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Going the Extra Mile: Managers and Supervisors as Moral Agents for Workers with Disability at Two Social Enterprises

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Article abstract

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Key findings demonstrate supervisors constantly have to reshape and reinterpret human resource management (HRM) policies and practices to exercise and extend moral agency. This phenomenon suggests contradictions between moral agency and ethical management practice within current HRM regimes. The key message of the paper is that HRM does not always support the ethical management of WWD.

Consequently, we question the ethical nature of contemporary HRM policy and practice for WWD, and argue for further research to unpack ethical ways to more effectively support WWD in the workplace. For WWD to be included at work, achieve life skills and their goals, managers and supervisors need to engage with their moral agency. Finally, we draw implications for management and employment relations theory and practice.

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KEYWORDS: disability, ethical management, human resource management, moral agency, social enterprises.

Introduction

This study examines the ethical management of workers with disabilities (WWD) in two Australian social enterprises. Employment for people with dis-

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abilities can be challenging as they often face discrimination and unfair treatment at the workplace (World Health Organization, 2011). The Australian Federal, State and Territory Governments have developed *The National Disability Strategy 2010-2020* (Australian Department of Human Services, 2017: 1), which identifies the need to: "increase access to employment opportunities as a key to improving economic security and personal well-being for people with disability". Despite various government initiatives to increase the employment of WWD, the employment participation rate of people with disabilities is 54 per cent as compared to those without disability at 83 per cent (ABS, 2012). Persons with mental health disability experience the highest unemployment rates at 19 per cent, followed by intellectual disability at 16 per cent, making them less likely relative to people from the general population to participate in the labour force (ABS, 2009).

Disability is defined by Van der Ploeg *et al.* (2004) as an incapacity that: "substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual" (p. 640), which may include physical, mental or intellectual disability. In this paper, we focus on workers with intellectual and mental health disabilities, given the current levels of discrimination and perceived challenges by managers associated with their employment and accommodation at the workplace (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2017). Fuller *et al.* (2000) describe a mental disability as one that affects "a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities" (p. 149), with the most severe symptoms being diagnosed as a mental/psychiatric illness, such as schizophrenia. A person with an intellectual disability has limitations both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviours such as social skills (Schalock *et al.*, 2007).

The employment relationship, with its legacy emphasis on notions of master and servant, influences the day-to-day management of all employees (Kaufman, 2015). This relationship has, at least historically, mostly been associated with the idea of subordination. Arguably, this relationship is made more complex when employing WWD given the increased power imbalance between these workers and managers, and the increased need to make accommodations and tailor individualized support for WWDs (Groschl, 2007; Fujimoto *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, despite legal and social obligations for organizations (Dass and Parker, 1999; Cox, 1993) to manage diversity at the workplace (Nemetz and Christensen, 1996), in practice, organizations do not always comply (Foster, 2007). In contrast to the classical view of the ER relationship, largely associated with industrial-age scholarship and associated notions of managerial prerogative and employee reactive means of remedying misaligned interests between capital and labour, there also exists an ethical-management counter-perspective. This latter view invokes the idea of employer moral obligation with respect to

workforce management including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, and health and safety (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014). Moreover, ethical considerations may also include the extent to which managers and supervisors adhere to formal human resource management (HRM) policies and practices (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2017), the equitable treatment of all employees irrespective of disability (Cook and Burke-Miller, 2015), and the imperative of high levels of individual and organizational performance (Dundon and Rafferty, 2018).

However, research has demonstrated that mainstream HRM does not adequately address the complexities that exist in the employment and management of WWD (Lerner *et al.*, 2004; MacDonald-Wilson *et al.*, 2002; Cook and Burke-Miller, 2015). HRM policies and practices may be inflexible when dealing with the idiosyncrasies of disability, such as developing appropriate performance expectations and the need for diverse and changing accommodations (Guest and Woodrow, 2012). For the ethical management of WWD to become a reality, we argue that all employment relations actors, including managers and supervisors across all hierarchical levels, must understand the needs and challenges of WWD at the workplace (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2017). Insofar as WWD employees are concerned, there is a third perspective of the employment relationship. This derives from evidence that such employees are at least as valuable as their peers when assessed using narrow measures of individual performance (Cimera, 2010; Lagerveld *et al.*, 2010). There is substantial evidence that WWD are often high performing workers and, when given a chance of employment, can make valuable contributions to the organization that, in-turn, may increase their self-worth and quality of life (Cimera, 2010; Lagerveld *et al.*, 2010; Hoque, Bacon and Parr, 2014). Such evidence diminishes the importance of notions of ethical management, but rather compels the analyst to view the phenomenon of WWD as a matter of competitive advantage. In this paper, we adopt a hybrid paradigm of the employment relationship—it is ethical to better accommodate the needs of WWD in the workplace because it is advantageous for business through reputational, marketing and branding effects of ethical management, as well as economic and social contributions of such a workforce.

