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**Human Sustainability, Relational Coordination and Worker Outcomes**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Adam Smith Business School: Management  
College of Social Sciences  
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## Abstract

This study focuses on human sustainability in the university context and argues that human sustainability in this context and elsewhere needs to take a more central position in research, education, business and public policy. Its contribution to knowledge is twofold: First, this thesis aims to make a contribution to the theory of relational coordination, which argues that the personal transformation of people in organisations is fundamental for organisational and social transformation, by explaining how the personal transformation of people takes place in the university context and how the University can help its employees to positively transform themselves. Second, this thesis aims to legitimise the concept of human sustainability by theorising and defining it, given that theory and research on this topic remain limited.

In this thesis I define human sustainability, based on Kantian principles as follows: “Human sustainability is when organisations respect human beings as free, rational and responsible, include them in policy formulation and decision-making and encourage them to build mutual respect with all persons within and beyond their organisations.” I also put forward a conceptual framework called “The Cycle of Human Sustainability,” which aims to answer the two research questions of the study (“How does design for human sustainability affect relational coordination?” and “How do human sustainability and relational coordination affect worker outcomes?”), to show the associations among the three constructs, and to explain how the University can facilitate the personal transformation of employees. Although the framework focuses on frontline staff in this study, it could be utilised to examine any major stakeholder of the University (i.e., academics), or other organisations and their stakeholders in other sectors (e.g., healthcare, banking, retail).

Key findings suggest the following: there is a low level of human sustainability in the University, which has a limited positive influence on relational coordination, especially between functions; the low levels of human sustainability and relational coordination have a limited positive influence on the positive personal transformation of frontline employees in the University which, in turn, have a limited positive influence on their worker outcomes (work engagement, proactive work behaviour, job satisfaction).

To Noemi, Francesco and their generation  
with the hope and wish to make our world a more human and respectful one.

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## Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: ELLI MELETI

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## List of Abbreviations

ASSET	A Shortened Stress Evaluation Tool
CAP	Changing Academic Profession
HS	Human Sustainability
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
IPRs	Interpersonal Relationships
JD-R	Job Demands-Resources model
JS	Job Satisfaction
KM	Knowledge Management
OCB	Organizational Citizenship Behaviour
PDM	Participative Decision-Making
PT	Personal Transformation
P-E	Proactive Person-Environment
PSO	Proactive Stakeholder Orientation
PWB	Proactive Work Behaviour
RC	Relational Coordination
RCT	Relational Coordination Theory
RSO	Responsive Stakeholder Orientation
SAC	Student as a Consumer
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TA	Thematic Analysis
UWES	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale
WE	Work Engagement
WERS	Workplace Employee Relations Survey

## Chapter 1 Introduction

The purpose of this first chapter is to provide an overview of the thesis. It starts with an introduction, then states the aims, objectives and research questions, which are followed by an explanation of the theoretical contribution. Finally, it describes the thesis structure summing up the main issues regarding each chapter.

This study focuses on human sustainability in the university context and argues that human sustainability, in this context and elsewhere, needs to take a more central position in research, education, business and public policy. Pfeffer (2018) argues that governments, organisations and managers should comprehend and evaluate the negative results and costs of their “toxic management practices” regarding medical expenses, decreased productivity and increased turnover. This is the case because stress within the workplace is not adequately considered by them, despite the fact that there is a vast amount of “epidemiological literature” on the influence of the circumstances at the workplace on physical and mental health.

“Social movements” view “human sustainability” and workplaces in organisations as significant, as they consider “environmental sustainability” and the physical habitat. Similarly, societies gain from “movements” that focus on the significance and “sanctity of human life,” and persons’ “physical” and “psychological” welfare, including their working lives (Pfeffer, 2018). A serious approach involves university curricula as well as other matters. For example, a survey of more than 100 business schools in the United Kingdom, examining whether they comprised teaching on health, employee engagement and well-being in “any of their courses”, resulted in a negative answer (Pfeffer, 2018).

Although stress at the workplace exists in organisations and institutions in various sectors (i.e., private sector, higher education), persons usually remain in “toxic” workplaces for the following reasons: financial need; necessity to take advantage of the trustworthiness derived from a reputable organisation; “inertia,” due to their lack of vitality to search for another job; “rationalization” and “commitment effect,” due to their commitment to remain in this particular job which implies various “psychological” procedures; and,

“social proof” when the “toxic” turns to the “norm”. Consequently, persons “learn what to expect, what to want, and what is normative by observing others...in that sense, people collectively come to define a version of reality and certainly what is expected and acceptable” (Pfeffer, 2018, p.182). Therefore, the “abnormal” and the damaging, such as working long hours, is identified as the usual behaviour of employees in organisations, which is suitable and “expected” (Pfeffer, 2018). This is the reality in many organisations, in various sectors, and higher education is no exception. Scholarly work suggests that universities in the United Kingdom “are at risk from a process of ‘hollowing out’ - that is, of becoming institutions with no distinctive social role and no ethical *raison d’etre* - and that this is a process which undermines the possibilities for meaningful institutional and academic identities” (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2013, p.338).

Although universities in the United Kingdom are publicly funded, they have had substantial autonomy from the state and have been the main places of “authority” and “decision-making”. However, recently there has been a decrease in autonomy owing to the launch of more “intrusive regulatory systems” (i.e., ways of funding, quality assurance regulations) and higher “market-based” competitiveness. “Business models” including university senior management growingly prevail with a “cadre” of full-time university “managers” substituting the traditional appointments of academic senior management guided by senior professors (Aarrevaara & Dobson, 2013). Higher education institutions in the United Kingdom are under constant pressure to perform, as are the majority of universities worldwide. They are obliged to face competition at the international level, “government accountability measures,” lower funding, novel technological systems, higher student requests and higher expectancies from their “business partners” and regions (Franco-Santos et al., 2014). There is also a great increase in administration tasks and a higher level of competitiveness for “resources” (Barrett & Barrett, 2008). Changes in the higher education sector in the United Kingdom also include restructuring and the utilisation of limited duration contracts (Tytherleigh et al., 2005).

In trying to comprehend the present state of higher education in the United Kingdom, it is important to understand neoliberalism and its influence in higher education institutions (Nedeva & Boden, 2006; By et al., 2008). Despite the fact

that there are similarities with other notions relevant to the current period, “such as ‘postmodernism,’ (Bauman, 1997) ‘Late Modernity’ (Giddens, 1991) or ‘globalization’ (Steger, 2004) - neoliberalism focuses more on political economy, [since it] assumed world-wide scope in the triple emergence...of Reagan’s, Thatcher’s, and Deng Xiaoping’s political and economic offensives in the US, Britain, and China, respectively” (Collins, 2008, p.xi). Higher education is pressed by a “set of neoliberal practices and structures” which are reforming universities based on “neoliberal (and neoconservative) assumptions” of the economy worldwide (Canaan & Shumar, 2008).

