles to find the best to use in such situations. The limited literature on this issue raises a few more practices that line managers may wish to consider. Further strategies that line managers may wish to encourage employees with ADHD to use include the tape-recordings of meetings or presentations, as well as the use of a dry erase or bulletin board so that reminders and thoughts can be jotted down (Painter, Prevatt & Welles, 2008).

Line managing employees with Asperger syndrome

There is again an evident overlap in terms of how line managers can support employee with different neurodiverse conditions. Indeed, texts that cover line managing an employee with Asperger syndrome often refer to atypical career histories, fragile egos, acting on knowledge of condition, keep change to a minimum, use technologies to aid structure and memory, consider changes to working environment and the use of headphones to screen out distractions. However, further advice provided by Prospects and The National Autistic Society (2005) on how a line manager can play a part in supporting an employee with Asperger include closely supervising the employee, as well as being consistent in dealings with the employee. The line manager should also consider encouraging colleagues or team members to be equally consistent and clear when dealing with a colleague or team member with Asperger syndrome. It could also be reasonable to suggest that it is perhaps the employee with Asperger syndrome, rather than dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD, who is more likely to require external support in employment. As such, as inferred in the work of Hurlbutt & Chalmers (2004), line managers should expect to liaise with the employee's advocate, often an external support worker, on support mechanisms. Further key and practical issues particularly unique to line managing an employee with Asperger syndrome includes recommendations that line managers should never assume what is best for the employee (Worton & Binks, 2008), avoid the random allocation of work tasks (Hendrickx, 2009), and where possible and appropriate allow the employee with Asperger syndrome to work with employees who share similar backgrounds and personalities (Johnson, 2005).

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

What stands out the most from the discussion of literature on line management, neurodiversity and neurodiverse conditions is a sense that little is known about the reality of putting the plethora of advice on such matters into action. As such, in order to build an image of what it is to line manage a neurodiverse employee it would seem sensible to focus on the following four questions. Firstly, what level of knowledge do line managers have of neurodiverse conditions? Secondly, how receptive are line managers towards the concept of neurodiversity? Thirdly, what kind of support does a line manager receive in such situations and is this perceived to be enough by line managers? Fourth and

finally, how do line managers rate their experiences of managing employees with a neurodiverse condition and what is key to such experiences? With such suggestions in mind, the rest of this section will now focus on describing and discussing research design that would allow such issues to be effectively explored in an empirical setting. The section includes description and discussion on participants and fieldwork details, ethics, data collection and data analysis.

Research design

Exploratory research was deemed to be the most appropriate overall approach given that the current study will essentially be the first empirical study located in the field of HRM to focus on the experiences of line managers who manage neurodiverse employees. Exploratory research is relevant in this situation as very little is known about the experiences of line managers who manage neurodiverse employees. Indeed, such an approach is advantageous because it allows researchers to be flexible and pragmatic, yet at the same time subscribe to a broad and thorough form of research (Davies, 2006). It was also deemed essential to adopt a qualitative approach over a quantitative approach, in order to explore experiences of line managers managing neurodiverse employees. This decision was again made on the grounds of very little prior knowledge concerning such issues and therefore there is probably more to be had at this stage of affairs from interviewing line managers, rather than through a numerically-driven survey approach (Gilbert, De Winnea & Selsa, 2008). A final decision to be made in terms of research design was to opt for a case study approach. A case study approach was deemed appropriate as the experiences of line managers in such situations is expected to be shaped by the complexity and particular nature of the setting (Stake, 1995), that of the UK transport industry.

Participants and fieldwork details

The current research is based on interviews with 18 line managers who have experience of managing an employee with a neurodiverse condition. Research participants were recruited through emails sent out via the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) membership list. Interviews with line managers were semi-structured. Out of the 18 line manager interviewed, three line managers reporting experience of managing two or more employees with a neurodiverse condition (see Table Two for further and specific details of line manager and neurodiverse conditions). Further, no

financial inducements were used in the study to attract participants and all participants self-selected themselves for the study.

