

# **Do Holistic HRM Practices Make a Difference to FIFO Workers' Job Quality? An Exploratory Investigation**

## **Abstract**

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

## **Introduction**

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

1. Analyse what factors are considered to affect FIFO employees job quality; and
2. Determine what employers are doing to enhance job quality for FIFO employees.

The project concerned two phases: the first phase involved an extensive literature review that resulted in the creation of a job quality framework. The framework was constructed based on the Eurofound 2012 (p. 20) surveys and various Australian surveys. The purpose of this paper is to investigate FIFO arrangements within the context of strategic HRM and in terms of employee wellbeing. There is an extensive literature concerning how strategic HRM practices can potentially improve employee performance and wellbeing across a number of criteria (Clarke and Hill, 2012). There is also a body of literature that has examined the impact of FIFO arrangements on employment wellbeing in terms of workplace safety; stress; health and well being with the Safety Institute of Australia (2013) claiming that one-third of FIFO workers having suffered from mental health problems linked to their employment and living

arrangements. Since FIFO employment involves extended absences away from families and homes, there are also issues that concern the impact of this on families, community and family life (Taylor and Simmonds, 2009). However, there has been an absence of any systematic examination of HRM practices that support FIFO arrangements especially in the context of where there are a growing number of organisations that are heavily dependent on a FIFO workforce in their remote regional workplaces.

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

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

## **Strategic HRM, Employee Well Being and the FIFO Workforce**

One of the core principles of strategic human resource management (SHRM) is that organisational performance is influenced by the way that employees are managed. Supporting this argument, certain sets of human resource practices have been found to improve employee effectiveness and to predict higher levels of organizational performance (Gittel et al. 2010). Moreover, researchers have documented the impact of human resource practices on efficiency outcomes such as worker productivity (Datta et al. 2005) among many other factors. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) suggest that motivation and discretionary effort underlie the association between human resource practices and performance which can be triggered by strong human resource systems. However, there may be a need for caution with regard to the methodology used for analysing human resource practices given the findings of Guest et al. (2003) who surveyed 336 UK companies. They found when objective measures of performance were used, greater use of HRM was associated with lower turnover and higher profit per employee but not higher productivity, but when subjective performance estimates were used a strong association was made between HRM, productivity and financial performance. Guest et al. (2003) concluded that the association between HRM and performance was confirmed but did not necessarily relate to higher performance.

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

Specifically, extensive recruitment, selection and training procedures; formal information sharing, attitude assessment, job design, grievance procedures, and labour-management participation programs; performance appraisal, promotion, and incentive compensation systems that recognize and reward employee merit have all been linked with valued firm-level outcomes (Huselid, 1995). Such policies and procedures have been labelled high performance work practices (HPWP) which, it is generally recommended are introduced in

bundles within the workplace. For example, recruiting and selecting ‘high-performing’ employees without developing them or without providing some level of empowerment is likely to be ineffective whereas recruitment, development and empowerment together is likely to produce greater effects (Wall and Wood, 2005). Singh et al. (2012) point out that, although there has been some agreement among researchers (see Gittel et al. 2010) that HRM bundles (occasionally referred to as holistic HR practices) can generate greater effects than HR practices in isolation, there has been no agreement as to what they should be or how many.

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

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

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

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

### **A Job Quality Framework and its Relevance for FIFO Workers**

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

1. A concept that is concerned with employees’ job satisfaction (Lau and Bruce, 1999);
2. A concept that goes beyond examining job satisfaction, by also encompassing subjective well-being (Considine and Callus, 2001); or
3. A dynamic, multi-dimensional construct that incorporates any number of measures relating to employment quality (EUROFOUND, 2012).

While it is clear that job quality matters for individual and collective well-being (Burgess and Connell, 2008, 408), what is not clear is what improved job quality leads to, or what the consequences are of deteriorating job quality and bad jobs. Specifically, the job quality

literature is associated with five key factors: health, relationships, family, attachment, turnover and productivity.

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

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

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

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

**Table 1 about here**

A summary of the four dimensions as utilised in the job quality investigation are presented in Table 2. This forms the basis for the case study analysis that follows. It is suggested that the

framework covers the core dimensions of job quality and is applicable to all employment arrangements, including FIFO arrangements. In terms of the prior research and public discussion on FIFO work and workers the key dimensions comprise extrinsic job quality and working time quality.

**Table 2 about here**

### **Case Study Method**

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

The two case study organisations have extensive FIFO workforces deployed into remote regions of Western Australia. Each case study was given a pseudonym (ResourceCo and MiningCo) and the findings are aligned with the job quality framework presented in Table 1. ResourceCo's activities span the world, employing over 70,000 people they are strongly represented in Australia and North America. ResourceCo has 12,500 employees in W.A. with the majority employed in the Pilbara region of Western Australia and 2,500 in Perth. Work rosters vary according to the different sites, operations and residential options offered at various coastal and inland towns. 48 per cent of the workforce is FIFO workers, females comprise 22 per cent of the workforce, and the company is the largest private employer of indigenous people in the country.