Despite the potential benefits of the employment of WWD, there is substantial evidence that formal HRM policies and practices generally do not effectively take into consideration the diverse needs and accommodations of WWD (Fujimoto *et al.*, 2014; Cavanagh *et al.*, 2017). In this paper, underpinned by a hybrid conceptualization of the employment relationship, we examine how managers and supervisors use formal HRM policies and practices to ethically manage WWD in two social enterprises. This paper is guided by the following research questions: How do managers and supervisors ethically manage workers with disabilities in

the workplace? What role does formal HRM play in supporting managers and supervisors' ethical management of workers with disabilities? To answer these questions, our paper examines the role of key employment relations actors, including managers, supervisors and WWD. We underpin our study of the ethical management of WWD through the use of situated moral agency (SMA) (MacIntyre, 2007; Wilcox, 2012; Weaver, 2006). Contemporary authors offer a simple definition of "moral agency" as "the capacity to do right or wrong" (Gray and Wegner, 2009: 505). Wilcox (2012: 86) defines moral agency as the "agency exercised by organizational actors in the pursuit of ethical practice". The concept of 'Situated' deals with the constraining context (e.g. formal HRM policies and practices within two social enterprises) in which employment relations actors determine their ethical actions. Moral agency has two dimensions: the first is the "moral" and the philosophy underpinning what is right or wrong; the second refers to the "social" perspective of how one practices; for example, how a manager would behave towards employees (Wilcox, 2012). Moral agency is the active form of moral autonomy (McKenna and Tsahuridu, 2001) and is manifest as ethical action or inaction (Lowry, 2006). This framework is selected to examine our research questions, given the debate in the literature as to the extent to which ethical management is possible at all (Greenwood, 2002). The framework also examines whether managers and supervisors have the autonomy to act as moral agents in a business environment where the logic of the market has often reduced workers to a resource to be rationalized (Dundon and Rafferty, 2018; Kaufman, 2015).

This study contributes to management and employment relations literature in three ways. First, given the dearth of literature on the ethical management of WWD in contemporary workplaces (Cavanagh *et al*., 2016), our paper contributes to a better understanding of both the formal and informal management practices needed to support WWD in the workplace. Importantly, we do this through examining "lived experiences" of the employment relations actors and extend understandings of the hybrid and complex nature of the employment relationship. Second, we extend understandings of managers and supervisors as moral agents to better understand the processes of the ethical management of WWD at the workplace. Third, we contribute to a better understanding of the workplace interventions that enhance the participation and continued employment of this cohort of workers.

The paper is organized in the following way. The first section reviews the literature on HRM and ethical practice, followed by a justification of the methodological approach, and analysis and discussion of the findings. The paper concludes with a summary of the contributions of this study and recommendations for future research.

Workers with Disability

People with a disability experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment (World Health Organization, 2002-2004; Lerner *et al.*; 2004, Doctor *et al.*, 2005). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), disability and labour force participation of persons with a disability represents 2.2 million or 14.4 per cent of the population. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) was instituted to protect discrimination against people with disability. After a Productivity Commission Review (Review of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*) in 2004, the DDA was changed to further protect the equality and additional legislative protection of workers. Despite the progress in anti-discrimination legislation, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers* (SDAC) data indicate that people with disability are less likely to participate in the labour force (e.g. labour force participation rate for people with disability aged 15-64 years decreased from 54.9% in 1993 to 52.8% in 2012).

Given the challenges associated with open employment for WWD, social enterprises provide employment for this cohort of workers, and as not-for-profit organizations, their focus is on supporting their community of workers rather than profit seeking. The concept of a social enterprise is multifaceted, and provides services for individuals to gain social/life and work skills with the ultimate aim of employment (Weerawardena and Mort, 2006). We situate our study in two social enterprises.

The Ethical Management of Human Resources

Some management and employment relations scholars have questioned the extent to which the ethical management of workers is actually possible (Greenwood and Simmons, 2004; Beadle and Moore, 2006; Wilcox, 2012; Guest and Woodrow, 2012). Dundon and Rafferty (2018: 378) argue that in a "predatory regime of financial capitalism", the "role of HR [human resources]" becomes poised not as a "strategic business partner" or "employee champion", but as a "handmaiden of efficiency", required to push through coercive measures to extract greater shareholder value from its workforce.

Irrespective of the economic challenges of ethically managing human resources, organizations have a responsibility to operate within legislative employment requirements and negotiated employment relations agreements (e.g. enterprise bargaining agreements, see Roessler *et al.*, 2011; Cook and Burke-Miller, 2015; Foster, 2007). For example, the *Disability Discrimination Act* was enacted in 1992 to eliminate discrimination against people with disability and to ensure the rights of people with disability are protected (Parliament Australia, 2013). However, despite legislative interventions, substantial evidence demonstrates that WWD

are often excluded from employment (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2017), and when employed, often feel "isolated and excluded from organizational social networks" (Fujimoto *et al.*, 2014: 518). Fujimoto *et al.* (2014) argue that: "work-oriented inclusion processes have largely involved human resource management interventions, which have not been particularly effective in developing inclusive organizations and reaping economic benefits" (p. 518). Recent research has reported that the unethical treatment of WWD at the workplace may be symptomatic of managers' perceptions of WWD being poor performers or lacking the necessary competencies to be effective at work (Negri, 2009; Cimera, 2010). Roessler, Hurley and McMahon (2010) argue HR professionals are not always aware of prevention programs (for example, anti-discrimination) and interventions (promoting inclusion) that advance non-discriminatory work practices and flexible work schedules for WWD. Consequently, negative employer attitudes may exacerbate the failure of employment support programmes to promote the benefits of employing workers with intellectual and mental health disability (Luecking, Cuozzo and Buchanan, 2006).