Insert Table Two about here

Research ethics

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Heriot-Watt University Research Ethics Committee (HWUREC) prior to fieldwork commencing. The application to HWUREC took into account that a key aim of the study was to conduct research on a sensitive issue. Generally, the research ethics approach used in the current study followed closely the British Sociological Association (2004) statement of ethical practice, particularly in terms of gaining written consent, informing participants of their rights, as well as making assurances concerning privacy and anonymity. Further steps taken to protect the interests of the 18 research participants and to facilitate honest and frank discussions with the interviewers is the omission from the current research of details concerning, for example, line managers' actual job title, age, gender, employer and location of employer.

Data collection

Interviews with line managers were conducted between October 2012 and March 2013. The interviews were conducted by the first three authors of the paper. All interviews were conducted by telephone and interviewers also took notes based on each interview. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed before analysis began. Cost and convenience were key factors in the decision to use telephone over face-to-face interviews. However, the most important reasons to use telephone interviews is that this method allows easier access to hard-to-reach groups; telephone interviews are also an appropriate choice for sensitive topics, in that interviewees may be less distressed answering such questions when the interviewer is not physically present (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The interviews were semi-structured so as to ask major questions the same way each time, but also so questions could be asked out of sequence and more information could be asked for if needed (Fielding & Thomas, 2008).

Topics for interviews with line managers and employees were based on the following themes: (1) current job information and work history, (2) knowledge and awareness of neurodiversity and neurodiverse conditions, (3) family or friends and neurodiverse conditions, (4) details of managing employee with neurodiverse condition, (5) training, (6) disclosure, (7) ideal support, (8) current economic climate, (9) further views and comments.

Data analysis

The rather limited range of literature on line management and neurodiversity, the relatively modest amount of data captured in relation to line managers, the exploratory nature of the study, as well as authors' familiarity with the data collection process, were important factors in determining the approach to data analysis. For instance, the data was analysed manually, rather than through specialised software. The data was analysed using the three level approach to coding developed by Coffey & Atkinson (1996). First all of the data was coded in a very basic manner, such as, "source of knowledge" and "internal support". At the second level of coding content of the initial codes were developed to further reflect the language of line managers, e.g. the language used to access knowledge, or the language used to reflect on the quality of support available. The third and final stage of coding involved the development of broad analytical themes. In this instance, coding in such a manner involved linking together first and second level codes to allow broader insights into experiences of the line managers. The three first authors met at each stage of the coding processes to determine an agreed set of codes.

Analytical framework

As mentioned earlier in the paper advocates of neurodiversity believe there should be a radical review of how condition such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and Asperger syndrome are conceptualised both academically and from a wider societal stand point. Such views ally themselves very well to the wider and more established concept related to that of the social model of disability. From this perspective disability is said to be the product of specific social and economic structures, with such structures leading to institutional forms of exclusion and cultural attitudes becoming embedded in social practices (Terzi, 2004). In this situation, pressures placed on transport organisations to operate in wider transport industry markets, or conform to targets imposed by incumbent governments, is likely

to lead to a wide-range of organisational practices, some formal and some informal, that disproportionately have a negative impact on the employment prospects of employees with a disability. As such, a defining feature of this approach to organisational analysis is to lower the analytical emphasis on the individual with the disability and instead put much higher emphasis on examining the contribution of the organisation towards the disabling process. Attention, as such, in the following sections concerns paying close attention to, for example, how line managers, through official policies and procedures, as well as through informal understandings and practice, shape the employment experiences of employees with a neurodiverse condition.

STUDY CONTEXT: THE UK TRANSPORT INDUSTRY AND THE TSSA'S NEURODIVERSITY CAMPAIGN

The UK transport industry consists of industries concerned with the physical transportation of people and goods between locations, warehousing and storage for goods, and support activities related to modes of transportation. The latter include air, rail, water, road, and pipeline transportation. The broader UK transport industry employs 719,000 people in directly transport related occupations and a further 658,000 people in allied roles (Department for Transport, 2012).

