



LEARNING AS WORK: Teaching and Learning Processes in Contemporary Work Organisations

Family Metaphors and Learning Processes in a
Restaurant Chain

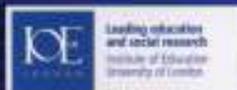
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Learning as Work Research Paper, No. 18
July 2008

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ABSTRACT

Previous research on Human Resource Management (HRM) in hospitality has argued that the nature of the service encounter determines the type of management controls deployed. So, where the service encounter is standardized, organizations rely on external bureaucratic controls while organizations whose service offer is customized use normative controls given their greater reliance on front line staff for service delivery. This argument is underpinned by the notion of “best fit” between competitive strategies and HRM style. However, this notion is limiting because it does not take into consideration broader sectoral issues that mediate the relationship between service offer and types of control. This paper addresses this limitation through a case study of a “McDonaldized” restaurant chain in the UK. Contrary to the above argument, the evidence shows that the company employed a family-based type of control which aimed to address the perennial issue of high labour turnover which is common in hospitality. The relative success of normative control in this case is explained by the fact that it did not co-exist with other, more militaristic forms of control as is often the case in fast-food outlets.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early '80s the managerialist literature was interested in the contribution of corporate culture to organizational performance (Deal and Kennedy 1982, Peters and Waterman 1982). However, since the early 1990s there has been a stream of research that has aimed to develop a more critical view of the impact of cultural/normative control on employee subjectivity (e.g. see Willmott 1993). It is often maintained that in comparison to traditional forms of bureaucratic control, normative control is more pervasive in its effects (Hales 1993). It, therefore, transforms “each employee into a self-regulating, self-policing subject, one who is almost unable to achieve any political, critical or moral detachment from his/her employers’ power practices” (Gabriel 1999, p.180).

A sub-theme in these debates examines the exercise of normative control through the use of the “company-as-family” metaphor and/or a discourse of “fun at work”. Although assessments on the effects of this type of cultural control vary, with some studies confirming the above picture of the colonization of employee subjectivity (Casey 1999) and others pointing to possible sources of resistance (Fleming 2005), this paper addresses a different issue. It aims to connect the discussion on “family and fun” based control with the debate around the notion of “best fit” between HRM approaches and competitive strategy (Schuller and Jackson 1987, Schuller 1989, Storey and Sisson 1993, Legge 1995). Its empirical focus is the UK hospitality sector. More specifically, we argue that family themed control can be prominent in McDonaldized (Ritzer, 1993) service organizations, competing on cost, as they seek to improve their employee retention rates. This finding contrasts with existing research (Lashley and Taylor, 1998) which assumes

that internal, normative controls are only exercised by organizations emphasizing quality and customised service, while outlets that offer a “standardised” service are assumed to rely on external, tight bureaucratic controls.

However, before focusing on the empirical site of our research, we look briefly at the broader literature to ascertain what the evidence reveals with regard to the rationale of employing normative control in different workplace environments. Thus, research on high tech firms and consultancies has shown that cultural control wrapped around themes of “family and fun” aims, in some cases, to strengthen the employees’ identification with the organization at the expense of airing individual concerns related to work anxiety (Casey 1999). In other cases, it aims to secure the extension of working time at the expense of social life to ensure a high standard of performance in a competitive environment (Grugulis et al. 2000). By contrast, research on settings such as call centres and DIY stores has provided evidence for the adoption of normative control to address the monotonous nature of work (Fleming 2005), while also ensuring high standards of customer service (Redman and Mathews 2002).

With regard to research in the hospitality sector, one would expect that the relatively poor working conditions (leading to high turnover rates, see Iverson and Deery 1997) and the requirement for customer service would be the primary reason for drawing on family and fun discourses. The latter, in particular, is evident in research on the use of normative control by high quality UK and US hotels (McDonald and Liff, 2007). More specifically, these organizations employed a paternalistic management style (whereby staff were viewed as a family with male managers assuming the role of the father of the clan) in order to elicit employee commitment to the emotional work required to produce a

high quality customer service. McDonald and Liff (2007) distinguish paternalism from soft HRM practices, considering it a more “affordable” way of securing commitment. However, if we view normative control as one aspect of the overall HRM approach a service organization adopts, this research provides an implicit link with the aforementioned literature on the fit between competitive strategy and HRM styles.

In particular, their evidence seems to confirm the suggestion that there is a link between service archetypes and HRM styles; namely the fact that greater reliance on front-line workers for the delivery of customer service is accompanied by a management style which employs internal rather than external bureaucratic controls. With the exception of the work by Hoque (1999, 2000) which also focuses on high quality hotels, research on hospitality has tended to overlook how the types of service might shape an organization’s HRM approach. Lashley and Taylor’s work (1998) develops a four fold typology constituting a heuristic device that can be used by future research to examine these links. This paper focuses on this model to contribute to the above debate. The next section discusses their model in more detail and it is here we outline our research contribution.

SERVICE ARCHETYPES AND HRM STYLES

Lashley and Taylor (1998, p.155), see “a hierarchy of effects that flows from the strategic level down and through to the functional and tactical levels”. In other words, the organization’s mission statement determines its competitive strategy, such as targeting a specific market segment and positioning itself accordingly. This, in turn, informs planning at the HRM and operational levels. According to Lashley and Taylor (1998), the

level of intangibility of the offer and the extent to which it is customized/standardized determines the HRM approach adopted by service organizations. Figure 1 below illustrates how organizations can be positioned against these two dimensions. The degree of standardization/customization determines the extent to which management can tightly control the service delivery through specification of both its tangible (menus, décor etc) and intangible (customer interaction) elements. This impacts on the discretion levels customer facing staff are able to exercise.