Irrespective of the challenges of managing WWDs, there is evidence of their success in the workplace in which they report feelings of inclusion, well-being and high levels of achievement and performance (Meacham *et al.*, 2017; Meacham *et al.*, 2018; Yang and Konrad, 2011; De Gama, McKenna and Peticca-Harris, 2012). Meacham *et al.* (2017) studied workers with intellectual disabilities at two large Australian organizations and found that socialization and inclusive HRM practices and supportive managers (e.g. vocational support programs that emphasized inclusion) enabled WWD to achieve successful career paths. In another study of three Australian hotels, Cavanagh, Bartram and Shaw (2018) reported that ethically-oriented work practices that emphasized employee participation, high levels of supervisory and colleague support, and authentic work experiences enabled feelings of inclusion among WWD. Findings demonstrated that managing workers with intellectual disability in an 'ethical' way promoted greater social inclusion and self-reported well-being. These findings are broadly supportive of Wilcox (2012) who examined the moral agency of HR managers in a multinational enterprise. The author concluded that managers can be ethical, but may be in opposition to formal management policy and practice. He raises questions around general ethical practice and advocates the need for continuous cycles of reflection and discussion between management across hierarchies regarding how to improve ethical management practice in organizations.

Theoretical Framework

Given the conflicting evidence of the ethical management of human resources and the under-researched nature of disability employment, we examine how

managers and supervisors use formal HRM policies and practices to ethically manage WWD in two social enterprises. To do this, we extend Wilcox's (2012) conceptualization of 'situated moral agency' underpinned by MacIntyre's (2007) framework of 'moral agency'. This theoretical approach is selected because it offers a nuanced framework to examine the complex interplay between formal HRM policy and its interpretation and translation into practice by managers and supervisors with a vulnerable group of workers.

Situated Moral Agency

Social cognitive theory of morality has its origins in examining the learning process (Holt, 1933) and underpins the moral analysis and actions of an individual (Bandura, 2002). The theory asserts that individuals learn from observing and emulating others and is contingent upon the rewards or retributions for behaviours. Bandura's (1991, 2001, 2002) social-psychological perspective on moral agency has established that an individual's ethical practice is influenced by the organizational environment (e.g. 'situated') and the individual's notion of 'self'. Moral agency is a motivation for the moral identity of those exercising ethical practice (Weaver, 2006). Even though a manager's behaviour is governed and inhibited by organizational and legislative rules, his/her interpretation and implementation of such rules are guided by moral choices (MacIntyre, 2007; Lowry, 2006).

Wilcox's (2012) study found that HR managers' moral agency is supported by three mechanisms; first, through 'self-identification' "with institutional logics and the norms of what they see as 'professional' HRM, including the valuing of employees as people", which may function as a counterbalance to the logics of capitalism and labour rationalization (p. 93). It is through HR managers identifying with professional norms and logics that they can find an "alternative source of moral standards and identity that provides them with a sense of accountability to and for others" at the workplace (Wilcox, 2012: 93); second, through 'reflective relational spaces' (e.g. physical or virtual spaces) that: "provides to them through regular meetings among themselves and with other HR colleagues in the firm" (p. 93) an opportunity to discuss oppositional views to the dominant organizational logic; and third, through reflective relational spaces, HR managers can build a 'collective understanding' to "reinforce their professional norms and duties" (p. 93). These three processes are important because, collectively, they enable HR managers to enact their moral agency (Wilcox, 2012). We extend this work, beyond HR managers, to examine how operational managers and supervisors interpret and implement formal HRM policies as part of exercising moral agency to enable and support WWD.

In line with McIntyre (1999), we argue that, if employment relations actors are to engage with their moral agency, they require the capacity for self-reflection

and critical examination of organizational and managerial practice. However, through 'compartmentalization', where "each distinct sphere of social activity comes to have its own role structure governed by its own specific norms in relative independence of other such sphere" (McIntyre, 1999: 322), managers and supervisors can find it difficult to "disengage and scrutinize the values, norms and expectations of their roles". Wilcox (2012) argues that this characteristic of contemporary organizations renders critical reflection and questioning organizational logics extremely challenging for managers. Within this context, managerial behaviour is often scripted to reflect the dominant logic within the organization that "preclude[s] recognition of the moral dimension" of organizational decisions (p. 88). It is within this context that we situate our examination of two social enterprises to examine the role of moral agency in explaining how formal HRM is interpreted and used by managers and supervisors to ethically manage WWD.

Methodological Approach

This research is based on a case study approach at two social enterprises in Victoria, Australia. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university, informed consent signed by each participant and participant information statements provided to all participants (Glesne, 2015). A case study approach was considered the most appropriate because it focuses on the socially constructed nature of reality to understand social phenomena, ontological and epistemological conditions in context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) which, in this case, is focused on the management of WWD. Qualitative data were collected through participant interviews and focus groups. The researchers relied on the decisions of the CEOs and

TABLE 1

Research Participants and Data Collection Method

Research Participants	METROPOLITAN Research Site No. 1 No. of participants	RURAL Research Site No. 2 No. of participants	Total	Method
CEO	1	1	2	Semi-structured Interviews
Managers	3	6	9	Semi-structured Interviews
Supervisors	7	5	12	Semi-structured Interviews
WWD	7	8	15	Focus Group 1
WWD	5	8	13	Focus Group 2
WWD	4	7	11	Focus Group 3
	27	35	62	

managers determining that management and supervisors could be interviewed, and WWD would attend focus groups.

Research Sites and Participants

Social enterprises were selected for the study because they provide employment for people with disabilities and their main mission is to serve a community (Barraket and Archer, 2010; Owen *et al.*, 2015; Parmenter, 2011; Vidal, 2005). According to Glesne (2015), a research site should be selected based upon the purpose of the study and by taking into consideration a number of factors (e.g. the place, time, costs involved, disruption of the researcher's presence, the 'gate-keepers', the participants and how the site/s will potentially benefit from the study). Two research sites (social enterprises), located in a metropolitan (research site 'A') district and a regional (research site 'B') area of Victoria, were chosen based on their business ethos; they each provide a service to the community by employing WWD. Therefore, the research sites were selected based on the area of research (Glesne, 2015), and, in this case, the area of interest is 'social enterprises' and the ways in which they manage WWD.