According to the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2013), the transportation and storage industry remains quite strongly unionised and has a trade union density of 39.8 per cent, 59.4 per cent of workplaces in the sector have a union present and 46.7 per cent are covered by collective bargaining agreements. Further information from this source highlights long term decline in union membership in the transportation sector, from 572,178 members in 1995 to 474,152 members in 2012. Despite the decline, the transport industry, together with the manufacturing and communication sectors, accounted for the majority of applications (58 per cent) for trade union recognition in the 2011-12 year (Central Arbitration Committee, 2012).

The transport industry is by no means a static entity, with constant pressures to change from within and from governments. Indeed, in 2006, the Eddington Transport Study set about analyzing linkages between transport and UK productivity. Three priorities for investment that would benefit the UK economy were recommended: urban areas, key inter-urban corridors, and international gateways

Comment [J1]: I've asked Susannah to provide a further paragraph summarising the emergence of their ND campaign. This section could probably be edited with this extra, important information.

(House of Commons Transport Committee, 2011). Eddington endorsed pricing mechanisms to maximize existing networks (e.g. road pricing schemes) rather than large capital investment projects such as high speed rail. The latter scheme is going ahead, following the election in 2010 of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government. The incoming government inherited a transport system with higher passenger usage across all modes than 1997 and an economy with lower GDP and transport growth than 2006 (House of Commons Transport Committee, 2011). Vehicle, passenger, and freight traffic volumes have fallen, as has public spending, although demand for rail has been resilient to the recession (House of Commons Transport Committee, 2011). Understandings of the transport industry are further complicated by responsibility for transport projects being devolved to local government and London, Scotland and Wales by the Coalition government.

The transport industry employs a vast range of occupations, from train drivers to office workers. The TSSA, the source of where the vast majority of the participants for the current study were recruited, represent white-collar salaried employees in the industry, including administrative, clerical, supervisory, managerial, professional, technical, research, executive and allied grades (TSSA, 2009). TSSA members, as well as the research participants in the current study, can be found in roles as varied as booking office clerk, train manager, call centre worker, controller on the London Underground, and senior engineer on national rail infrastructure projects.

The impetus for the research began when TSSA Organisers had received anecdotal reports from workplace representatives that union members were not taking up learning, development, and promotion opportunities due to difficulties arising from undiagnosed, unsupported neurodiverse conditions. Some members had been disciplined and even had their employment terminated because the hidden disability at the root of their problems had not been recognised as a causal factor. In 2010 the TSSA received funding from the UK Department of Business, Innovation, and Skills (which is disbursed via the Trades Union Congress) to work with their members on these issues. The project is thus supported by the Union Learning Fund with the remit of supporting and enabling marginalised workers in taking up learning and development opportunities at work. Initially started as a dyslexia project, the initiative soon expanded to encompass other neurological developmental conditions which frequently co-occur with dyslexia, i.e. dyspraxia, Attention Deficit Disorders, and Autistic Spectrum

Disorders. These were collectively termed "neurodiversity", a term adopted to signal a commitment to the social model of disability.

MANAGING NEURODIVERSE EMPLOYEES IN THE UK TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

The following section involves the presentation of the findings from the interviews with line managers. The findings section is divided into four sub-sections related to line manager knowledge of neurodiverse conditions, line manager attitudes towards neurodiversity, line manager experiences of managing an employee with a neurodiverse condition, and line manager perceptions of support.