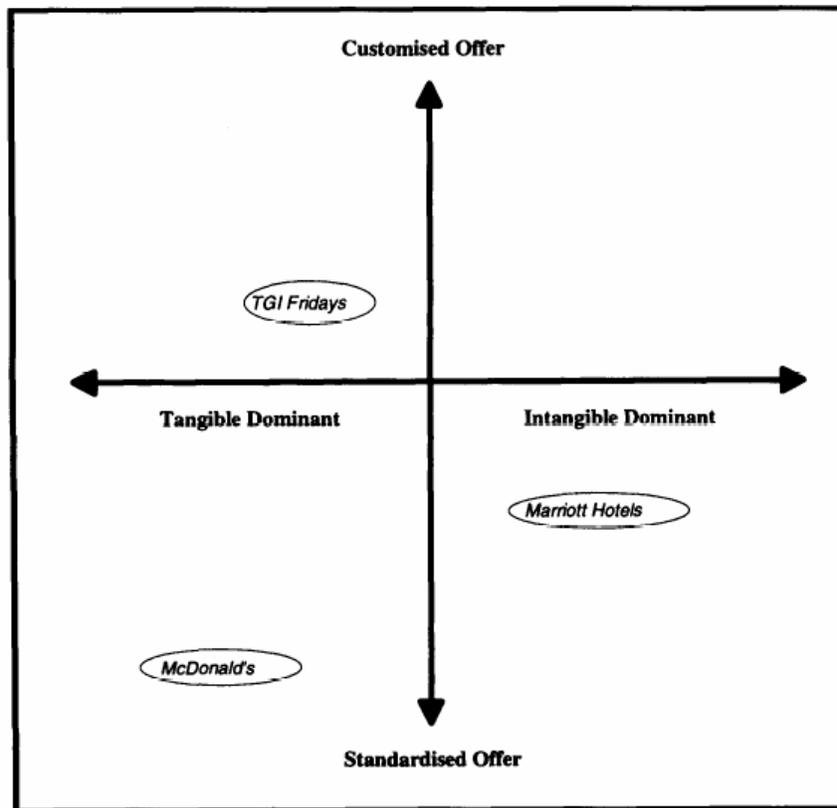


Figure 1: Strategic drivers of the service offer

A four-fold typology of service offers is proposed. This is shown in figure 2. The first one, “service factory”, represents a service process characterised by low labour intensity and low customization (high standardization). McDonald’s exemplifies this service type. The second one, “service shop”, involves a degree of customization but it is still characterised by relatively low labour intensity. TGI Fridays is cited as an example of this approach. Although there is a high level of standardization in the tangible aspects of the service offer there is still some scope for customizing the customers’ experience. A more extensive food and drink menu is offered (in comparison to McDonald’s) and employees are encouraged to cater to the needs of individuals customers (stressing some spontaneity and improvisation in terms of the intangible aspects of customer service) (Lashley, 2000). “Mass service” is represented in the typology by Marriott Hotels and refers to a service process involving a high degree of labour intensity but a low level of customization. Finally, “professional services” are those “in which there is a high degree of customization of the service to the individual customer needs and a high degree of labour intensity” (Lashley and Taylor 1998, p. 157). Hospitality management consultancies are said to typify such a service offer.

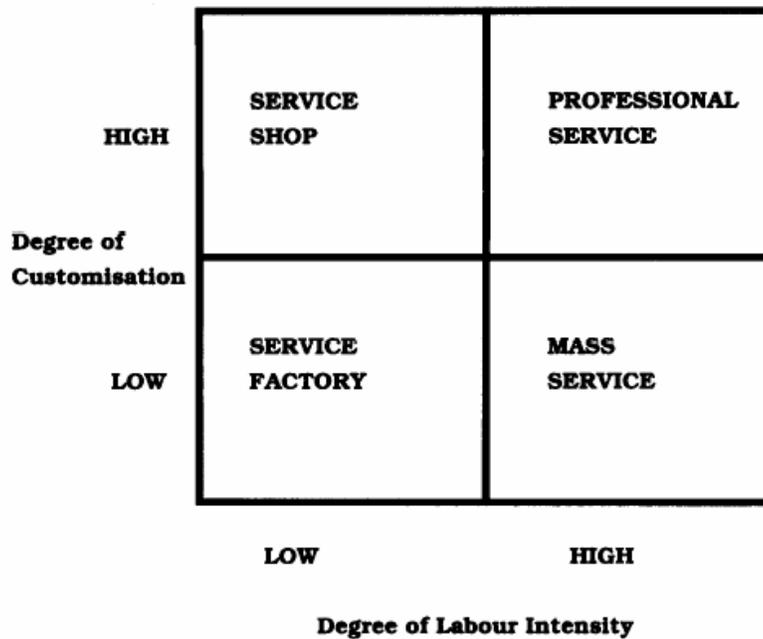


Figure 2: Lashley and Taylor’s Four Service Archetypes

To link the service offer of organizations and their HRM styles, Lashley and Taylor (1998) focus on the source of managerial control and the extent of employee involvement. They argue that given the sometimes contradictory demands on hospitality employees to “delight the customer” (customization) within the limits of a branded concept (standardization), control and commitment are both important. By the same token, employee commitment to the organizational rules of service delivery has to co-exist with some employee discretion in acting out the interaction. On this basis, the dimensions of customization and standardization of the service offer are placed on one axis, while externally imposed managerial control and internal control self-imposed by employees are placed on another. This is shown in figure 3.