The reform scheme announced by the Coalition Government in November 2010 and incorporated in the following (June 2011) “White Paper (DBIS, 2011a)” is a very “radical” one in the history of higher education in the United Kingdom. The principal change is that in times ahead, the majority of the money universities obtain from undergraduate teaching will be derived from student fees, with straight state support restricted to a small number of priority areas (Brown & Carasso, 2013). The Government argues that these changes are necessary to position English higher education on a “sustainable footing” while decreasing assertions on the taxpayer (Brown & Carasso, 2013). By positioning “students at the heart of the system” - to refer to the title of the White Paper - both “quality” and “efficiency” will be increased as universities reply more constructively to students’ interests and necessities through substantial competitiveness and information (Brown & Carasso, 2013, p.2).

Although the government of the United Kingdom suggests positioning students at the “heart” of higher education, they prioritise the market instead (Holmwood & Bhambra, 2012). A major change focuses on the “state” and “market” and the way they are related to the system of higher education. “Marketization” and “commodification” are two processes that although closely related, are distinct; they also influence higher education. For example, in the United Kingdom, higher education is firstly formalised with certain operations and structures in the short run, in order to switch an “educational service” to a “commodity” purchased in the “marketplace” in the long run (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). These processes are part of the transformation of the public sector, in general, from a welfare to a market state. “The new state formation is, however, as different as the former welfare state was in turn from pre-war capitalist state forms in

England” (Ainley, 2004, p.497). “Education-as-market-sector represents a vast new and untapped area of investment and profit making” (Brody, 2007, cited in Lewis, 2008, p.46).

Consequently, higher education is conceived and organised focusing primarily, but not only, on two “neoliberal assumptions” based on which universities should act: Firstly, they ought to battle to vend their services to their “customers,” the students; secondly, they ought to generate “specialized,” “highly trained” people with the relevant understanding that will qualify the country and its “elite workers” to contend “freely” on an international economic level (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). Together with these neoliberal notions, “neoconservative” notions exist as well. Both, neoliberal and neoconservative ideas increase government control and policing of the public sector which are realised in the shape of, apparently but not in reality, separate bodies (i.e., “quangos” in the United Kingdom). Thus, only apparently, it looks as though higher education institutions, similar to other public organisations, are progressively liberated from an economic, political and ideological state influence (Beck, 1999).

It seems neoliberalism has “taken away the joy of learning, the creativity of teaching and the formation of strong public intellectuals” (Patrick, 2013, p.3). Creative actions necessitate “boldness” and belief, the capacity to take “intellectual risks,” and to understand and overcome constraints. They will not do well in an academy “run on principles of Taylorism...The power of creativity will not tolerate enclosure” (Clegg, 2008, p.222). Critical thinking is also discouraged since under neoliberalism all public institutions that teach the youth to be “critical and engaged” citizens is viewed as threatening to the “established order” (Harper, 2014). The emphasis is on applied research that can be used instrumentally as a “marketable commodity”, even in the social sciences, since scholars are undertaking less basic research and search for ways to make themselves more “sustainable” (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). Universities look more and more like “corporate research parks”. As Shumar (2008, p.68) argues, “if in the past the ‘factory town’ was one kind of an ideal for the way communities ought to be imagined, the ‘university town’ is coming to replace that ideal.”

The government in such a higher education system, and especially since the introduction of student fees, defines students as customers. Recently, “a student as a consumer approach” (SAC) has been strengthened with the incorporation of students and universities under the Consumer Rights Acts (2015) (Bunce et al., 2017). This system is supposed to increase student choice. However, research indicates that this conceptualisation by the government is restricted since it considers students as “rational calculators” primarily considering the financial “costs” and “benefits” of higher education and the relative quality of universities and degrees (Callender & Dougherty, 2018). Research on student choice and marketisation in higher education policy in England indicates that, to date, there is little proof that the “student choice model” based on greater tuition fees and larger student loans, and so “enthusiastically” encouraged by politicians and policymakers, has satisfied their expectations (Callender & Dougherty, 2018). Recent research demonstrates that there has been a rise in proof indicating that “consumer-based” activities, ideas and views are pervading into higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (i.e., Nixon et al., 2018; Woodall, et al., 2014). Managers have executed policies and processes that centre on earnings and “revenue maximisation,” (i.e., Natale & Doran, 2012), contrary to the traditional “staple” participation in learning and teaching (i.e., Marginson, 2013). Research shows that academics view the introduction of tuition fees as the “catalyst” for students enhancing proof of “customer-like” conduct, “viewing the education process as transactional” with the universities “providing a ‘paid for’ service” (Jabbar et al., 2018, p.85).

As a consequence, universities are transformed to “marketizable” institutions that are progressively heartened to function “synergistically” with businesses to create affluence from knowledge creation. Universities in the United Kingdom are growingly having their structure adjusted in a “corporate” way (Rutherford 2005, cited in Canaan & Shumar, 2008). In addition, like other corporations that do not raise the minimum wage claiming that it is too expensive (Bowie, 2017), prior research in higher education shows that academic salaries have fallen in real terms over many years (Taberner, 2018). In parallel, the “information revolution,” called information and communications technology (ICT), was extended in approximately 20 years, in contrast to the industrial revolution which took 200 years. The logic behind ICT includes diverse issues such as the

procedure of lowering wages and that the principal purpose of education is learning in order to create earnings (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). For instance, in the United Kingdom in 2003, the Secretary of Education Charles Clarke's White Paper on Higher Education proposed that the principal "challenge" encountering universities is "to make better progress in harnessing our knowledge to the process of creating wealth" (Canaan & Shumar, 2008, p.13). In this way, the "earning-earning dyad" is depicted as being main to the country's security, and learning is diminished to the creation of "human capital". Thus, considerable restructuring is common in education, and especially in higher education, to ameliorate the country's economic place in the international economy (Canaan & Shumar, 2008).