Line manager knowledge of neurodiverse conditions

The line managers interviewed for the current study were expected, simply by association and hands on experience, to have some knowledge of neurodiverse conditions. Out of the eighteen managers, eleven reported having knowledge of one particular neurodiverse condition, and in each case this turned out to be the neurodiverse person they were currently or previously managing. The remainder of the line managers reported a wider knowledge of neurodiverse conditions than they had experienced as a line manager. Why the line managers knew more about more than one neurodiverse condition tended to be related to external factors, such as a previous job outwith the transport industry:

I brought [experience] from the health service, you have to know loads of stuff that are nothing to do with your job. You end up sitting with people who have no relatives and you just get a natural awareness of it (Line Manager 1).

Broader knowledge came from an extra line management role as a staff representative: "...being also an active union representative, we're aware of sort of people with dyslexia and things like that" (Line Manager 10). Such knowledge also came from a family member or friend with a neurodiverse condition: "My son has ADHD and OCD" (Line Manager 13).

Given such insights it was not surprising to find that line managers obtain information concerning neurodiverse conditions from a wide-range of sources. Indeed, two-thirds of line managers reported

receiving information on neurodiverse conditions through organisational training programmes, although in all cases this related to dyslexia awareness training:

[My line manager] sent me on a specific course which was about dyslexia awareness in the workplace. Quite an eye-opener. How it works, how to spot it, how to deal with it, because we are an equal opportunities employer (Line Manager 9).

...I went on a reasonable adjustments course, then I ended up on a dyslexia awareness course. It aided my understanding... (Line Manager, 12).

Even more line managers reported acquiring some level of knowledge from formal internal and external sources, such as a HRM or occupation health specialist, or a specialist from a support organisation:

...I found out from the HR adviser, she just talked me through what I needed and what was expected from me after that. I had HR on the phone, following things up... (Line Manager 7).

...I spoke to someone at Occ Health. They were helpful and understood and explained. Read the notes and assessments on the people. The people have explained it to me and how it affects them, at what level (Line Manager, 15).

One thing was to call in the help of NAS [The National Autistic Society] for further advice. Very helpful in briefing individual teams. As a grad trainee [with Asperger syndrome] he moved from team to team for various learning experiences. They were very good in running little workshops before our guy arrived there, so they knew what to expect (Line Manager 4).

However, it was evident that line manager also sourced information on neurodiverse conditions from beyond formal training and formal support. Indeed it was common for line managers to source such information from the Internet: "A number of websites can't remember which ones. Googled 'dyslexia'. Didn't note where it was from" (Line Manager 16). Information sourced from television programmes also figured prominently in the findings:

...I know about Tourette's [syndrome] because I watched Big Brother...Well, yeah. Because that chap [Gary McKinnon] today who's going to be extradited to America has Asperger's. That's all I know about that (Line Manager 17).

To a lesser extent, but particularly in situations involving line managers who have a family member or friend, information was also sourced from personal experiences, external specialist organisations and academic courses.

[I get my information from a] few places. Membership with National Autistic Society. Quite a lot of other parents. Share notes, but as it is quite a diverse spectrum, what you have experienced is not the same as them, and vice versa. A few years ago, I did an online PG certificate with Strathclyde Uni, about ASD [autistic spectrum disorder]... (Line Manager 5).

Line manager attitude towards neurodiversity

Questions relating to line manager attitudes to neurodiversity were not designed to catch anyone out. A level of unawareness of neurodiversity was expected in most cases. Rather, the questions here were designed to draw out first impressions of the term based on experiences of line managing an employee with a neurodiverse condition. Such questions were also designed to allow the line manager with prior understanding to provide detailed opinion. It would be fair to say that the term neurodiversity provoked a wide-range of responses, with no particular attitude dominating the findings. For instance, five line managers expressed positive view towards this emergent term:

Good, it doesn't label anybody; it is a more positive word to use. It looks at a positive way of focusing people's attention on things people should be aware of (Line Manager 1).

Once you understand what it gathers, even as a layperson, you can see those things sit together as a family of conditions (Line Manager 4).