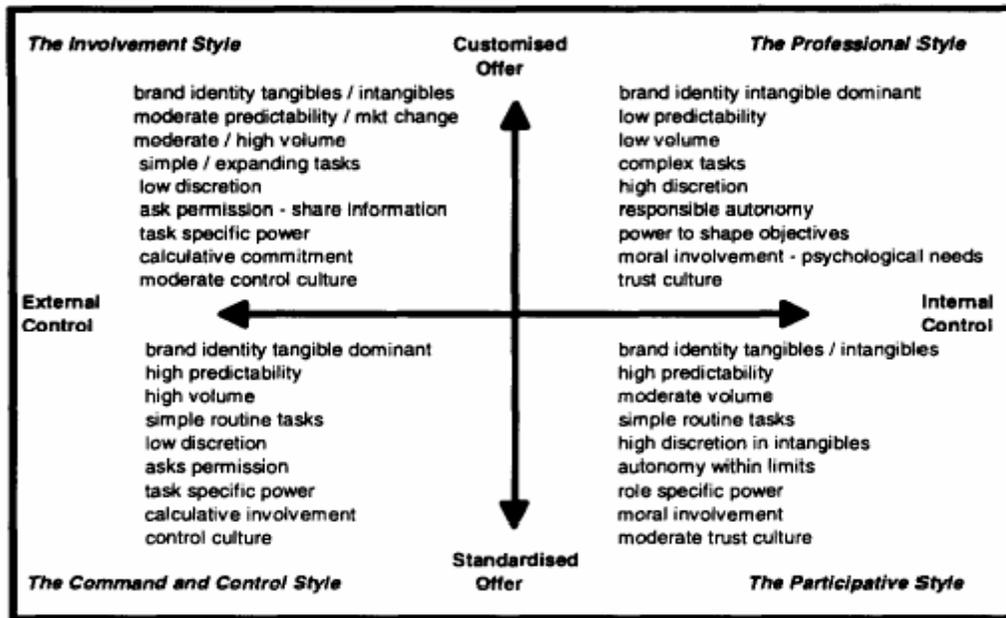


Figure 3: Lashley and Taylor’s ideal HRM styles

The “command and control” style typified by McDonald’s, involves low discretion for employees, almost no responsible autonomy and very close supervision of employees’ effort. Emphasis is placed on controlling employee performance externally to maintain adherence to pre-defined standards. The “involvement style” is exemplified by TGI Fridays. It shares some similarities with the “command and control” style in that there is only a little scope for discretion in the production process with management aiming to ensure the standards revolving around the branded concept are maintained. However, employees enjoy a degree of discretion in shaping the service interaction with significant emphasis placed by management on the recruitment and selection process. The “participative style”, exemplified by Marriot Hotels represents a standardized customer offer, yet it requires a degree of employee participation regarding task organization and service delivery. Finally, in the “professional style”, there is great scope for employee discretion over the organization of work, such that there is no “one best

way” to complete tasks. Furthermore, recruitment and promotion procedures promote the internalisation of company values by the employees. However, according to Lashley and Taylor this style of HRM is a relatively rare in hospitality.

LIMITATIONS

Overall, Lashley and Taylor’s work is useful in outlining how the HRM styles of service organizations may derive from their service offer. However, there are a number of criticisms that can be levelled at this model. First, on a broad level, the model does not take into account how issues specific to the hospitality sector might mediate the relationship between service archetypes and HRM. The need to incorporate a contextual approach when discussing this relationship is evident in Kelliher and Perret’s (2000, p.422) work on UK designer restaurants; that is restaurants that challenge “traditional approaches to food, service and design”. By definition, designer restaurants pursue an innovation strategy. On this basis, Kelliher and Perret sought to identify the extent to which the HRM style of designer restaurants is tailored to the facilitation of worker involvement by giving them autonomy, encouraging their development, reducing labour turnover and providing a stimulating environment (Shuller, 1989). The results showed a “lack of coherency both in terms of internal consistency across policy areas and the ways in which different staff groups were managed”. For example, communication initiatives, participation and schemes for employee development were more sophisticated for chefs than front of house staff despite the latter’s importance in delivering customer service. Thus, Kelliher and Perret (p. 435) remark that “the relationship between approaches to HRM and business strategy is more complicated than assumed by the models based on notions of fit”. This acknowledges the impact that other factors, such as competitive

product market conditions, have on HRM approaches. Similarly, research by Paauwe and Boselie (2003) suggests examining the notion of fit in the context of the broader environment a firm operates, although they refer to the adoption of HRM practices at a national level. Secondly, the concept of labour intensity referring to the amount of contact required between customers and front-line staff in the context of the service encounter, may obscure the fine grained picture of what exactly constitutes service in McDonaldized establishments, e.g. the requirement for emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), which, as seen above, might inform the adoption of forms of normative control. Consequently, the effect can be that such service outlets, with virtue to their “standardized offer” which reduces employee input to service delivery are automatically associated with the “command and control” HRM style, even though that might be misleading.