Consequently, higher education institutions are considered as an "economic weapon" in an international war of competitiveness for "mastery of change" or "innovation". These neoliberal and neoconservative changes have advanced significant social matters that, in turn, influence policy; for example, "Widening Participation" in the United Kingdom, that focuses on "disadvantage" calling class, or the novel vital place of higher education in the economic development plan and the worldwide awareness regarding the growth of "knowledge economies". Therefore, a "means/ends" (Lyotard) rationale prevails in universities in the United Kingdom (Canaan & Shumar, 2008). This is expressed in restructurings of universities and institutions worldwide during the last decades, adopting activities for calculating "teaching performance," "research quality" and "institutional effectiveness" (Shore & Write, 1999). For example, the promotion of an "audit culture" in British universities with novel "audit technologies," usually formulated in terms of "quality," "accountability," and empowerment," as it is considered to be "emancipatory" and "self-actualizing". However, such procedures like "Research Assessment Exercises" and "Teaching Quality Assessments" have had negative effects on higher education since they "beckon a new form of coercive and authoritarian governability" (Shore & Write, 1999, p.557).

Ball (2003) notes that the re-organisation of education with novel forms of regulation, controls academics in a different manner, making them "continually accountable and constantly recorded" and, as such, "ontologically insecure" (Ball, 2003). Ball states that teachers and researchers are not sure whether their



work is sufficient, whether they are “doing the right thing,” doing as much or well comparatively to others, regularly looking to ameliorate, to be superb.

“And yet, it is not always clear what is expected” (Ball, 2003, p.220).

Ontological insecurity comes on top of work intensification in both “first” and “second-order activities”. First-order activities of teaching, research and administration proliferate due to the cut in resources, student numbers increase and requests for greater research proliferate. Second-order activities “of performance monitoring and management” necessitate dedicating additional time, showing attempts following from creating performative information regarding first-order activities (Ball, 2003, p. 221). The paradox of audit is that “absent from audit is a scrutiny of the audit process itself” (Canaan, 2008, p.263). Academics inspire students to justify their reasoning and, as researchers, they perceive good scholarship as that which clarifies the suppositions that lead investigation (Strathern, 1997). However, audit does not make its standards of judging clear and, therefore, does not allow “scrutiny” - and potential modification of these standards. Audit is “not accountable” to anybody or anything and, consequently, is “hardly democratic” (Canaan, 2008).

Consequently, for more than three decades, higher education institutions worldwide have “been assailed and assaulted by the tenets of neoliberalism” (Smyth, 2017, p.56). Universities have extensively restructured and re-regulated. In fact, they are now more highly regulated than any other period in the past, an issue that is “at odds” with the neoliberal significance on deregulation (Davies et al., 2006). New managerialism is the principal way of governance that links up with neoliberalism since it focuses on “governing through enacting technical changes imbued with market values” (Lynch, 2015, p.193). The rigorous auditing of higher education’s products is the “cornerstone” of new managerialism and the big business of rankings in marketing universities and promoting journals, that are problematic in many ways, have been accepted as “inevitable” even by those who understand their diverse imperfections (Lynch, 2015). Furthermore, research findings indicate that the marketisation of British higher education has resulted in being “pedagogically limited” since a “market-led” university might discourage “intellectual complexity” in case this is not “in demand” and encourage relations with the place of work if this is “desired” (Molesworth et al., 2009).

Under these circumstances, managerialism “stifles” transformation although, apparently, “promising not just change but also innovation. It stifles change precisely because it reduces all content to form, to procedure and practice” (Docherty, 2015, p.140). Therefore, research is not considered important enough; all that is significant is that the research grant is achieved. What is happening in the classroom is not considered important if the students complete a survey demonstrating positive results for formal and audited reviews (Docherty, 2015). According to (Martin, 2016) centralised hierarchy and bureaucracy, are the two major problems in universities under these circumstances, despite the fact that there is a growing trend in research stating that decentralised structures are the best for effective outcomes. This is a puzzle which, according to Holmwood (2016), necessitates being found in “long-term changes in British public policy and the paradoxical position of higher education within it” (Holmwood, 2016, p.63).

As a consequence of these and other changes, stress at work is a “major problem” in higher education in the United Kingdom (Kinman & Jones, 2004). Academic and non-academic staff and their families are afflicted by stress. Prior research in higher education, comprising of two surveys undertaken in 1998 and 2004 suggests that academic and non-academic staff have “consistently” demonstrated proof of boundary levels of “psychological stress” (Kinman & Jones, 2004). “Stress levels for academic and related staff are higher than for doctors, managers and other professional groups, as well as a sample of the population as a whole” (Kinman & Jones, 2004, p.iii). In addition, the influence of long hours and “over work” are negatively influencing peoples’ family lives (Kinman & Jones, 2004). A national survey that investigated the degree to which higher education institutions in the United Kingdom satisfy the lowest level standards endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for the managing of “work-related stressors,” including 9,740 academic and non-academic staff, reported the following: “stressors” associated with “change,” “role,” “job demands” and “managerial support” are especially high; high average working hours persist, with numerous persons continuing to surpass the weekly maximum set by the UK Working Directive (Kinman & Court, 2010).

Johnson et al. (2019) argue that these changes incorporate, among other issues, reduced perceptions of autonomy and job security and growing student numbers.

They contrast stressors and strain between academic and non-academic university staff in three universities in the United Kingdom, utilising the ASSET (A Shortened Stress Evaluation Tool) stress measure that provides information on eight stressors and two measures of strain (“psychological” and “physical” ill health). The study suggests that for both academic and non-academic staff, the stressors “work-life balance” and “aspects of the job” are related to psychological and physical ill-health, and stressors that influence ill-health did not vary by the kind of job (Johnson et al., 2019).

Consequently, organisations in all sectors (i.e., private sector, higher education) should seriously consider all these issues and focus equally on environmental and human sustainability. Thus, they need to ameliorate workplaces where persons can succeed, be physically and mentally healthy, and able to work for numerous years without encountering “burnout” or sickness from managing actions (Pfeffer, 2018). However, as Pfeffer (2018, p.22) argues “we have not begun to scratch the surface when it comes to reporting on and promoting human sustainability.”

This thesis views human sustainability as related to human beings, relationships, roles, coordination, and communication, between and among roles, within and beyond their organisation; thus, to all stakeholders of an organisation, both primary and secondary (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2007). This is the case because organisations and businesses need to treat people as they should be treated by others in everyday life; the ethics of business are not different, thus they are not of a “lesser grade”, from everyday ethics (Phillips, 2003). The stakeholder approach is distinctive in its prominence on the relationships that create the networks from which new “value creation ideas” are initiated (McVea & Freeman, 2005). This thesis focuses on respect for the dignity of all stakeholders and their relationships. It focuses on human sustainability, relational coordination and the influence of these two dynamics on worker outcomes. It defines human sustainability and proposes a conceptual framework named, “The Cycle of Human Sustainability” aiming to explain the process of personal transformation of employees in organisations.