Research site 'A' is a social enterprise based in a metropolitan area of Victoria, Australia. This site employs over one hundred people in the commercial cleaning sector. The organization trains and retains employment for people with mental health and intellectual disabilities. For the purpose of this study, we did not seek detailed information about the specific disability of WWD. Site 'A' is a subsidiary of an employment company and operates successfully in profit, and has received numerous community awards. The management of Site 'A' advised us which workers were suitable for the study.

Research site 'B' is a social enterprise based in Regional Victoria, Australia, employing one hundred and five people mainly in the manufacturing industry, including workers with psychological and intellectual disabilities. The organization prepares gluten free foods, and offers services in repackaging, scanning, mail house, and recycled timber furniture. It also offers safety products and garden services (although gardening is now almost obsolete). They operate two factories located within ten minutes of each other. This organization is known for their work with WWD and cost effective labour solutions for companies within the region with over 30 years of experience. As with the other site, we did not seek detailed information about the specific disability of workers. The management of Site 'B' advised us which workers were suitable for the study. Similar to research site 'A', it has also received numerous awards for its contribution to the community.

The following table provides details of the participants and the research data collection method. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the study. As previ-

ously noted, WWD have a range of mental health and intellectual disabilities, but it was outside the scope of the study to seek details on particular disabilities.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved a series of forty-five minute semi-structured interviews with CEOs, managers and supervisors. Focus groups (a qualitative research technique in which a small group of people are asked questions about their experiences and opinions on a particular phenomenon) were also organized for WWD to establish their views on management and supervision. We adopted this methodology as it gives us a rich and multi-faceted understanding of possible answers to our research questions. Through triangulating the experiences and opinions of managers, supervisors and WWD, we are able to develop a greater understanding on the ethical management of human resources. When we made contact with prospective participants, we outlined the purpose of the research and assured each of the participants the research study was a voluntary exercise (Schensul, 1999). As participation was voluntary, participants were advised they could exit at any point during interviews or the focus group discussions.

The interview and focus group data were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo, following the steps of thematic content analysis (Weber, 1985). The initial step was to generate a coding framework and a detailed codebook. Initially, an *a priori* coding framework was established based on a moral agency theoretical framework (MacIntyre, 1999). The transcripts of each interview and focus groups were coded independently by two coders until saturation. Two coders were used to ensure the reliability of the coding framework. Where there was disagreement between the coders, a third rater was employed to finalize the coding.

Findings

Data were collected from two social enterprises and various themes were identified. These include the ways in which the management of the two social enterprises demonstrate their support for WWD, strategies for social enterprises, the challenges for management, supervisors' views on management and relative compliance of HRM rules. There were also themes around management's personal connections with disability that create deeper understandings, as well as managers and supervisors finding ways to support WWD. The researchers were aware that espoused claims by the CEO and managers would have to be supported by WWD perspectives.

CEOs/Managers views on management

The CEOs and managers were asked to conceptualize the employment relationship by describing the HRM policies and practices in the organization relative to WWD. The data illustrate that managers are aware of what they have to do to maintain standards and at the same time support WWD. The CEOs and managers all explained how they allow extra time for WWD to learn a task and complete the daily jobs:

> We have employee relations, well above the supported standards… (Karla, CEO, Site 'B')

> Our support … we have the higher-level managers that look after the business affairs and we manage the staff below them. (Martin, Manager, Site 'B')

> We treat our WWD equally. Give them proper pay and work hours. Train them … induction … tell them their rights … performance review is done every 12 months. (Kerri, Manager, Site 'B')

There were instances where the size and structure of the organization had a negative impact on the policies and procedures involving WWD:

> As we get bigger, new layers of management, structures are needed … with our HR department [parent company] … frequently we have issues between HR requirements and our organization. (George, CEO Site 'A')

> With policies and procedures, we have some overriding procedures for WWD … so the HRM practices have to go around HRM of the parent company's procedures, performance and policies. (Thomas, Manager, Site 'A')

> Unfortunately, the HR policies and procedures from the outside organization … they don't allow many things for us to operate … WWD have to be more supported … we have to be more tolerant … (Nicholas, Manager, Site 'A')

It was apparent that one of the organizations (Site 'A') is disadvantaged due to the policies and procedures of their parent company when Nicholas commented that: "… they [parent HR Company] don't allow many things for us to operate". Nevertheless, in these statements it was evident that management has to be flexible and sometimes "bend HR rules" to accommodate the needs of WWD. Joe (Manager, Site 'B') summed up what all of the managers concur that managers have to "keep the WWD in front of everyone"; essentially, the message was that WWD should not be hidden. If WWD are prominent in the workplace, then it is more likely there will be community discussion, and governments and organizations will have to find ways to better accommodate these workers.

Strategy of the social enterprises

The CEOs and managers were also asked how HRM practices are linked to their respective organization's strategy. Mason, Manager at Site 'B', summed

up the sentiments of most managers: "… we're very people focused … the CEO … makes sure that we don't forget that." The managers were confident in their statements about what they have to do to take into account the needs of WWD:

> The mission is that we have to employ WWD and look after their care and wellbeing … that is part of our strategic plan. (Karla, CEO, Site 'B')

> Good management with right support … most positive in the interactions, everyone is inclusive … this is a harmonious workplace and there is transparency. (Joe, Manager, Site 'B').