Overall, although the Lashley and Taylor model explains to some extent the link between the nature of service in offer and the scope employees have to exercise discretion, it assumes a mechanical relationship between the type of the service operation and the type of control exercised. More specifically, there is no clear explanation why service operations based, to a larger or lesser extent, on standardization (thereby limiting the scope for discretion), should necessarily rely on external bureaucratic management controls. On the other hand, there seems no reason to suppose that internal normative controls are only encountered in service operations that favour a greater degree of customization due to the greater reliance on employee autonomy to deliver customer service. That this may not be the case is implied in Nickson et al’s (2001) brief case study of Prêt-a-Manger in their review of the literature on skills and HRM practices in the UK hospitality sector. Although Nickson et al. do not explicitly examine the relation between

an organization's service offer and type of managerial control, they pose the following question: "what might explain the differences between the way employees at Prêt-a-Manger and McDonald's perceive their jobs and themselves, given that work processes are arguably essentially largely similar? (ibid: 89)".

This paper aims to address explicitly these limitations through the case study of a UK based restaurant chain which has many features of a "service factory". In particular, we will show that although their service offer is to a great extent McDonaldized, leading to largely routinized jobs and low levels of labour intensity (minimal contact with customers), internal normative controls wrapped around the themes of "family and fun" are used instead of external controls as predicted by the model outlined above. Apart from providing an explanation for this "empirical anomaly", i.e. the deployment of normative control in a service factory, we will attempt to show why it appeared to be successful in our case study organization despite being, at first glance, at odds with the organization of work.

The next section discusses the methods used in our research and it introduces our case study organization. This is followed by a discussion of its service offer which is argued to conform to a "service factory" operation. Additionally, we illustrate, with reference to the broader literature, how the company's approach to managing their employees approximated a paternalistic style stressing the metaphor of restaurant staff as a "family" having "fun".

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

This study is based on research that took place in Javi's (a pseudonym), a UK based restaurant chain. Since its establishment in the mid 1990s Javi's aimed to bridge the gap between fast-food and traditional restaurants. More recently, the company has expanded rapidly, owning several hundred outlets throughout the UK and employing several thousand employees. The company prides itself on its management style which has allowed it to maintain the "family" atmosphere of its early days. It is this particular approach to managing people that has won Javi's prizes and national recognition as a good company to work for.

Fieldwork took place in two stages between June 2006 and October 2008. Following an initial interview with the training and development manager, research access was granted to four stores located in the greater London area and in South Wales. Overall, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers and staff in these stores. Additionally, we also interviewed two area managers responsible for these outlets. Interviews with the employees lasted 45 minutes, while interviews with managerial staff were longer ranging from 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews aimed to explore in more detail the organization of work in the restaurants and also identified how the company's culture, centred around the concepts of family and fun played out in the context of everyday work. Following this first round of fieldwork we secured access in three more restaurants in Scotland. As part of the second phase of fieldwork 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the managers and staff of these restaurants as well as the area manager who oversaw their operation. Similar to the first stage of fieldwork, interviews with managerial staff lasted between 60 and 90 minutes while interviews with

employees were shorter. All interviews were transcribed and analysed using the Atlas.ti qualitative software.

JAVI'S: A SERVICE FACTORY

Lashley and Taylor's typology of different service processes consists of two key dimensions: the degree of standardization/customization of the service offer and the degree of labour intensity required for service delivery. Thus, it is with reference to these two aspects of service that Javi's can be characterised as a "service factory".

In relation to the first dimension, Javi's service offer is highly standardized, to ensure consistency in delivery. Restaurants carry the same relatively limited food menu comprising identical items for sale. In addition, the menu preparation methods and prices are centrally determined. The head office is also involved in specifying the layout and décor of each restaurant and although there are variations among locations, there is no deviation from the branded theme. Staff uniforms are also standardized throughout the chain while the music that forms part of the ambience is provided from CDs that are compiled by the head office and sent to restaurants.

One of the restaurant managers we interviewed explains how standardizing the tangible aspects of the offer facilitates brand recognition among customers:

"There are standards, there are things that you just can't change because if I change it, then it doesn't become uniform. It doesn't become Javi's, it just becomes Finchley Javi's or Wood Green Javi's. When customers come here and have a tea, you know, it has to be served this way. Because we share customers, the name is the same, the food is the same, the standards are the same. The only difference is the people and the personalities. But everything is Javi's, I'm not going to just do a different coleslaw, you know, we've got the same supplier.

Because when you're given a store, you know, when this store was handed over to me, everything was there. You've got to create your own atmosphere, it's the vibe in the store."

Jodie, Manager

In relation to labour intensity, an aspect of Javi's operation which resembles fast food outlets is the fact that table service is kept at a minimum. Instead, customers do some of the work of traditional waiters/waitresses in that they have to place their orders at the till and pick up their own cutlery. This process also entails an element of customer control since by getting the customers to order and pay for their food before it is delivered to them, they are discouraged from "doing a runner", i.e. leaving without paying:

"So when you get customers at the counter, they pay for their food then, you know their food's been paid for, all they've got to wait for is their meal."