Sustainable organisations, which are not so common, could adopt the proposed definition of human sustainability and increase their level of human

sustainability. A “sustainable work system” is capable of operating in its environment and reaching its economic, operational, human and social goals (Kira & Van Eijnatten, 2009). Sustainable organisations focus on their people, and the relationships between and among them, such as relationships with their employees, their community and other stakeholders. They not only perform better under normal conditions but, also, under unexpected events (Gittell et al., 2006).

Consequently, relationships, and the way these relationships are coordinated, become of primary significance. Furthermore, human sustainability, as defined in this study, enhances relational coordination. Hence, treating people as ends in themselves is, itself, not only a moral but, also, relational choice, a relational action, or a relational response. Therefore, human sustainability is not simply about how the organisation treats people; it is also about how all people involved with the organisation treat each other, and how this impacts key organisational performance outcomes, in normal and stressful times. This thesis adopts the relational coordination theory, which provides important insight into human sustainability.

Relational coordination theory states that relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect promote frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication, and vice versa, enabling stakeholders to successfully and effectively coordinate their work. Conversely, when negative, these same relationships serve as barriers (Gittell, 2006). Moreover, the theory of relational coordination claims that “there can be no organizational transformation -or social transformation- without personal transformation” (Gittell, 2016, p.12). However, relational coordination theory does not explain how this personal transformation of human beings takes place in organisations.

This thesis focuses on work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction, which are all positively associated to relational coordination (Warshawsky et al., 2012; Gittell, 2016; Gittell et al., 2008; Cramm et al., 2014; Albertsen et al., 2014). Work engagement research in higher education institutions worldwide remains limited (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017; Daniels, 2016). Research of proactive work behaviour in higher education remains limited, especially regarding employees. The majority of studies focus on

students and their proactive coping with various situations (i.e., depression, communication with academics and other issues) (Bagana et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2013; Zhou, 2014; Brown et al., 2006; Islam et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2014; Cho & Lee, 2016; Clements & Kamau, 2018). Other studies, for instance, focus on academics and the way their proactive personality is related to various issues (Bergeron et al., 2014; Wahat, 2009; Zhu et al., 2017; Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016). Job satisfaction research in higher education has focused on the job satisfaction of academics (Rhodes et al., 2007). “Cumulatively”, research in this sector indicates that there is “little unity” in comprehending job satisfaction in a college or university environment (Smerek & Peterson, 2007).

Consequently, these issues that are identified need further research and this thesis aims to contribute by investigating them; hence, human sustainability, its influence on relational coordination and the influence of both dynamics to work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction in higher education. This cross-sectional, interpretivist, qualitative case study research is undertaken in a large university in the United Kingdom. It considers how designing for human sustainability enhances relational coordination and explores how, together, they influence worker outcomes such as work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction.

I define human sustainability, based on Kantian principles, as follows: “Human sustainability is when organisations respect human beings as free, rational and responsible, include them in policy formulation and decision-making and encourage them to build mutual respect with all persons within and beyond their organisations.” The definitions of the other four concepts examined in this thesis (relational coordination, work engagement, proactive work behaviour, job satisfaction) are derived from the literature review (Table 1-1).

Table 1-1 Definitions of concepts examined in this study

- **Relational coordination** is defined as “a mutually reinforcing process of communicating and relating for the purpose of task integration” (Gittell, 2002a, p.301).
- **Work engagement** refers to a “positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74).
- **Proactive work behaviour** is defined as “taking control of and bringing about change within the internal organizational environment” (Parker & Collins, 2010, p.637).
- **Job satisfaction** is defined as “the degree of positive affect towards a job or its components. This is determined by characteristics both of the individual and of the job, and particularly how work is organized within the corporate work environment” (Adams & Bond, 2000, p.538).

The aims, objectives and research questions are discussed in the following section.

## 1.1 Aims, objectives and research questions

The aims, objectives and research questions are specified in this section as follows.

The aims of the study are twofold: First, to examine how human sustainability, as it is defined in this study, influences relational coordination in the University; and, second, how both human sustainability and relational coordination influence worker outcomes (work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction).

The objectives of the study are the following: First, to review the relevant literature; second, to clarify and define human sustainability; third, to design an empirical study; fourth, to implement an empirical study; and, fifth to provide recommendations.

The research questions are the following:

Research question 1: “How does design for human sustainability affect relational coordination?”

Research question 2: “How do human sustainability and relational coordination affect worker outcomes?”

The objectives to answer the above stated research questions, are framed from an interpretive perspective, the research strategy is a case study research strategy adopting qualitative methodology, and the context of the research a large university in the United Kingdom. The research is cross-sectional and studies the associations, not causal relationships, between the constructs of human sustainability, relational coordination and worker outcomes (Gittell et al., 2008). The focus of the study is on frontline employees, the programme administrators, and explores the work they do to support students. Despite the fact that research on relational coordination indicates that frontline staff are crucial for the effectiveness of the organisation, research into this topic remains limited. Frontline employees play a critical role; however, in many industries, the frontline role is ignored (Gittell et al., 2008). In addition, the programme administrators are also “boundary spanners” in this university context because they have to bring together all the relevant functions to serve the programme and their students. As Gittell (2016, p.68) states, “the boundary spanner, whose job is to integrate the work of other people around a project, process or customer, is another key role to be designed by organizations”. Thus, the unit of analysis is the frontline employees and their relationships with other professional roles, within a particular unit/School in the University. It is therefore a multi-level analysis.

## **1.2 Theoretical contribution to knowledge**

This thesis aims to make a contribution to the theory of relational coordination, by explaining how the personal transformation of all stakeholders of an organisation, employees, managers and clients takes place in organisations and, hence, explaining how organisations can help their employees to positively transform themselves. The theory of relational coordination claims that “there can be no organizational transformation -or social transformation- without personal transformation” (Gittell, 2016, p.12). However, this does not explain how such a personal transformation of human beings in an organisation takes place.

This thesis aims to contribute in this area by explaining how the personal transformation of all persons can be facilitated and take place through the implementation of the proposed definition and, once finalised, the conceptual framework of human sustainability. This is fundamental as Gittell (2016) argues that we cannot have high levels of relational coordination, which lead to increased worker outcomes, without first having achieved a personal transformation of human beings in the organisation.

This study aspires to legitimise the sector of “human sustainability” by theorising and defining it, aiming to make a contribution to the field, since theory and research remain limited. Hence, I define human sustainability (HS), based on Kant’s “Formula of Humanity as an End” and the “Formula of the Realm of Ends” (Kant, [1785] 1990), as follows: “Human sustainability is when organisations respect human beings as free, rational and responsible, include them in policy formulation and decision-making and encourage them to build mutual respect with all persons within and beyond their organisations.” In addition to defining human sustainability, based on my analysis I present a conceptual framework, “The Cycle of Human Sustainability”.