Five line managers, however, offered quite opposite and perhaps contradictory views to neurodiversity:

It sounds a bit like an illness, whereas I think dyslexia is like having blue eyes, part of them, not an illness. I am not that keen on the term. It sounds contagious! Dyslexics just process things differently. I don't like this term (Line Manager 7).

I thought it was a ridiculous description because of the spectrum it covers. It is putting someone in the same bracket as another person. It is a deceptive thing to say, like sexual or racial diversity. I have had two people working for me under that banner who are poles apart. It is a dangerous thing to lump people with such differences under one term. I think the difference in terms of, if you

take racial diversity, it is about appreciating and respecting peoples' ways and culture. This new term is almost putting a flag up, and an expectation, and it lessens your expectations of what people are to be capable of, and I feel very strongly that with people with mental disability, to be lumped under one banner, is not the right thing (Line Manager 11).

The majority of line managers, as such, expressed neutral or mixed sentiments towards the concept of neurodiversity:

Don't know. Sounds like a buzz word. It doesn't categorise. Nothing wrong with that. I don't know; don't hold an opinion on it (Line Manager 9).

While it is good jargon to describe a collective way of thinking, or addressing a variety of areas, I am not one for huge labels on a wide scale, I would prefer to talk about individual aspects of it. Fine in a technical perspective, but day to day, people need something they can understand, closer to that. Part of my role is about environmental diversity. I use this term talking to my colleagues, but I won't talk to station or duty managers about it, because they won't understand, or can understand why. I prefer to stay close to what people understand. I would therefore not refer to someone in my team as having a neurodiverse condition; I would just talk about what they have. It makes it more real rather than a category (Line Manager 14).

Experiences of line managing an employee with a neurodiverse condition

Aside from considering knowledge, attitudes and formal support as factors that would help shed some light on the realities of line managing an employee with a neurodiverse employee is that of building a picture of how line managers more broadly experience such situations. More specifically, an important issue is further explaining what makes for a good, bad or indifferent experience for the line manager, in such situations. As is evident in the findings so far, line managers do not appear to have a common experience of managing an employee with a neurodiverse condition, although one-third of line managers reported positive experiences, more than half reported mixed experiences, with just two line managers reporting negative experiences.

Below are accounts that provide details of positive experiences of line managing an employee with a neurodiverse condition. More importantly, such information sheds light on further factors that make experiences positive, such a line manager keen to make a difference:

That was a complete change on how he was when he arrived [employee with Asperger syndrome]. We tried to build confidence, practice, repetitive tasks, plus it builds his knowledge of working with PCs, to strengthen his employability, later on. We started them on daily tasks, weekly tasks, and as they became more competent, and confident, we would say, "we need this task done this morning", or "we need this in an hour" and we would sit and do it together. Initially it was difficult, but it became to start to be achieved, there were accuracy issues, but some distinct progress was made, and he was able to deliver in the timeframes we set him, which when he started, would have been very difficult to do (Line Manager 3).

He [employee with Asperger syndrome] had the quietest office. Only two people in at any time. He had focus and quietness to get on. He found it hard in a louder office. We worked together to make that happen. He had a lot of big dictionaries, despite our "clean desk" policy, but I just left him to it. He had little piles for everything. That is fine, good. Organised. I had to plan anything that came out of the blue, as he found it hard to cope with, and his delivery was quite slow, so it was a case of planning everything upfront with him, and having a lot of dialogue. Spoke to him probably more than my other staff because we couldn't articulate through email that well, like instructions. In one sense I do like it written, but with him I couldn't, so I had to articulate it to him. It takes more time to manage and it definitely has an impact (Line Manager 9).