Jane, supervisor

The fact that customers expect minimal table service is indicated in the company's terminology: in interviews, managers referred to their outlets as "stores" instead of restaurants, while staff are known as "cashiers" (customer facing employees) and "grillers" (cooking the food). The only element of "conventional" customer service that remains is greeting customers at the door. At this point, the "rules" of how the restaurant operates are explained. After placing their order, customers are told to wait at their selected table. Prepared food is brought to the table by the waiter/waitress who also checks back with the customers and takes dessert orders for which the waiter/tress takes payment. Although interactions with customers are not scripted and customer facing staff are encouraged to customize their interaction with regular customers, it is clear that the intangible features of the service offer are also routinized, thereby minimizing the level of labour intensity.

Having established that Javis's operation resembles that of a service factory, the next section aims to show how the company deviates from Lashley and Taylor's typology by relying on cultural control to deliver the service offer.

STANDARDIZATION THROUGH CULTURAL CONTROL

Lashley and Taylor (1998) assume a direct link between the degree of standardization and the type of control to be exercised. Thus, internal control is more likely to be encountered in organizations that emphasize a highly intangible and customized service that requires greater reliance on the "human dimension" for its successful delivery. In contrast, where the service offer is standardized leading to limited employee discretion and low levels of customer contact, external control is more likely. The empirical examples they use support this suggestion. So, in the "service factory" of McDonald's managers "will largely be concerned with monitoring the performance of subordinates so as to maintain adherence to predefined standards". By contrast, in the "service shop" of TGI Fridays the objective of management is to allow for a degree of discretion to allow for some customization of the customer interaction but within "an overall framework of tight control" (Lashley and Taylor 1998: 159 and 162).

However, this section will show that a standardized service offer does not have to be allied to the exercise of externally imposed managerial control. Thus, although Javis's service offer is standardized and it does not require a high degree of customer contact, the HRM approach relies on controls that emphasize the image of the company as a "family" rather than on bureaucratic controls designed to ensure conformity to pre-defined service standards, as might be expected. More specifically, with reference to our empirical

evidence we argue that Javi's approach towards their employees can be characterised as paternalistic.

In the relevant literature (Black and McCabe 1996, Greene et al. 2001), paternalism is viewed as a type of cultural control that often succeeds in eliciting employee commitment and consent. According to Fleming (2005, p.1470), managerial paternalism can be seen as "a way of organizing the employment relationship along the lines of a parental/child, master/servant or teacher/pupil configuration of authority". Fleming's research in a call centre outlines several elements that characterise a paternalistic management style, e.g. the founder of the firm assuming the role of benevolent patriarch who knows all employees by their first name, the conceptualisation of the company as a family where informal relations and a trusting atmosphere are especially encouraged and an approach to recruitment that perpetuates the parent/child relationship by ensuring there is a significant age difference between management and employees. Sometimes, this paternalism is reinforced and attends to non-work matters such as managers assisting their largely overseas staff, who have limited English language skills with housing problems (McDonald and Liff, 2007).

Our empirical evidence points to the fact that Javi's cultural control was based on similar paternalistic devices. Thus, the job title of a store manager is a foreign word for father. However, whilst existing research on paternalism has shown that the role of the "father of the clan" is usually performed by male managers, in Javi's this image of the head of family applied equally to both male and female managers. Thus, despite the fact the job title implied the presence of paternal authority, in reality managers were viewed as a surrogate parent (embracing both paternal and maternal elements depending on the

manager's gender). As the following quotes illustrate, this was a commonly accepted view among employees:

“Even if it has nothing to do with work, John, the head boss, always comes up to you and makes sure that you are all right. Say if you've got any problems going on at home or anything, he's always there and will always listen to you and will try to give you the best advice. So it's kind of like a dad kind of figure, the dad of the work place and everybody just goes and talks to him if they have got any problems.”

Sally, cashier

“The manager is like the mother or father of the family it's just like someone to look up to, to learn from and to gain experience from. You can take advice from all of them. If you've got a problem, they'll help you out with it. They're all open and they'll keep it confidential.”

Christian, griller

Similarly, a “parental” role is assumed by the area managers who strive to know all employees by their first name:

“I make a point of trying to speak to everybody when I come in, you know, how's your kids, how's this, how's that, it's hard to know 150 people and know all about them. But you try, you try to do it”.

Neil, area manager

Subsequently, the importance placed on a parental figure in the workplace presupposes the existence of a “family” of employees who support each other and also have fun. Here, it is important to stress that this was a specific kind of invented family, i.e. a permissive family of adolescents (given that most employees were in their late teens, early 20s) where tolerance (by managers/parents) towards cases of slight misbehaviour (mostly at fun events) was the norm and where “sibling rivalry” and conflictual relations (which form part of real family lives) were suppressed to favour an image of a “happy family”. Additionally, the employees' young age (reflected in their job title which was “Javieritos”) meant that their work-based family would not compete for

their time with their real families at home as was the case with the working mothers in McDonald and Liff's (2007) case organizations.

To help the family “have fun together” each store gets a fun budget of £1200 per year. There is also a competition in each region based on mystery shopper scores. The store that comes first wins an extra £500 to spend on their staff, while the runner up gets £250. It is the staff who decide what they do with the money, but popular activities include in-store parties, bowling, paint-balling and trips to amusement parks. Participation in these activities is voluntary but the majority of the employees take part. Finally, there is some extra funding of social activities that take place on a company wide basis. For example, family days where managers and staff get their families together and Christmas parties in the various regions. However, apart from formal socialising, our interviews showed that the family atmosphere in the stores resulted in members of staff socialising outside working hours. This included going out for drinks after the end of the shift and organizing birthday parties.