The focus of this study is on frontline employees, programme administrators; however, once the conceptual framework of the cycle of human sustainability is created, it can be utilised in further research and applied to all other stakeholders of an organisation (i.e., managers, clients, suppliers, the community, shareholders).

This study is significant for the following reasons. First, it focuses on human sustainability, which needs further research (Pfeffer, 2010a; Pfeffer, 2018). Second, it focuses on relationships, which are an alternative narrative to describe “successful businesses” and organisations that are “about more than money. They are driven by purpose. They create value for customers, suppliers, employees, communities [and]...financiers” (Freeman & Moutchnik, 2013, p.5). Third, although it focuses on employees, once developed the proposed theoretical framework can be expanded to include more stakeholders (i.e., clients, managers, the community). This is due to the fact that stakeholder management “is based on a moral foundation that includes respect for humans and their basic rights” (Freeman et al., 2018, p.3). The ethics of business are



not different, thus they are not of a “lesser grade”, from everyday ethics and “stakeholder obligations do not replace, but are *in addition to*, the duties that existed prior to organizational scheme of cooperation” (Phillips, 2003, p.163). Fourth, it focuses on improving and facilitating not only intra- but, also, inter-organisational relationships, as well as relationships between organisations and the community, aiming at personal, relational, organisational and societal transformation

### 1.3 Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis reflects the research process I followed to undertake this study (Figure 1-1).

**Figure 1-1 Outline of thesis**



This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The current chapter has introduced the main issues upon which the study is focused, provides some background on the organisational and higher education sectors, synthesises relevant literature and states the theoretical contribution to knowledge and the thesis structure.

Chapter two discusses a review of relevant literature on human sustainability, relational coordination, work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction. As theory and research on the topic of human

sustainability remain limited, the literature is derived from the fields of philosophy, business ethics, sociology and organisation studies. This extensive literature review facilitates the whole development of the thesis.

Chapter three discusses the research methodology outlining the philosophical and methodological decisions regarding this study as follows: logic of inquiry - inductive; ontology - relativism; epistemology - social constructionism; researcher's stance - engaged; research paradigm - interpretivism; research strategy - single case study and qualitative methodology; research design - cross-sectional with primary and secondary data; research methods and data collection, with semi-structured interviews and website documents; and, data reduction and analysis using thematic analysis.

Chapters four, five and six are the core findings and discussion chapters, which are built around the key themes related to each theoretical concept, based on the data structure derived from the thematic analysis of the interviews. Hence, chapter four is structured along the key themes related to the theoretical concept of human sustainability and includes the following: Information/lack of information; participation/lack of participation in decision-making; meaningful/meaningless work; fair/unfair selection, promotion, evaluation; respect/lack of respect.

Chapter five is structured along the key themes related to the theoretical concept of relational coordination and includes the following: Shared/functional goals; shared/exclusive knowledge; mutual/lack of respect; frequent/infrequent communication; timely/delayed communication; accurate/inaccurate communication; problem-solving/blaming communication.

Chapter six is structured along the key themes related to the theoretical concepts of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction and includes the following: Work engagement (vigour/impotency, dedication/disloyalty, absorption/inattention); proactive work behaviour (individual innovation/individual stagnation, problem prevention/problem manifestation, taking charge/not taking charge, voice/lack of voice); job satisfaction (job satisfaction/job dissatisfaction).

Finally, chapter seven discusses the key findings of the study regarding the three main constructs of the thesis (human sustainability, relational coordination, and worker outcomes) and their associations with each other, answering the two research questions, and drawing the main conclusions of this research. Moreover, it elaborates upon the theoretical contribution, the limitations and the implications for research and practice of this thesis.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the theoretical perspectives related to this thesis. This study focuses on human sustainability and argues that it needs to take a more central position in research, education, business and public policy. Sustainability is a broad concept which has taken various shapes and continues to develop. It has also been defined, as well as measured, in diverse ways (Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). Different definitions of “corporate sustainability” and “corporate sustainable development,” have been adopted in the management literature, and published in both academic and practitioner journals (Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). Corporate sustainability is a very broad and complicated notion (i.e., Hart et al., 2003; Faber et al., 2005; Hart & Dowell, 2011). This is also demonstrated from the available definitions in the field of management. There is also ambivalence about whether corporate sustainability should focus on economic, social and environmental issues, or on social and environmental, or should focus only on environmental; consequently, different scholars may agree with one option or another. Despite disagreements in this area, the majority of scholars believe that corporate sustainability should focus on economic, social and environmental aspects, even if they utilise diverse phraseologies to describe them (i.e., “3Ps” of people, planet, and profit or “Triple Bottom Line”) (Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014).

Companies, in dealing with these aspects of sustainability, create various products, practices and procedures which, although necessary, are not sufficient for the formation of sustainable organisations (Hart & Milstein, 1999; Senge & Carstedt, 2001; Unruh & Ettenson, 2010). Corporations create sustainability reports (Global Reporting Initiative 2019), as well as nominate Chief Sustainability Officers, who endorse sustainability as part of their central delegation. Although there are diverse positive consequences out of this interest in sustainability (i.e., decreased contamination) and various other environmental practices, there is still social injustice and the wearing-away of numerous “ecological systems” (Haigh & Hoffman, 2014).

Organisations, in order to respond to social and environmental changes, need to overcome various industry (i.e., industry policies, capital cost) and organisational (i.e., staff attitude, not effective communication) obstacles (Post & Altma, 1994). Furthermore, organisations need to undergo cultural transformation since the evidence shows that this did not yet happen (Harris & Crane, 2002). Cultural change is an extremely elaborate matter, since organisations are “cultural units” which include strong “subcultures” based on different jobs, products, functions and silos, among others (Schein, 2009). Consequently, based on the above stated status of sustainability, we understand that although you can find it all over, it is primarily a downgraded idea in the business profession and research (Haigh & Hoffman, 2014).

The growing interest in sustainability is more oriented towards physical (i.e., environmental and ecological sustainability) than human resources. Although this “ecological” perspective is well-founded, it is very limited. The reason for its restriction is that it misses giving a central position to human beings and the way their behaviour has an impact on it, and vice versa (Faber et al., 2010). The Academy of Management division on the natural environment has, as one of its goals, dealing with people in organisations for sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010a). Moreover, at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015, all member states of the United Nations decided on new global Sustainable Development Goals. The declaration states:

“On behalf of the peoples we serve, we have adopted a historic decision on a comprehensive, far-reaching and people centred set of universal and transformative Goals and targets. We commit ourselves to working tirelessly for the full implementation of this Agenda by 2030...We are committed to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions - economic, social and environmental - in a balanced and integrated manner...As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society...This is an Agenda of unprecedented scope and significance. It is accepted by all countries and is applicable to all...[involving] the entire world, developed and developing countries alike...In these Goals and targets, we are setting out a supremely ambitious and transformational vision...We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination...” (United Nations, pp.4-5).