Key to good experiences appears to involve the line manager adopting creative approaches to reasonable adjustments. However, to be creative appears to be based on the line manager having the time and space to experiment. Line managers, of course, reported mixed experiences when managing employees with neurodiverse conditions:

Yesterday we had a routine catch up. Form filling required in this he is very good at, but one form involves one page for information from six different sources, and he [employee with Asperger syndrome] finds that very difficult. So, we have found a new way of working. He is now doing certain parts of the form in single chunks. Sizable chunks, looking for one thing at one time. Pulling information together, he doesn't like that. I am sure he will get more familiar with it. Certain parts he is fine with, but others not. Over time, he has learned to become more familiar

with processes. Takes time. Certain things make him uncomfortable and he just avoids doing those. We work together with more time to go through certain processes (Line Manager 14).

They [three employees with dyslexia] are all very sensitive and demanding in the way of attention-seeking. Not in a horrible way, but it is constant attention that they draw, which flares up from time to time, but in a big way (Line Manager 15).

What is at the core of such mixed experiences is far from clear from the above quotes, yet it is reasonable to assume there are limits to what a line manager can do in such situations. It would also be reasonable to assume from the findings that line managing an employee with a neurodiverse can be a draining experience and fraught with dilemmas. Similar insights are apparent in the case of line managers who report negatives experiences of line managing an employee with a neurodiverse condition, even when this responsibility is shared by team members, or when the line manager tries to prevent the employee relationship from breaking down:

It is difficult for people who work with him [employee with Asperger syndrome] every day, same desk, same place. We thought this would be good. Once, he went down to a group of senior managers and interrupted them while they were at a table, and they were shocked. Day to day it is not quite so easy to make all the allowances that you need to, but some people just don't answer his emails, as they just know as he gets incredibly frustrated. It's not their problem, and then he failed his targets, because nobody communicates with him. Other people might try different things and ways (Line Manager 13).

Yes, it is difficult, it is a poor relationship. She [employee with dyslexia] turned up late today, and we have not spoken. That will last for the rest of the day I think, partly because I haven't got time at the moment, and I don't particularly want to. The relationship has broken down completely because of what is going on. If I criticize her for not doing something, I tell her she needs to, and she sees that as a negative thing. She has made complaints to HR about me. She has not been achieving. I get called into question why I have given her a below average mark, and tried to be constructive. If I alternatively give her praise for doing something right, it still causes her to go to HR, to say I have contradicted her. I get pushed into corners every which way, which has caused a problem in the relationship, and quite frankly, I now can't give her the time of day. We have gone

through grievance policies. My views have been upheld. She appealed that and lost that. We have done that (Line Manager 18).

Line manager perceptions of support and organisational practices related to disability

In this instance the aim was to acquire some insight into line managers' perceptions of the support they receive in relation to employees with a neurodiverse condition. This issue has been covered to some extent so far in the previous sub-sections, with line managers generally reporting positive views of such experiences, particularly in terms of first contact with official sources of support. Further and ongoing positive experiences, however, were reported by line managers:

When the person [with dyslexia] came to my team, I was able to contact the lady who did the [awareness] training and ask her for advice, about software for my colleague. I asked him to see the trainer to ensure she has all the support she could have. I knew the contact trainer was there. Trainer was really helpful (Line Manager 6).

...yes, there is quite good support in terms of working in an organisation like this. It's just a matter of tapping into it and knowing it's there and that's the fact (laughter) (Line manager 17).

However, the interviews also suggested support, particularly related to occupational health services, was not to set up or designed to deal with such conditions, seeking help from such services was overly complicated or bureaucratic, or that support is actually in short supply:

[Occupational health] were rubbish the first time round... We sent him [employee with Asperger syndrome] back, and they sent him to an outside specialist who did a proper assessment (Line Manager 4).

[The employee with Asperger syndrome] couldn't do the job. Getting Occ Health to help me was really hard...I went to a staff network meeting, and we had a talk to Occ Health. I asked for this facility that they were talking about at the meeting, and they just gave me another number! There was no "one stop shop" service to access. You have to wiggle your way through (Line Manager 12).