One of the managers from Site 'A', Julie, noted how important it is for the organization's strategy to always strive for "better … bigger contracts", aim to "remove the stigma", engage in education and build better understandings about ways to work with employees with disability.

Challenges for management

Most of the managers talked about daily challenges, which were noted by Thomas, Manager, Site 'A': "… the policies … they're the disability standards that we have. Like the training records/ weekly support staff to meeting with the guys". One of the bigger challenges for Site 'A' appears to be due to the nature of their relationship with a HRM parent company. Whereas, at Site 'B', the challenge appears to be how the organization practices ethically in terms of paying WWD:

> HR policies set out by a parent company are not in congruence with supported employment. WWD may not even have the money to come to work because they have to pay for public transport … give them more slack." (Nicholas, Manager, Site 'A')

> HR from the parent company sometimes questions us why we employ them when they aren't good. We put them through Certs 2 and 3 'Cleaning'. Our HR [parent company] people don't know what supported employment's about. (Roberto, Manager, Site 'A')

> … the government … they should be looking at the money aspect. We need to look at quality and not quantity … they're paying less … WWD are working and we need to be giving them the right money to live on. (Adam, Manager, Site 'B')

> Previously … my focus was on the business only. This [social enterprise] is more about the individual's self-achievement and job enthusiasm, which is second to none. Different commitment. They [management] wants to support. (Joe, Manager, Site 'B')

Managers also discussed less demanding challenges with workers and how they help them manage their weekly pay. Therese, Manager, Site 'B' explained: "… on the finance side of things, we offer them short-term advances. We also

help them with the bills that they cannot pay … when a big bill comes in, they just struggle to handle it. We help them and they don't have to struggle so hard – financially." Kerri, Manager, Site 'B' told us about the constant training they have to engage in to better manage WWD: "Through the organization's leadership program … eight of our staff were given the opportunity to be leaders and [they now] have more authority ... learn how to deal with peers and taking actions and owning the responsibility."

Supervisors' views on management

From the supervisors' perspectives, working at the two social enterprises, HRM is concerned with the decisions that organizations make that impact on WWD. Where possible, they exercised respect for formal HRM and it was evident in the supervisors' talk that their support for WWD appears to be a balance of management confines, following guidelines and ethical practice:

> … our priority is to meet the production deadlines and supervising our employees … I deal with their personal issues, like court orders, counselling appointments, rental assistance (Jennifer, Supervisor, Site 'B')

> We follow strict guidelines and structured a way to do things that adhere to how the group does things. (Lola, Supervisor, Site 'B')

> Overarching frame. This is a dividing framework that we adhere to. Given by framework that sets the platform. We work from this but it's more about doing the right thing. (Silvia, Supervisor, Site 'A')

Compliance with management – from the supervisors

We found evidence that some of the supervisors felt change, in terms of adhering to new management rules, was complex. For the supervisors, a management decision rather than exercising practice might be appropriate for WWD. Supervisors were clearly aware of potential solutions outside management restrictions, which were expressed in terms of the way they work:

> Management pay my wages and you cannot just do it your own way … I have to take orders and listen to my team leaders. (Adam, Supervisor, Site 'B')

> There's a change in culture. Motivation is the workplace; it is a new place to work. We want motivation to be the key factor in this place. (Jennifer, Supervisor, Site 'B')

> People strategy. If a WWD is not feeling well … we will even go as far as suspending the program for a period until they feel better … may even last as long as over 12 months … At the end of 13 weeks … we prepare the time for their work to be assessed by the Government agency DEWA. (Rose, Supervisor, Site 'A')

Personal connections – supervisors' deeper understandings

At each of the organizations, there were supervisors who have had personal experience with serious illnesses and were able to express how their personal experiences impacted on how they understand WWD:

> I became a diabetic … and it hit me and that changed the world for me. It took me 3 years to accept ... I have to live with that … I know the challenges WWD have to live with. (Adam, Supervisor, Site 'B')

> I had cerebral palsy as a kid … I had some bad psychosis … I'm wheelchair bound … my priority is to make sure it's a safe environment for WWD to work so that they don't get hurt physically and mentally … I know their issues on another level. (Frank, Supervisor, Site 'B')

> I had my own business … it was a cleaning and gardening business… my health was affected. My work life was always cleaning. I fell off the roof and had the skull cracked … you don't realize how you're travelling until it hits you … create a life for them and they become accountable. (Aaron, Supervisor, Site 'A')

> I have a learning disability … we take a chance on them [WWD] … not just look at the disability, but the ability and their potential. (Frances, Supervisor, Site 'B')

Adapting, finding different ways to work with WWD

There was shared understanding amongst the supervisors about fostering the work experiences of WWD. Sarah, Supervisor, Site 'A' expressed the most effective way to work with people with disability was to have them "buddy with someone who is a role model." The other participant supervisors talked about how they found ways to support WWD:

> This is all about human nature behaviour. I used to train martial arts and by training … martial arts is … a lot about respect, no matter who you are. I knew their behaviour. This then helps to train them and sometimes you have to be an actor. (Adam, Supervisor, Site 'B')

> One of the workers … struggled in staying on a task … we started on the nursery, we decided to give him work to pot the plants … he loved it… started with 500 and worked his way to 6000 pots a day. The best part of it, all the seedlings grew perfectly well. (Mason, Supervisor, Site 'B')

> Training in bullying at the workplace, about life skills, which we have to capture every month. We have to make sure that they know and … making the workplace safe for everyone. (Bronte, Supervisor, Site 'B')

Throughout the interviews with supervisors, they expressed how happy they were when they could see a change in each WWD's life. Olivia, Supervisor, Site 'A'

summed up their overall sentiments when reflecting on the change they see in the workers over time "his hands used to shake but today he is independent."