This culture of “family and fun” is further supported by a number of HR policies. From that point of view our evidence agrees with Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) remark that procedures such as induction, training and promotion play an important role in normative forms of control. Here, they aimed to ensure that employees identify with the managerially invented “company as a family” metaphor. Thus, the recruitment process, for example, does not focus on a candidate's technical abilities at all but on their interpersonal skills, as it is crucial that newcomers fit in with the existing “family”. Thus, potential employees go through a three hour “trial shift” which helps to identify whether they fit in or not. They are also given a chance to decide whether the job is for them. At

the end of the shift, the staff who worked with the trialist give their feedback on whether s/he could work as part of the team. Additionally, our interviews showed that managers tend to recruit friends and relatives of existing staff in order to reinforce the family feeling in the store.

With regard to training, newcomers are trained by “buddies”, experienced members of staff who are able to perform all the jobs in the restaurant. The role of the buddy is to show the trialist around the store and introduce them to the rest of the “family”.

“The buddy is the person that meets you. That’s the first face you see and then they introduce. You won’t remember everyone because it’s 20 people at a time but you introduce a new member, and even on a trial shift, to everyone. You make them welcome. You make them want to stay. You make them like it. If you get a person that feels as in home, they work as a team member, so you’ve made a great team”.

Nadia, Buddy

“When I was a buddy one of the things was try and make all the new people welcome...everybody gets those days when you just can’t be bothered, you just come in and maybe you’re feeling sick or you’re hung over or something like that. But I mean with the new staff the way I looked at it, is when I was a new member of staff when I came in, if somebody came up hung over, and just didn’t really want the time of day with me I would have felt quite bad. So if it’s a new member of staff obviously, you go that little bit extra mile just to be nice because you know you need to make them feel welcome.”

Dan, supervisor

Once chosen to work in store, new cashiers and grillers undergo a training period of approximately two weeks, whereby they learn to perform their role by shadowing the buddy who, in return, shadows them to assess whether trainees meet the required standards. Overall, although there is adherence to standard procedures, there is a more relaxed approach to standards than that of, for example, McDonalds where trainees and employees are monitored against a detailed operation and training manual that tightly

specifies how each job has to be performed (Royle 2000). The training period culminates in menu and health and safety tests. After passing these tests the trainee becomes a full member of staff, employed either as a cashier or a griller. However, after a three month probation period any member of staff who wishes to do so gets cross-trained with cashiers having a go at performing the grillers' job and vice versa. Cross-training also helps to smooth out any tension between these two categories of employees that might arise during busy shifts and undermine the family atmosphere in the store:

“Everybody in the restaurant gets cross trained, everybody learns how to do everything. Because all the staff know how to do everybody else's job as such, so there is no animosity between them [cashiers and grillers].”

Gail, manager

Also, it is important to note that management training for assistant managers, store and area managers who are externally recruited includes a four week “skills training” period. This involves learning all the jobs in the store (grilling, serving, working the tills etc). Although this serves the purpose of learning the “Javi's way” of working, it also projects a unitary image which underlines the absence of a divide between managers and employees:

“It takes everyone to the same level. There's no hierarchy, it's all the same level. Everyone can see that you're more than willing to jump in and do that. It's not a case of I'm the manager, I don't get my hands dirty, everyone's on the same level, so it's good”.

Alan, manager

Staff reviews take place every quarter and they do not aim to monitor closely performance against production and service standards, in contrast to McDonald's where employees' performance is assessed through observation check lists “22 times over a four month period” (Lashley and Taylor 1998, p.160). Instead, the focus is on identifying the

staff's ambitions and plans for their development. Similarly, when store managers' performance is reviewed by area managers one of the key issues tends to be staff welfare:

“In terms of sales, profit and loss, mystery shopper, ops check which is operational standards [store managers' performance indicators], to me that's information that I can... if I want it at any point I can just look for it and find it. I think what I look for as well is what goes into them achieving those results. So when I come into the restaurant, how are the staff, are they happy, is there a vibe in the restaurant, are they smiling, you know, I'll have a look around... also what I'll base them [store managers] on is I'll talk to the assistants and say how are you, when did you have a review, how are you feeling about your personal development plan, what courses are coming up.”

Bill, area manager

The emphasis on personal development is also reflected in the company's target to fill half of new managerial positions internally in order to “keep it in the family”. Additionally, the existence of clear promotion paths in the various stores is seen as an important incentive for people, who might lack formal qualifications, to develop a managerial career with the company:

“My original plan was to take a year out and go to Uni next year but then as time's gone on, I've been promoted to buddy and then supervisor and I am now Assistant Manager... People go to the Uni for five years to do what I've done in the space of a year, so that's the main reason I stayed on”.

Ian, Assistant Manager

Nevertheless, as the following quote shows, people are promoted to supervisory and managerial roles not only on the basis of their competence but also on the basis that their demeanour does not disrupt the family ethos:

“It took me a long time to get to the position I am because I used to be really loud. My work was really good, that wasn't the problem...I'd shout a lot sometimes because if I saw staff wasn't doing anything, I'd tell them. But even though it wasn't my position at the time to tell them, I just told them. So they held me back a little bit, but then when they saw I'd grown away from that, they started to progress me. But they like people who are bubbly, we love bubbly people who laugh. And they progress them from there.”