MiningCo is one of Australia's leading mining contractors, with around 5,000 employees and 1,500 contractors working across more than 50 sites in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, South America and Southern Africa. Although there are three divisions within the

organisation, this case study focuses on a Mining division based in Western Australia where 1,108 employees are based. The gender demographic of the workforce is 11 per cent female and 89 per cent male. Amongst other programs introduced by the organisation, the Corporate Family Program supports employees with caring responsibilities whether they have children or ageing family members, allowing for the provision of practical support and services such as online booking arrangements for carers.

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

Sixteen interviews were conducted in total during July, August and September 2013 within the two organisations (see Table 3). Participant details are provided in Table 4. Interviewees were asked to review the job quality framework (Table 2) and then indicate the top three factors that they believe impacted both positively and negatively on the quality of their work. Human resource managers, line managers and supervisors were asked to report on the workplace culture; management approach, workplace measures and assessment; employee attraction and retention; aspects of quality work; offshore operations; programs or initiatives perceived to influence the quality of work; benefits of quality work; quality of work challenges; and levels of employee autonomy.

**Table 3 about here**

**Table 4 about here**

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



## Findings

### Case Study 1 - ResourceCo

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

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

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

**Dimension 3 – Intrinsic Job Quality:** ResourceCo’s workplace culture was reported as being as much about social wellbeing as other factors. As the OHS supervisor pointed out:

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

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

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

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

The ResourceCo leadership model concerns supervisors/leaders having a direct and open relationship with no third parties involved. The company prides itself on how well those direct relationships are developed and offers different levels of leadership training and support. Direct supervisor/employee engagement is advocated and practiced, for example shift co-ordinators enable FIFO supervisors to spend time out ‘in the field’ with the staff on site rather than sitting behind a desk. However, span of supervisor control ranged from 10 to 40 or more team members and several interviewees noted that it was questionable as to whether supervisors can communicate effectively in the larger teams. The ability for employees to develop at ResourceCo, change jobs and sites were considered key for employee retention.

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

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

Although other rosters with longer ‘days on’ offered higher pay, they are not considered as family friendly due to longer absences from home. However, they may suit some workers without family responsibilities. Rosters are fixed as consistency is needed for operational effectiveness although there is reportedly a lot of movement between sites (and hence roster changes). Offering a range of different roster options/changes is reportedly an effective way to retain employees. Managers have had feedback that employees join ResourceCo because of the ‘good rosters’. As one of the personal services employees said *“This company is better than other companies, particularly the smaller operations where they have longer rosters on and have shorter periods off”*.

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

**Table 5 about here**

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

## **Case study 2 – MiningCo**

### **Dimension 1 – Job Prospects:**

During 2011 and 2012 the Human Resources (HR) team maintained a focus on improving recruitment and retention processes, developing a plan to increase the diversity of the workforce, improving leadership skills and succession planning processes, enhancing the benefits available while increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of HR systems and processes. Work quality is not assessed as such although there is a yearly staff satisfaction survey that is undertaken and managers and supervisors participate in 360 degree feedback processes. The outcomes of the satisfaction survey are followed up to address any issues. With regard to job prospects, the General Manager noted:

*We are a big contracting organisation so for us at the management level there is opportunities because there is growth. For the employees, because you have got bigger size [and] bigger critical mass, there is less likelihood of fluctuation of jobs up and down and there is going to be somewhere we will rehouse you when the contract finishes.*

The Operations Manager commented on recognition at MiningCo

*...we have an innovation awards program and so we encourage innovation on site with work practices or people have invented tools and things that make the workplace safer. With that we recognise them with innovation awards....the healthy heart program, for example, has been rolled out across other sites, has been nominated for an internal innovation award.*

### **Dimension 2 – Extrinsic Job Quality:**

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

The MiningCo physical environment on site was considered to have a big impact on the retention of staff. One of the sites was set up in 2010 and initially FIFO workers tolerated very poor conditions, however this has changed now as a site supervisor noted:

*...all those factors meant that the atmosphere on site was quite depressed and turnover got to 70 or 80 per cent...but the opposite is the now the case. The camp is as good as it could be, the flights in and out operate well. The management of the accommodation is good, the facilities are good, and supervision is improving. All those factors have meant a significant drop in turnover.*

### **Dimension 3 – Intrinsic Job Quality:**

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

The level of consultation was considered to be determined by the supervisor.