Going beyond to help WWD

In the supervisors' talk, we found evidence of defying formal HRM and going beyond managing the functions of the organization. Effective management of WWD appears to require supervisors to extend what they would be expected to do in any other organization. It was evident that their role as supervisors is much more than the supervision of WWD to complete their work tasks:

> … girl with OCD … she's supposed to work 7.45 to 4.30 but she goes through her routine … cleaning and washing her clothes … cannot come to work on time … we wash her uniform and deliver it to her … now she's an excellent worker … great attendance. (Jennifer, Supervisor, Site 'B')

One of the managers also explained to us how important it is to make a difference to the lives of their workers:

> This guy … no one wanted to work with him … came from a background of paranoia … was too anxious and we had to hold him by the hands. We have changed his conversations … to talking about 'footy'. Then, he said: "I like talking about this". He's now on open employment-job at a local paper. (Thomas, Manager, Site 'A')

Management from the perspectives of WWD

In the focus groups there was discussion around how WWD perceive how they are managed at work. The perceived level of organizational support for WWD was evident in the workers' talk:

> Management is a person employer and not an industry and we're not just a number to them. (Simone, WWD, Site 'B')

> Work's like a team … get on well … when we work we can talk … I got my forklift licence here and learning how whole lot of other things you can do with the forklift. (Harry, WWD, site 'B' Male).

> You can achieve your skills for open employment … builds up my confidence … many social BBQs, footy tipping, the movies … people to meet up and accept us ... recognition, independence … sense of accomplishment. No one to tell you that you can't. (Robbie, WWD, Site 'B')

> Actually treat us right …with respect. Treat us as part of the community. We feel part of a big family. Praise us … give us a pat for a good job … my work is appreciated. (Ryan, WWD, 'Site 'B')

> We have 'tool box' meetings … tackling the problems. Any concerns we have or suggestions. The boss gives good ideas and discusses the issues. (Charlie, WWD Site 'A')

We are equals. Not seen as a WWD. Give us something to do … purposely to support you. (Mick, WWD, Site 'A')

Great working here, more than anywhere else. That's why we stay longer. (Claire, WWD, Site 'A')

In their talk, the workers appear to accept that management appreciates their work and their views about work. WWD are not afraid to ask questions or express their concerns.

Effective management and benefits of work for WWD

Management support for WWD was exercised with integrity and they acted as moral agents to ensure the workers experienced the advantages they may not have experienced elsewhere. Throughout all of the focus group meetings, management practices in the two organizations appeared to be related to benefits for WWD:

Money. Getting paid. Annual leave. Holidays. Christmas break-up parties … work hard to save up for a mortgage. (Bret, WWD, Site 'B')

I'm happy with the pay … pay cheque. On a hot day I can go 5 times and get water … good job!' (Benjie, WWD, Site 'B')

Appreciate … We get rewards—telling you that you do a good job … I got employee of the month. (Andy, WWD, Site 'B')

Team leaders [supervisors] applaud you … like employee of the month. You get a pat on the back. They tell you, you did a good job … don't yell at you.' (Chris, WWD, Site 'A')

They [management] talk to me and say: "Thanks". They have a conversation and they're wishing you well on your work … say: "We appreciate you." (Karl, WWD Site 'A')

I know I have done a good job, and someone says to me: "Nice cleaning", it says someone appreciates me. (Charmaine, WWD, Site 'A')

These statements indicate that WWD acknowledge the praise afforded by management and supervisors and recognize the appreciation for their efforts.

Discussion

In this paper, underpinned by a hybrid conceptualization of the employment relationship, we examined how managers and supervisors extend beyond formal HRM policies and practices to ethically manage WWD employed at two social enterprises. Our findings demonstrate that the ethical management of human resources in the two social enterprises is characterized by a constant, flexible interplay between what should happen (formal HRM) and what actually happens

when managing (i.e. informal implementation of HRM and day-today management) WWD. A key finding from our study is that the role of the moral agent (MacIntyre, 1999, 2007) is critical to the ethical management of WWD. We demonstrate the efficacy of Wilcox's (2012) three mechanisms associated with moral agency and enhance our understanding of the interplay between formal HRM policies and the way in which managers and supervisors ethically manage workers with disability at the workplace. In the proceeding discussion, we provide further synthesis of findings, theoretical contributions and directions for future research.

First, the CEOs, managers and supervisors, as moral agents, were mindful of what Wilcox (2012) refers to as 'self-identification' of overarching HRM policy but, in the reality of the day-to-day management of WWD, they could not ignore their challenges and their human frailties. Our findings demonstrated that through their professional norms and lived experience working with WWD, managers and supervisors exercised moral agency by often overlooking the prescriptive nature of formal HRM to connect with the workers on a human level. Our findings demonstrate the problematic nature of prescriptive HRM in that it does not take into consideration the idiosyncratic and complex challenges of the day-to-day management of workers with mental health and intellectual disability (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2017). For example, if workers were to be managed in accordance with HR policies and practices of the organizations, they may not maintain their employment due to their taking too long to perform a task, lack of focus, not attending work on time, and underperformance. However, given that managers and supervisors genuinely care about the welfare of WWD, they take extra time in their training and development, performance management and their overall welfare. In their 'reflective relational spaces' (Wilcox, 2012), managers were able to connect with each other and discuss their challenges and most appropriate solutions for the day-to-day management of WWD. They challenged organizational logics (formal HRM policy) through their discussion indicating that WWD "have to be more supported" and that managers and supervisors "have to be more tolerant". Through 'collective understandings' they were able to "reinforce their professional norms and values" to reinterpret formal HRM policy by often overriding or ignoring it to 'ethically' manage WWD. Through 'the collective and mutual reinforcing' (Wilcox, 2012) of organizational norms within the scope of their roles, managers and supervisors consistently enact their moral agency.