More specifically, the 17 United Nations sustainable development goals are, either directly or indirectly, part of the objectives of organisations that focus on human sustainability (Table 2-1).

**Table 2-1 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**

- “Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere  
 Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture  
 Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages  
 Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all  
 Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls  
 Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all  
 Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all  
 Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all  
 Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation  
 Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries  
 Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable  
 Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns  
 Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts\*  
 Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development  
 Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss  
 Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels  
 Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

\*Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.” (United Nations, 2015, p.14).

All the above stated initiatives demonstrate that, nowadays, it is highly significant for organisations to realise that companies and their management practices also have profound effects on human beings and the social environment. Prior research indicates that, frequently, these effects are even

more prevalent and harmful than companies' effects on the physical world (Pfeffer, 2010a). For example, a study of job satisfaction, undertaken by Right Management in 2012 in the United States and Canada, indicated that only 19% of persons stated they were satisfied with their job, with two-thirds of the participants stating they were not happy at work.

Another example is a survey undertaken by Mercer, the human resource consulting firm, in 2012 which surveyed approximately thirty thousand employees all over the world, which announced that between 28% and 56% of employees wanted to quit their jobs (Pfeffer, 2015). People in organisations are "very, very unhappy" with their leaders. There are a lot of data demonstrating that places at work are frequently "toxic environments," which are negative for both employees and employers and, as far as research indicates, there is no proof that there will be improvement soon (Pfeffer, 2015). Pfeffer (2018) states the following:

"Ironically, companies have developed elaborate measures to track their progress on environmental sustainability with little thought given to the companies' effects on *human* sustainability. Although environmental sustainability obviously is essential, so is human sustainability - creating workplaces where people can thrive and experience physical and mental health, where they can work for years without facing burnout or illness from management practices in the workplace. We should care about people, not just endangered species or photogenic polar bears, as we think about the impact of corporate activity on our environments" (Pfeffer, 2018, p.3).

Despite all other significant developments "we have not begun to scratch the surface when it comes to reporting on and promoting human sustainability" (Pfeffer, 2018, p.22). This thesis views human sustainability as related to human beings, relationships, roles, coordination, and communication, between and among roles, within and beyond their organisation; thus, to all stakeholders of an organisation, of which two types are important, the primary and the secondary (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2007). Hence, "a stakeholder in an organization is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p.46).

“First...we might call *primary* or *definitional stakeholders* to signify that they are vital to the continued growth and survival of any business. Specifically, these are customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and financiers” (Freeman et al., 2007, p.50).

“Second...we have to be concerned with those groups that can affect our primary relationships. We’ll call these groups *secondary stakeholders*. So, activists, governments, competitors, media, environmentalists, corporate critics, and special-interest groups are all stakeholders...insofar as they affect the primary business relationships” (Freeman et al., 2007, p.51).

All primary and secondary stakeholders of businesses, organisations and institutions are people (Freeman et al., 2018). All persons ought to be respected due to their dignity and humanity (Kant, [1785] 1990). Stakeholder management “is based on a moral foundation that includes respect for humans and their basic rights” (Freeman et al., 2018, p.3). The ethics of business are not different, thus they are not “of a lesser grade”, from everyday ethics, as some managers and others have indicated, claiming that business ethics are of a “less strict variety” than the everyday ethics. It is important to understand that:

“...stakeholder obligations do not replace, but are *in addition to* the duties that existed prior to organizational scheme of cooperation. Running an organization does not license a manager to violate the norms and standards of society but instead presents a brand-new set of moral considerations based on stakeholder obligations...Obligations are added rather than diminished” (Phillips, 2003, p.163).

Consequently, organisations and businesses should treat people based on these considerations (Phillips, 2003). The stakeholder approach is distinctive in its prominence concerning the relationships that create the networks from which new “value creation ideas” are initiated (McVea & Freeman, 2005). Thus, the fundamental idea is that “business can be understood as a set of relationships among groups that have a stake in the activities that make up the business...To understand a business is to know how these relationships work” (Freeman et al., 2007, p.3).

This thesis focuses on respect for the dignity of all human beings, of all stakeholders and their relationships. It focuses on human sustainability (HS), relational coordination (RC), and the influence of these two dynamics on worker outcomes, proposing a conceptual framework named, “The Cycle of Human



Sustainability” and aiming to explain the process of personal transformation of employees in organisations.

## **2.2 Kantian moral philosophy**

Respect for the dignity and humanity of persons is fundamental for the effective, viable and sustainable management of people in organisations. Managers, shareholders and all other relevant stakeholders, could comprehend the reasons human beings have dignity and are entitled to respect, and then behave accordingly to all persons, treating them with respect and encouraging them to treat all others the same way. The thesis adopts Kant’s moral philosophy, in order to examine dignity and the reasons we should respect human beings.

### **2.2.1 Why Kant?**

This section describes the reasons Kant’s moral philosophy is used as a theoretical basis for the construction of the human sustainability definition. There is a need for moral thinking, between and among managers, in organisations, who usually think in “utilitarian” terms. Managers in corporations, firms and other organisations, often focus on profit and do not consider issues regarding justice and equity. However, they often encounter problems relative to the lack of this consideration. Furthermore, Kant’s moral philosophy focuses on respect and mutual respect, and can defend, very well, people in organisations who believe that their rights, pursuits and moral principles are not adequately respected; the universalised norms and regulations that can be constructed based on Kantian principles can be helpful and used in diverse matters in business ethics; Kant’s emphasis on dignity, respect, autonomy and responsibility of persons, who should always be treated as ends in themselves, promotes universalised principles, accepted by all persons, roles and functions involved. Moreover, because everyone is treated with respect and equity, it encourages participation of all stakeholders, all persons in the organisation, as co-creators of the main rules and policies, as well as followers. No person from the ones involved, or sets of people who form groups, the relevant stakeholders, would ever enforce a rule that exploits people; rather, they highlight those that

enhance teamwork, collegiality and cooperation among people in organisations (Bowie, 2013).

Consequently, a theory and a definition of human sustainability, that is based on Kant's philosophy, could encourage all persons, all the stakeholders who are involved in an organisation, to become better persons. Thus, it could assist them to enhance their lives, as well as collaborate with colleagues to make a better organisation, a better community and a better society. In this way, the organisations which adopt and implement rules and procedures that are based on Kantian ethics have, as their priority, their people and how to provide a workplace for persons where they work well together and manage to grow both personally and professionally. The achievement of profit and financial goals are also considered, since they are necessary for the growth of an organisation (Bowie, 2013). The "Formula of Humanity as an End" and the "Formula of the Realm of Ends" based on which the definition of "Human Sustainability" is constructed, are discussed below.