*We have pre-shift meetings and toolbox meetings in which [the workers] can express their concerns and any improvements they want to make. Whether the supervisor wants to take them on board it is up to them (site supervisor).*

#### **Dimension 4 – Work Time Quality:**

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

#### **Table 6 about here**

Table 6 summarises the JQ framework as it applies to MiningCo. It was evident that MiningCo management has expended considerable time and effort to encourage diversity in their workforce and been recognised externally as a result. The effectiveness of HR practices was more varied at MiningCo than at ResourceCo. Dimension one, job prospects, appeared to require some attention as career paths were not evident for all employees. Dimension two, extrinsic job quality, had greatly improved according to interviewees. Here, effective practices included a strong focus on employee wellbeing with regular health checks covering the whole workforce. This strategy served to identify some serious health issues. There had also been extensive investment and improvements to on-site accommodation. Other areas that appeared to require attention concerned dimension three of the JQ framework (intrinsic job quality) as it relates to attention to supervisor development given the level of consultation, autonomy and a sense that suggesting new ideas would not always be welcome. Dimension four, working time quality, had improved for MiningCo FIFO workers given changes in rosters. MiningCo had also introduced diversity programs concerning the recruitment of indigenous workers and women and made efforts to promote women to more senior positions.

#### **Conclusion and implications**

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

1. What factors affect employees quality of work life; and

## 2. What are employers doing to enhance the quality of work life for FIFO employees?

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

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

**Job Prospects** – Job prospects were particularly enhanced at ResourceCo where workers have a large internal labour market so that staff can develop a career, change roles and FIFO sites were considered key for employee retention. This was not evident in MiningCo and some of the senior managers admitted that career pathing needed attention with regard to some jobs.

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

**Intrinsic Job Quality** – At ResourceCo, leadership and communication were identified as the single most important factors influencing the quality of work and the biggest lever for employee engagement combined. Direct employee engagement is advocated and practiced. For example, FIFO shift co-ordinators enable supervisors to spend time out in the field with the staff on site rather than sitting behind a desk. This aspect was considered to require attention by some interviewees at MiningCo due to variation in the quality of workplace supervision and its impact on consultation, communication and workforce autonomy.

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

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

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

### **Implications, limitations and future research**

This paper considered whether it is possible to develop quality jobs using strategic HRM for workers whose employment arrangements, such as FIFO, deviate from the norm by asking “do holistic HRM practices make a difference to FIFO workers’ job quality?” We argue that holistic HRM practices resulting from a strategic HRM framework do make a difference,



given the case study example of ResourceCo. MiningCo had apparently not effectively achieved job quality for its FIFO workers with regard to all four of the dimensions used in the JQ framework. Also its focus on HR in general did not appear to be as strategic as the approach taken by ResourceCo. Were the findings different to those that may have applied to ‘standard workers’? The answer is both ‘yes and no’. Some of the job quality findings would almost certainly apply to ‘standard workers’. However, issues related to flight convenience (airports with proximity to homes), standards of accommodation and rosters that stretch for 12 hours a day, and days at a time are all particular to FIFO workers whereby the issue of job quality and holistic HR practices becomes even more important.

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

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

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**Table 1: Descriptions of the four job quality dimensions**

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

**Table 2: Framework Summary of the 4 dimensions for the Investigation of Job Quality**

<b>Dimension 1 Job Prospects</b>	<b>Dimension 3 Intrinsic Job Quality</b>	<b>Dimension 4 Working Time Quality</b>
Job security Recognition Career progression Contract quality	<b>Work Itself</b> Meaningfulness of work Interesting work  <b>Skills and Discretion</b> Skills and Autonomy Training Access	Work Life Balance Duration Scheduling Discretion/flexibility Working hours Shift patterns Flexible work arrangements
<b>Dimension 2 Extrinsic Job Quality</b>  <b>Good physical environment</b> Safety Low level of physical and posture related hazards	<b>Work Intensity</b> Pace of work, work pressures Emotional/value conflict demands  <b>Good Social Environment</b> Relations at work Direct Supervision Consultation Social support, absence of abuse	

Source: Adapted from Eurofound (2012: 20)

**Table 3: Case study employee numbers and interview sample**

Case Study Identifier	Industry	Managers	HRM division employees
ResourceCo	Resources	3	3
MiningCo	Mining	5	5
Total		8	8

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

Gender	No.	Tenure (organisation)	
Male	11	≤ 1 year	4
Female	5	1 – 5 years	4
		≥ 5 years	8
Age (years)		Hours Worked per Week	
25-44	6	40 – 50 hours	6
45-54	5	≥ 55 hours	10
≥55	5		

**Table 5: Summary of the JQ Framework as it applies to ResourceCo**

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

**Table 6: Summary of the JQ framework as it applies to MiningCo**

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