I feel a bit let down by the company for lack of support. [Senior managers] say "if you ever need anything I am here", but when you do, they don't give any. Then, they call to say "did he [the employee with Asperger syndrome] achieve his targets this year?" (Line Manager 13).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The broad aim of this study was to make a particular contribution to a growing body of literature on increased line manager involvement in HRM. More specifically, the aim was to make a unique contribution to our understandings of line management involvement in supporting employees with a disability or impairment. The basis, as such, of the current research was to conduct an exploratory study of line manager experiences of managing employees with a particular type of disability or impairment, in this case a neurodiverse condition, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and Asperger syndrome.

The study in question set out to answer a range of questions related to line managing neurodiverse employees in a particular industry. Before proceeding to a broader discussion of the findings it should be noted that the current study is limited in several ways. For instance, the study was based on a limited range of neurodiverse conditions, and there was also a bias in the actual study towards dyslexia and Asperger syndrome over and above dyspraxia and ADHD. The findings were based on a limited range of line managers who are employed in a particular industry. A further limitation is that the voices of employees with a neurodiverse condition were absent in the current research. The voices of senior managers and staff representatives, as well as HRM, occupational health and external support specialists were also absent. That said, the current study should be noted for a range of key strengths. The first of these is the research is the first known empirical study of line management involvement in the management of employees with a neurodiverse condition, in the UK. Further, the study was characterised by being an exploratory, qualitative case study, with this approach allowing rich, colourful and varied insights into the everyday realities of a particular angle on line management. Indeed, such insights are also valuable in terms of raising a wide-range of further issues and unknowns and therefore guiding future research in this under-researched area of HRM.

In terms of gauging the extent to which the research questions have been answered is detailed as follows. Firstly, the findings suggest line managers possess or potentially have access to a wide-range of knowledge on neurodiverse conditions, with dyslexia awareness training appearing to be widely available in the UK transport industry. However, the findings also suggest the responsibility for

acquiring wider knowledge of neurodiverse conditions rests too much with the line manager, or that UK transport employers are slow to introduce training for line managers on the full breadth of neurodiverse conditions. What this suggests is that a lack of intervention at a strategic level of the organisation on such matters raises the prospects of line managers, perhaps unknowingly in most cases, adopting discriminatory practices towards neurodiverse employees. Secondly, the findings suggest line managers, on the whole, display mixed attitudes towards the notion of neurodiversity. This is not surprising given the newness of the term, yet in this particular case, it suggests there may be limitations to the depth of understanding, as well as tolerance towards, the emergent notion of considering employees with neurodiverse conditions in more positive terms than in days gone by. Again, it would appear a lack of strategic intervention in terms of attempts to shape organisational cultural attitudes towards employees with a neurodiverse condition is allowing medicalised views of conditions such as dyslexia to proliferate and as such have the potential to create and reproduce discriminatory attitudes. Thirdly, the findings suggest line managers' broader experiences of managing neurodiverse employees is very mixed. It is evident that line managers can make a very important and effective contribution in terms of the support an employee with a neurodiverse condition receives on a day-to-day basis, yet it is also evident that support of such kind has the potential to over-burden the line manager, especially in terms of time, resources, emotions and energy. As such, it is evident in the findings how the nature of the organisation and how the nature of the organisation affects the priorities of line managers represent further potential or pressure to discriminate against employees with a neurodiverse condition. Finally, the findings suggest line managers believe there is wider internal or external support out there should it be required, although the findings also suggest accessing support can be a frustrating experience with a level of rhetoric surrounding the level of support actually available to the line manager, as well as an extra burden placed on line managers who do not receive the right level of specialist support at the first time of asking. The findings as such highlight, paradoxically, how in some cases having formal and typically inappropriate support mechanisms may do little to prevent discrimination towards employees with a neurodiverse condition. Collectively, the findings also point towards in one sense the complexity of line managing an employee with a neurodiverse condition. However, the findings highlight how the line manager can

be so easily implicated as a key factor in the discrimination process when in reality it is the line manager who is constantly caught up in the wider failings of the organisation, as well as even wider factors, such as the failings of disability legislators. All that being said, it is also clear that all the issues to emerge from the findings require much more research.