### **2.2.2 The "Formula of Humanity as an End"**

Kant's "Formula of Humanity as an End" considers rational beings as persons, and makes a distinction between persons (i.e., rational beings) with an absolute and intrinsic value, and things (i.e., a machine), with a relative value. In this sense, persons have dignity, and things do not. The duty of respect is a duty we owe to all persons, as bearers of humanity, and this is not related with what any particular individual is all about, hence on their specific individual traits. Kant, in his "means-ends" argument, describes that we ought to treat rational beings:

"...[as] designated 'persons' because their nature indicates that they are ends in themselves (i.e., things which may not be used merely as means). Such a being is thus an object of respect, and...are not merely subjective ends whose existence as a result of our action has a worth for us, but are objective ends (i.e., beings whose existence is an end in itself)" (Kant, [1785] 1990, p.45).

"Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only" (Kant, [1785] 1990, p.46).

Hill (1992, p.41) further explains Kant's formula of "Humanity as an End" as follows:

"Kant's formula, in effect, has two parts, namely: (1) Act in such a way that you never treat humanity simply as a means; and, (2) act in such a way that you always treat humanity as an end. The first seems to have an instant intuitive appeal, but it cannot, I think, be understood independently of the second. To treat something *simply* as a means is to fail to treat it in some other appropriate way while one is treating it as a means. But (1), by itself, does not indicate what the appropriate treatment in question is."

Furthermore, based on constancy, we should respect others for the same reasons we respect ourselves and expect others to respect us, hence, achieving "mutual respect". The principle of consistency is fundamental when Kant talks about respect, since he claims that we should respect others for the same reasons we want others to respect us, and for the same reasons we respect ourselves. These reasons are primarily due to our dignity and humanity. As we recognise the same traits of dignity, autonomy and responsibility in ourselves, in order to be consistent, we should be prepared to recognise them in others as well, so we recognise other human beings to be autonomous and responsible, just like we are (Bowie, 2017). Consistency is significant, because what we say relative to one situation, or a person, for example ourselves, we should also say about comparable situations and cases, for example, about other persons. Therefore, relations between people, between the diverse roles in organisations, must be, based on this consistency principle, moral relations, since an organisation is comprised by people and the various sets of relationships between and among them (Bowie with Werhane, 2005).

### **2.2.2.1 Morality, dignity, reason, autonomy**

"Respect for others requires, Kant thinks, that we avoid contempt, mockery, disdain, detraction and the like, and that we show others recognition" (O'Neill, 1989, p.115). The reason human beings are entitled to respect, based on Kant's moral theory, is their possession of dignity, claiming that an object which has dignity, as a human, does not have any price, is well beyond and above any price. Therefore, the refutation of dignity is what makes some downsizing unfair, and treats people like machines, that can be either easily substituted, or can be stopped from functioning, at any time, for no significant reason. In such

circumstances, that which is without price, thus human beings, are treated as simply exchangeable with that which has a price, thus machines. Although this sometimes happens in organisations and companies, this is not acceptable, and should not happen to somebody who has dignity (Bowie, 2017). Employees, and the other people in the workforce must not be considered as products, or objects, that can be easily interchanged and substituted. The main reason for this is that people in organisations are persons and not inanimate objects (i.e., a table); they are qualified with dignity and respect (Bowie & Duska, 1990).

Consequently, according to Kant, human beings ought to be respected, primarily because they have dignity, which comes from the autonomy they possess, contrary to other objects (i.e., billiard balls), which do not possess autonomy. The difference between humans and other objects, (i.e., billiard balls), is that persons are responsible beings, due to their ability of autonomy and self-governance, and billiard balls, are not. Why is that? Well, if we observe the billiard balls, we see that the only way they can behave is to obey the laws of nature, thus, to go on one way, and this way does not depend on their choice. Conversely, if we observe individuals we can see that they can choose to behave in diverse ways (i.e., decide to act in one way or another depending on the situation and their beliefs) which do not necessarily have to follow the laws of nature, (i.e., to act in a single, predetermined manner like the billiard balls do).

Therefore, we say that human beings, act in an “autonomous way,” contrary to other objects, (i.e., the billiard balls), which act in a “predetermined manner”. This autonomy also gives responsibility to individuals, which means that they are also responsible for their actions, since they decided to act in one way rather than another. In contrast, other objects (i.e., the billiard balls) neither act in an autonomous way, nor are responsible for their actions, since they do not choose which way to go. Thus, objects like human beings who have dignity, contrary to other objects who do not, ought to be treated always with respect, as “ends in themselves” and never as means only (Bowie, 2017). Such behaviour towards employees, should always take place, in a consistent manner, in order that they never be treated like the other elements of production, despite the fact that treating them occasionally like other elements could be cost-effective (Bowie, 1985).

According to the “Formula of Humanity as an End,” treating individuals always as “ends in themselves,” is also related to the fact that we should never try to either coerce or deceive people because, “...coercion and deception are the most fundamental forms of wrongdoing to others - the roots of all evil” (Korsgaard, 1996, p.140). “Physical coercion treats someone’s person as a tool; lying treats someone’s *reason* as a tool. This is why Kant finds it so horrifying; it is a direct violation of autonomy” (Korsgaard, 1996, p.141). Consequently, organisations ought to neither coerce nor deceive their employees in any way; furthermore, they should endeavour to adopt practices which refrain from coercion and deception. Layoffs could sometimes represent a form of coercion and deception of employees. Sometimes employees are dismissed because they did something wrong, at other times they are fired, because the organisation wants to decrease the workforce and reduce costs. Although the result in both situations is the same, the reason is different since, in the first case, the reason is related to the person’s wrongdoing whereas, in the second it is related to the job, and the need for the corporation to eliminate it (Scott, 2005).

Furthermore, there are the “noneconomic layoffs,” that often go along with an antagonistic attitude of control by a corporation. For instance, employees can be dismissed because they were staff members of the old organisation or firm and the newly created organisation prefers to have their own workforce in those roles and functions. This is an unfair treatment for all concerned, and especially for those who have been working with the old company for a long time (Bowie, 1991). Organisations who respect individuals try to provide alternatives to layoffs and, in cases where this is unavoidable, to some degree, they try to support those who are let go by providing physical, material and psychological help (Scott, 2005).