Second, our study concurs with Wilcox (2012) that formal HRM often fails to promote ethical practice. In this study, we found that HRM can constrain how WWD are managed at work, which was evidenced in the data from Site 'A'. There were clear tensions between Site 'A' and the parent company that administers their formal HRM policies. Nicholas (manager, Site 'A') made it clear that

"they [parent company] don't allow many things for us to operate". The managers at Site 'B' did not appear to have the same challenges as Site 'A' with respect to the rigid enforcement of formal HRM. One possible explanation is that HRM at Site 'B' is administered on site. Managers spoke of HRM and acknowledged the rules, and whilst in reality they are an inhibiting force, they had a caveat: "they [management] want to support [WWD]."The CEO of Site 'B', Karla is very supportive of formal HRM and explained that the strategic approach was to ensure "job satisfaction and that's part of our strategic plan". We argue that to ensure 'job satisfaction' and the ethical management of WWD, managers and supervisors need to prioritize the welfare and support of WWD rather than rigidly implementing formal HRM policies.

Third, our study demonstrated the diverse ways in which managers and supervisors acted as moral agents beyond formal HRM policy. For example, participant supervisors taught WWD life skills and how to budget for holidays, find common interests such as "football" to connect with a worker, and assign repetitive tasks to help focus a worker. Moral agency was also demonstrated through another example in which supervisors would wash the uniform of a worker with obsessive compulsive disorder so she could arrive to work on time. The positive consequence is that the worker, who may once have not turned up to work, is now reported to be an "excellent worker" with "great attendance". If the supervisors had not acted as moral agents, and found a way to manage this worker, then it would be impossible for her to maintain employment. It was significant, but not surprising, to find that those in management who have experienced personal hardship and health issues report deeper understandings of the issues for WWD. There was authenticity in Karla's (CEO, Site 'B') response when she explained how she appreciates her own growth from "depression" to "confidence". Supervisors in general expressed how they exercise morality and genuinely "know the challenges WWD have to live with" and how they consider "the ability and their [workers'] potential" rather than the "disability".

Fourth, managers and supervisors did, at times, find it difficult to balance their moral agency with the realities of operating a commercial business (Greenwood, 2002; Wilcox, 2012). Our findings raise some important issues about what is actually meant by disability since the study reveals that managers in some instances have to "fudge" performance criteria to override formal HRM policies and practices when they want to exercise "moral agency". This raises a number of questions as to what extent are there limits to such moral agency. And, to what extent is it acceptable for managers and supervisors to knowingly misrepresent the work performance of WWD in the name of wellbeing and inclusion? Is lying not unethical? It is here that we situate our contribution to the management and employment relations literature. Consequently, if HRM policies and practices are

rigidly enforced, then supporting workers with disability is a near impossibility. We develop this contribution below.

Fifth, a strength of our approach was giving voice to WWD and examining how they interpret their work experiences. The workers all acknowledged the positive management and supervisor support when they used words such as "telling you that you do a good job", "applaud you", "you get a pat on the back" and they "don't yell at you." This was evidence that supported what the CEO and managers conveyed about how they are inclusive in the management of WWD. The workers were also aware that in other jobs, they may not have the same experience. Robbie from Site 'B' depicted the sentiments of most WWD when he said there was no one "to tell you that you can't". There were numerous examples of the impact of moral agency (Bandura, 2002; MacIntyre, 1999) through the "intentional and extended moral actions" of managers and supervisors.

Theoretical contributions

Our study makes theoretical contributions to management and employment relations literature. We advance understandings of moral agency in the employment of WWD. Findings demonstrate the need for managers and supervisors to continually, and in extended ways, act as moral agents to support WWD. Moral agents guided by their re-interpretation of formal HRM based on the needs of WWD may, in fact, be unethical as they often need to accept poor performance, late attendance and even lie to maintain the employment of WWD. This raises the question as to what extent a manager or a supervisor can act as a moral agent whilst they need to lie to promote the 'ethical' treatment of WWD. This leads us to challenge the utility and ethical nature of conventional HRM policies and practices to support WWD and the need to develop alternative models of HRM to more effectively and ethically manage WWD (Meacham *et al.*, 2017; 2018). We argue, in line with Wilcox (2012), that the development of alternative models of HRM for WWD needs to be underpinned by key aspects of moral agency—that is through continuous cycles of reflection and discussion between management across hierarchies regarding how to improve ethical management practice in organizations. This is a fruitful avenue for further research.

Our study demonstrates the utility of understanding the employment relationship through a hybrid approach in which, although pressures of managerial prerogative and the misaligned interests between capital and labour persist, there also exists an ethical-management counter-perspective (Kaufman, 2015). Managers and supervisors clearly valued WWD as an important vehicle to achieve the strategic goals of the business, but also valued them as human beings and friends. The employment relationship is much more than just a master and servant relationship bound by the pressures of capitalism, but also a place where

human beings can find purpose, meaning and dignity (Meacham *et al.*, 2018). Our study has shown that managers and supervisors can act as moral agents and even contradict the imperatives of capitalism and the desire to extract extraordinary contributions from workers. We recommend researchers conduct further studies with WWD across various other organizational types in different industrial sectors with different employment relations contexts.