Jane, supervisor

Finally, although pay for the newcomers begins at the minimum wage rate, in several of the stores we visited employees also received tips which were shared every month on the basis of the number of hours worked. This policy served to reinforce identification with the family “collective” in contrast to, for example, TGI Fridays where tips are taken individually and waiters/ressees competed with one another to get the most lucrative shifts (Lashley 2000).

In closing this section, it should be noted that although in Javi’s case cultural control was aimed primarily at employees, it was believed that the “family and fun” atmosphere in the stores would rub off somehow onto the customers; this was reflected in their slogan that “happy staff equals happy customers equals happy bank manager”. Overall, our empirical evidence showed that Javi’s was successful in delivering standardization not through militaristic bureaucratic controls, as it is the case at McDonald’s (Royle 2000), but through normative control that sought to cultivate identification with the unitary image of family.

EXPLAINING THE “ANOMALY”

Our research results deviate from Lashley and Taylor’s typology which links service factories with external bureaucratic controls. This raises the question as to why Javi’s adopts a form of control that according to Lashley and Taylor’s model does not resonate with its service offer and the resulting organization of work which is characterised by routinized jobs, lack of autonomy and minimal discretion.

On the basis of our fieldwork, the answer seems to lie in the nationality of the workforce, the majority of whom are not indigenous to the UK. Thus, the large number of

migrant workers recruited by Javi's provided fertile ground for the treatment of employees as "weak children in need of support". For example, managers often helped workers "stand on their feet" especially when they lacked a good command of English. Our evidence also shows that the family metaphor has a particular resonance with non-indigenous workers:

"When they come to the induction, I talk quite a bit about the family, about the fact that a lot of people, they weren't born in England, they've come on their own, their family becomes the people they work with, they're the ones that support them."

Bill, area manager

"We have a couple who came from Brazil when they first came here they were having problems to find accommodation. And my manager gave them a hand... because they were having English problems, so helping them to get accommodation. Even after they got a place and they had to apply for a telephone and electricity and stuff like that. And they would bring the letter to say I don't understand this, can you explain it... And it's like 'my baby needs to see a GP and I don't know how to arrange it'. So we help each other like this, you know, outside work".

Celia, Assistant Manager

"I came to this country by myself. So basically if you look at it this way, this is my family, these are my friends... then there are some people I've become more close with, that you would turn to with problems, more than I would with others, who I chat with and laugh with, whatever else. So it becomes your family, and because I, out of one week I'm here maybe 40 to 50 hours a week."

Noelle, cashier

"Remember I don't have family here. My best friends are in Javi's so I like spending time here. We visit each other in our houses and stuff like that. We go abroad together. We're just happy together. So that's the family spirit."

Nadia, Buddy

The above quotes resemble the situation in McDonald and Liff's (2007) study where paternalism was based on the foreign nationality of the staff. However, according to Lashley and Taylor (1998), "taking care of the staff" should not be viewed as a surprise in the hotels studied by McDonald and Liff, since the service offer was directed

towards the high end of the market, while this type of control in a “service factory” is unusual.

However, attributing the prominence of family-themed cultural control to the presence of migrant labour alone would be misleading as our data showed that it also appealed to British workers, who are not subject to the same social integration obstacles experienced by foreign workers. Nevertheless, the relevance of the family metaphor had a particular purchase on workers who were from troubled backgrounds. For them, a surrogate family at work was very appealing. Additionally, as seen above, the combination of familial camaraderie and support with opportunities for advancement, was attractive to a young workforce consisting, to a significant extent, of young school leavers struggling in “dead-end” jobs prior to joining Jarvis’.

“If people do have problems at home and they are having problems, my second position in this store is being a counsellor. I just sit and I listen to people talk about family problems.”

Kate, Manager

“You don’t have to be miles away from home to need a second family, you can never have too much family... I am mummy, Neil [area manager] is daddy, we are all brothers and sisters and the assistant managers if they are older then they can be there aunty, there uncle or whatever but yes I am mummy you know and they are my kids.”

Gail, Manager

“I couldn’t walk away from some of the people in here, that would be really hard for me but also I would be kind of scared to like go to another work place and not kind of have the management team that you have got in here that are so understanding and so calm, which you just get on really well with. So I would be kind of scared to move on to another job and have a manager that maybe I never got on with and then I have lost my job in here that I maybe can’t come back to... I think that would just be a disaster for me.”

Sally, cashier

“If I was in a company where I could move up fast but I didn’t really enjoy the job, I would think twice about staying there, whereas I say if I was in a company that I just really enjoyed but I didn’t see any career opportunities in it, I would

also think of leaving but with Javi's you've got both. So I know I'm going to have fun as well at the same time I'm working my way up towards manager as well, so I think that's why it is a really good company to work for."

Dan, supervisor

Consequently, a more plausible answer would be that the use of cultural control aims to address the perennial problem of employee turnover faced by McDonaldized restaurant chains (Leidner 2000). This claim is supported by research conducted by Royle (1999, 2000) and Lashley (2000) on McDonald's and TGI Fridays respectively, which shows that bureaucratic and normative control do co-exist to some degree in these two outlets. More specifically, despite the predominance of tight bureaucratic controls, McDonalds also deployed a paternalistic discourse stressing the virtues of family and teamwork in order to "compensate" for poor financial rewards and also to attain some degree of emotional labour from their staff who "are expected to control themselves *internally* by being pleasant, cheerful, smiling and courteous to customers even when customers are rude and offensive" (Royle 2000, p.64). However, Royle's (2000) evidence points to the fact that the success of normative control is undermined by the militaristic nature of bureaucratic control with managers who work long hours to achieve promotion taking it out on their staff.