In terms of relating the specific and broader findings of the current study to the much larger body of literature in which this study is situated, the following should suffice. At the broadest level, the findings provide further and particular evidence of the benefits and problems associated with the increased involvement of line managers in HRM. Indeed, the findings in one sense support the notion of increased line management involvement in HRM, yet in another further highlight how more needs to be done by organisations in terms of supporting the line manager in such situations. In a more specialised sense, the findings also add in a similar fashion to the literature that concerns itself with the increased line manager involvement in the management of employees with a disability or impairment. The contribution here is adding to the view that that line manager involvement in such situations is clearly pivotal in positive outcomes for both organisation and individual, yet it also the case that line managers are stretched even further in this particular part of their role than in their more general and mainstay HRM role. However, the contribution of the current research should, of course, be measured in terms of the contribution to the very limited literature concerning line manager involvement in managing employees with a neurodiverse condition. Given the limitations and the exploratory nature of the study the contribution here should, as such, be principally seen in terms of providing a basis and impetus for much more research on not just line management, neurodiversity and neurodiverse conditions, but also on neurodiversity and neurodiverse conditions in a more wider organisational context.

As a guide to researchers who may wish to go about creating what appears to be much needed new knowledge, the following recommendations are made. Where there is limited resources available to conduct more research on such issues attention should perhaps be directed towards attempts to replicate in some way the current research in different industries, variously sized enterprises, looking at the experiences of different occupational groups, both within and outwith the UK. Further, there would be, as such, scope to differently prioritise neurodiverse conditions as the basis of any such

study. Where there is perhaps far more resources available to conduct research on such issues, this would throw open the possibilities for a much broader utilisation of available research methodologies. Research on a grander scale will also open up the possibility of accessing the experiences and views of a broader range of parties to the process of supporting the employee with a neurodiverse condition in the work setting. There is much to be done here, but even a modest commitment to conducting more research on neurodiverse conditions in relation to work settings is likely to bring great dividends to all interested parties.

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| Neurodiverse condition | Description of neurodiverse condition |
|--|--|
| Dyslexia | Characterised by weaknesses in short-term memory, sequencing skills, and phonology. It affects not just reading and spelling, but also higher level literacy skills such as reading for comprehension, notetaking, and structured written work (Moody, 2009) |
| Dyspraxia | Difficulties with physical coordination, spatial judgement, organisational skills, and social skills (Moody, 2009) |
| Attentions deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) | A developmental disorder of self-control. It consists of problems with attention span, impulse control, and activity level (Barkley, 1995) |
| Asperger syndrome | A life-long developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people around them. It affects the individual's ability to understand and interpret non-verbal behaviour, motivations and expectations of others. People with Asperger syndrome often find it difficult to communicate, understand social relations and think in abstract and empathetic ways (Prospects/The National Autistic Society, 2005) |

Table One: Descriptions of Four Commonly Cited Neurodiverse Conditions

| Line manager | Neurodiverse condition(s) of employee |
|--------------|---|
| 1 | ADHD, Asperger syndrome, dyslexia |
| 2 | Asperger syndrome |
| 3 | Dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD |
| 4 | Asperger syndrome |
| 5 | Asperger syndrome |
| 6 | Dyslexia |
| 7 | Dyslexia |
| 8 | Dyslexia |
| 9 | Dyslexia |
| 10 | Asperger syndrome and dyslexia (both suspected) |
| 11 | Asperger syndrome, dyslexia and ADHD |
| 12 | Dyslexia |
| 13 | Asperger syndrome |
| 14 | Asperger syndrome |
| 15 | Dyslexia |
| 16 | Dyslexia |
| 17 | Dyslexia |
| 18 | Dyslexia |

Table Two: Line Managers and Employee Neurodiverse Conditions