Conclusion

The ethical management of WWD requires managers and supervisors to act as moral agents and re-interpret formal HRM policy to support the day-to-day management of WWD. We question the ethical nature of contemporary HRM policy and practice for WWD, and argue for further research to unpack ethical ways to more effectively support WWD in the workplace. Through Wilcox's (2012) three mechanisms that promote moral agency, we have shown that managers and supervisors do not simply act as moral agents, but they extend their actions to connect with workers as human beings and friends. For WWD to be included at work, achieve life skills and their goals, managers and supervisors need to engage with their moral agency.

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SUMMARY

Going the Extra Mile: Managers and Supervisors as Moral Agents for Workers with Disability at Two Social Enterprises

This study examines the ethical management of workers with disability (WWD) employed at two social enterprises in Australia. Viewed largely through the spectrum of institutionally-based conflict in the employment relationship, this research draws on a framework of situated moral agency (Wilcox, 2012) to establish the ways in which WWD are afforded opportunities to engage in work and how managers and supervisors practise situated moral agency at the workplace. A qualitative case study approach is used with 62 participants through semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

Key findings demonstrate supervisors constantly have to reshape and reinterpret human resource management (HRM) policies and practices to exercise and extend moral agency. This phenomenon suggests contradictions between moral agency and ethical management practice within current HRM regimes. The key message of the paper is that HRM does not always support the ethical management of WWD.

Consequently, we question the ethical nature of contemporary HRM policy and practice for WWD, and argue for further research to unpack ethical ways to

more effectively support WWD in the workplace. For WWD to be included at work, achieve life skills and their goals, managers and supervisors need to engage with their moral agency. Finally, we draw implications for management and employment relations theory and practice.

KEYWORDS: disability, ethical management, human resource management, moral agency, social enterprises.

RÉSUMÉ

Déployer un effort supplémentaire: gestionnaires et superviseurs en tant qu'agents moraux vis-à-vis les travailleurs avec handicap dans deux entreprises sociales

Cette étude examine la gestion éthique des travailleurs avec handicap (TAH) employés dans deux entreprises sociales en Australie. Prenant appui sur la relation d'emploi, cette recherche s'inspire du cadre théorique de l'agence morale locale (Wilcox, 2012) pour établir de quelle manière les TAH se voient offrir des possibilités de s'engager dans leur travail, ainsi que comment les gestionnaires et les superviseurs mettent de l'avant les principes de l'action morale située (en anglais, *situated moral agency*) dans leur milieu de travail. Pour ce faire, nous avons eu recours à une étude de cas qualitative auprès de 62 participants au moyen d'entretiens semi-structurés et de groupes de discussion.

Les principales observations sont à l'effet que les superviseurs doivent constamment remodeler et réinterpréter les politiques et les pratiques de gestion des ressources humaines (GRH) afin de mieux exercer et étendre leurs pratiques d'action morale. Ce faisant, nous trouvons des contradictions entre l'action morale et les pratiques de gestion éthique dans les régimes actuels de GRH. Le message-clé de l'article est que la GRH ne soutient pas toujours la gestion éthique de TAH.

Par conséquent, nous remettons en question la nature éthique des politiques et pratiques contemporaines de GRH envers les TAH et plaidons en faveur de la poursuite de recherches afin de découvrir des moyens éthiques permettant de soutenir plus efficacement les TAH en milieu de travail. Si l'on veut que les TAH se sentent intégrés dans leur travail, acquièrent les compétences de la vie courante et atteignent leurs objectifs, les gestionnaires et les superviseurs doivent s'engager davantage au niveau de leur action morale. En conclusion, nous dégageons les implications pour la théorie et la pratique en matière de gestion et de relations de travail.

MOTS-CLÉS: handicap, gestion éthique, gestion des ressources humaines, action morale, entreprises sociales.

RESUMEN

Esforzarse más y más: gerentes y supervisores como actores morales con respecto a los trabajadores con discapacidades en dos empresas sociales

Este estudio examina la gestión ética de los casos de trabajadores con discapacidad (TCD) empleados en dos empresas sociales en Australia. Visto más ampliamente a través del espectro de conflictos de base institucional en la relación laboral, esta investigación se inspira del cuadro teórico del discernimiento moral contextualizado (*situated moral agency*) (WIlcox, 2012) para examinar de qué manera los TCD disponen de oportunidades para participar en el trabajo y cómo los gerentes y supervisores ponen en práctica el discernimiento moral contextualizado en el lugar de trabajo. Un enfoque cualitativo de estudio de caso es utilizado con 62 participantes mediante entrevistas semi-estructuradas y *focus groups*.

Los resultados principales demuestran que los supervisores deben constantemente remodelar y reinterpretar las políticas y las prácticas de gestión de recursos humanos (GRH) para ejercer y desplegar el discernimiento moral. Este fenómeno sugiere contradicciones entre la intervención moral y las prácticas de gestión éticas con los regímenes actuales de GRH. El mensaje clave de este artículo es que la GRH no siempre apoya la gestión ética de los casos de TCD.

Por consecuencia, se cuestiona la naturaleza ética de las políticas y prácticas de GRH respecto a los casos de TCD y se aboga por una mayor investigación para descubrir formas éticas que apoyen más eficazmente los TCD en el lugar de trabajo. Para impulsar la integración de TCD en el trabajo, la obtención de competencias de vida y el logro de sus objetivos, los gerentes y supervisores deben implicarse con su discernimiento moral. Para terminar, se formulan implicaciones respecto a la gestión y respecto a la teoría y practica de relaciones laborales.

PALABRAS CLAVES: discapacidad, gestión ética, gestión de recursos humanos, discernimiento moral, empresas sociales.