Similarly, Lashley (2000) notes that normative control in TGI Fridays is one of the "tools" to retain employees and motivate them to "take ownership" of the service encounter. In this case, this is achieved by stressing the company's uniqueness and quirkiness, (e.g. naming waitpersons Dub-dubs) and promoting unitary ideas such as that of the "beach-ball" theory, i.e. when an employee is critical towards management s/he is reminded that "we are both looking at the same beach ball, from where you stand it is red, from where I stand it is green, and that's just the way things are" (p.802).

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, this attempt at normative control sits uneasily with the company's hierarchical reward system which individualises employee performance, thus intensifying employee competition for tips.

In Javi's, managers openly acknowledged that cultural control based on the family and fun concepts was a way of addressing employee turnover issues while the common perception was that the company was successful in this effort when compared to fast food outlets such as McDonald's:

“Yeah you get paid minimum wage but it's not a comfortable salary. That's why we have to make sure that we create that environment around ourselves, to make sure that at least you know that you're looking forward to going to work, not because of the £5.35 you're going to get, but because you're going to have a laugh, you know, because you've got a shoulder to cry on, you can go to work and, you know, you had a problem last night, somebody's here for you.”

Jodie, manager

“The restaurant sector's got a 200% turnover in staff. Up to a month ago I'd employed, I'd only employed three people the whole year in six months. But turnover of staff is incredibly low at Javi's. I don't know what the official figure is on staff turnover, but it is massively lower than industry standard, massively lower. So for example, on average McDonald's would replace their entire crew twice in a year, the entire crew, I wouldn't even replace a quarter of the guys in a year.

Interviewer: So what is it you think makes them stay?

The family culture... if you go to some fast food establishments, you walk in and you look at the staff and straight away you can see they're not enjoying being there, they're just doing it. You see at Javi's...people are happy to be here, want to work here, and we're an employer of choice.”

Roy, manager

“They work together here and then they end up living together. And once you have that you're not going to want to leave that. Why would you want to leave Javi's if you enjoy what you do and your friends are the people you work with. So it helps our retention.”

Bill, area manager

Overall, it would be worth remarking that, as mentioned previously, the perceived success of cultural control at Javi's can be explained with reference to the fact that in contrast with outlets such as McDonald's and TGI Fridays, the fun and family discourse is not at odds but it works in conjunction with a series of other HR policies covering the areas of recruitment, appraisal, training and development and promotions.

CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the debate about service operations and HRM styles stemming from Lashley and Taylor's work (1998). In particular, it addresses what is perceived as a limitation in their framework, namely that it does not explain the assumed ideal relationship between standardized service operations and the deployment of external managerial control.

Our data have shown that although Javis's service offer is highly standardized limiting the scope for employee discretion, they do not rely on tight bureaucratic controls aimed to ensure consistency in the delivery of a branded concept. Instead, the company manages to deliver standardization by employing a form of cultural control, emphasizing the notions of family and fun interspersed with a paternalistic discourse and a set of associated practices. The emphasis on the family value is supported by a number of HR practices that differentiate, to a great extent, the company's approach from the "command and control" style of service factories where it is assumed that: "recruitment and selection is less important, because of the emphasis on systems and 'one best way' of producing products...employee appraisal will be based on performance of tasks against tightly defined standards, and linked to rewards" (Lashley and Taylor 1998, p. 159).

Our evidence also shows that cultural control in Javi's is primarily related to an attempt to minimize labour turnover. Although high labour turnover is endemic in the sector with a reputation for low paying jobs and poor working conditions, this is not an issue addressed in Lashley and Taylor's work, which is concerned more with "universal types" of service and HRM styles rather than situational contingencies. However, HRM practices are not only influenced by the nature of the service operation, but also by broader sectoral issues. This is not captured by the notion of "best fit" which characterises the Lashley and Taylor model. Nevertheless, the research we present here provides but one empirical example which outlines inconsistencies with Lashley and Taylor's framework. This suggests that further research is required on service factories and the type of managerial controls they deploy. On the basis of our findings we suggest that this incorporates two elements.

First, instead of narrowly focusing on the type of the service offer (and the degree to which it is customized/standardized) future research needs to pay attention to the contextual conditions in which a service organization operates (e.g. labour market conditions) and which can inform the HRM approach adopted. Secondly, that in discussing the service offer of these organizations, future research needs to reconsider the relevance of the concept of degrees of labour intensity. If we take it to refer to the degree of interaction between employees and customers (as Lashley and Taylor do), the concept is misleading in that it tends to gloss over the finer details of what constitutes customer service even in the most Taylorized environments. For example, as Royle's (2000) example of McDonalds has shown, despite the lack of customization in the service offer, employees are still required to engage in some degree of emotional labour to match the type of service (speediness) they are expected to offer the customer. In fact, the requirement that employees control their emotions may make family-themed cultural

controls more relevant in service factories than is predicted by the Lashley and Taylor model. However, such detail can be easily overlooked by assuming the dominance of external managerial control implied by standardization and minimal customer contact denoted by the concept of labour intensity. Instead, we suggest that researchers focus on the “nature of customer service” and ground this concept empirically in order to obtain a clearer view of how the type of the service offered (in combination with broader contextual conditions) might influence the organization’s approach to managerial control.

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