Another form of coercion could be the employment contract since, in business ethics, there is a dispute regarding the common employment contract as coercive. Employee participation in the development of corporate ethics programmes could assist to limit coercion (Bowie, 2017). Often, management’s morality is damaged because they make promises to their employees which they do not maintain (i.e., pension contributions). For example, Enron’s executives encouraged their staff to keep Enron stock, despite the fact that they knew the company was in significant financial difficulty, and despite the fact they did not

keep their own stock. There are many companies that have managers who behave in a similar way to their employees. This is “deception of employees,” and a way of dealing with it in organisations is by increasing “transparency” (Bowie, 2005).

A transparent management procedure is, for example, “open book management” which gives decision-making power to employees together with all financial and other information about the company (Bowie, 2005). In this way, employees view themselves as “partners in the business,” they are “empowered,” in the sense that they want to do a better job on an everyday basis, and they have more appropriate information, which increases their knowledge and understanding of how the business operates. Having the financial information available, they understand the finances in a better way, become more responsible and, overall, do their job in a more effective manner without too much supervision or orders from their managers (Case, 1995). Another form of participation is unionisation, which is regarded as a human right by the United Nations (Bowie, 2017). The unions represent the persons in organisations; their function with a “decentralized decision-making process” is primarily not to contradict the decisions commonly undertaken by the people they represent, as well as others. Therefore, in this case, unions should be “partners” with both their associates and their managers and, as such, collaborate with the organisation for the benefit of all involved (Carlzon, 1987).

However, managers of any organisation, should try not only to avoid coercion and deception of their employees, and encourage participation in decision-making, but should go beyond that level and contribute in a positive manner, whenever possible, to the improvement of the employees’ talents, thereby helping them to self-actualise by developing their skills and capabilities. This is actually what the second part of the “Formula of Humanity as an End” states, which is that it is not sufficient not to use people, not to treat them as means only, but it is also necessary to treat them always “as ends in themselves”. One significant way of treating employees as “ends in themselves” is to provide them with meaningful work (Bowie, 2017).

### 2.2.2.2 Provision of meaningful work to employees

“Meaningful work is as important as pay and security - and perhaps more so” (O’Brien, 1992, cited in Pratt & Ashforth, 2003, p.309). There are various ways to define meaningful work, based on what the employees believe it is, or what the managers believe, and so on. However, this section explains what meaningful work signifies in this study, based on Kant’s moral philosophy. This explanation is based on the fact that, nowadays, within the circumstances of organisations and corporations, the ownership of meaningful work is essential for respecting human beings as ends in themselves, which means that, based on Kantian principles, there is a “moral requirement” for the organisation to comply. Kant argued that work is essential for the evolution of one’s self, since he considered it as the evolution of “one’s ability to act autonomously and the ability to live independently” (Bowie, 1998b, p.1084). Kant claimed, in the lectures on ethics he gave between 1775 to 1780, as follows: “Life is the faculty of spontaneous activity, the awareness of all our human powers. Occupation gives us this awareness” (Kant, 1963, p.160). Moreover,

“Without occupation man cannot live happily. If he earns his bread, he eats it with greater pleasure than if it is doled out to him...Man feels more contented after heavy work than when he has done no work; for by work he has set his powers in motion” (Kant, 1963, p.161).

Therefore, for Kant, work is a duty to oneself and is not a question of working for the mere purpose of gaining money as an end in itself, but as a means to other ends, such as living a decent life and being independent. Thus,

“[Misers] are irrational...Were they susceptible to reason, they would not be miserly; they would then recognize that money is valuable merely as a means and is no immediate object of welfare. But the miser finds a direct pleasure in money itself, although money is nothing but a pure means” (Kant, 1963, p.181).

Kant not only recognises that work brings pleasure and contributes to individual independence and self-respect, but he precisely distinguishes between the poor and the wealthy, an issue, organisations especially in our times, need to consider very seriously when they decide on the salaries of their staff. Kant states as follows:

“A man whose possessions are sufficient for his needs is well-to-do; if he has sufficient not only for his needs but also for his purposes, he is a man of means; if he has sufficient for his needs and other purposes and then to spare he is a man of wealth...if a man has only sufficient for his barest necessities he is poor, and if he has not sufficient even for these he is needy...All wealth is means...for satisfying the owner’s wants, free purposes and inclinations...By dependence upon others man loses in worth, and so a man of independent means is an object of respect” (Kant, 1963, pp.176-177).

One can gain autonomy, independence and self-respect, also, through work individually done (i.e., an impoverished artist), but regarding meaningful work in organisations, employees ought to be given jobs that provide sufficient wealth. As Kant stated, this type of wealth will provide them with enough money for their needs, for other purposes, and some extra money to spend elsewhere, improving their well-being, having self-respect, as well as leading a decent and respectful life. More specifically, from a Kantian perspective, meaningful work is work that has the following traits: an individual is entered without constraint; permits the worker to enact their “autonomy” and self-governance; permits the worker to evolve their potential; gives a salary adequate for physical well-being; reinforces the moral growth of the members of staff; it is not “paternalistic,” meaning that it does not dictate to members of the workforce of how they ought to act in order to be happy and successful (Bowie, 1998b). Particularly important for meaningful work is a consideration of the strengthening of the “rational capacities” of employees, so managers and organisations should be encouraged to put an emphasis on this issue, as well as those mentioned previously (Hill, 1992).

Consequently, Kant argues, that organisations and their managers, must not only enhance the rational capacities of staff members, but also be concerned with their physical welfare, as well as with their moral well-being. “Hence, the happiness of others is an end, which is at the same time a duty” (Kant, 1994 [1797], p.52). However, Kant clarifies that we neither have any further obligation to make people happy, nor impose on them what we think is correct, which is a paternalistic attitude. Thus, organisations ought to respect the general welfare of employees, and be concerned with their physical welfare and moral development, in “a non-paternalistic way”. For instance, although it is a positive fact that a company has a gym for employees, it is a negative fact that the organisation “requires” them to use it. This is significant, since it



distinguishes the Kantian moral perspective from a list of “enlightened” organisational practices the workers must follow (Bowie, 2017).

The major components of meaningful work, described above, are included in some of the following interrelated organisational practices, which focus on employees, and which managers could consider in order to achieve “competitive advantage through people” (Pfeffer, 1994); hence, “employment security,” which indicates a long-term dedication by the corporation to its staff; “selectivity in recruiting,” that indicates how important it is to select the appropriate people through a correct process; and “employee ownership,” which encourages persons to be both employees and shareholders at the same time. This helps people in organisations share the same goals, encouraging them to be more loyal and remain a longer period of time with the organisation; “information sharing,” which gives them more appropriate and useful knowledge, and that type of knowledge is power; “participation and empowerment,” which focuses on taking part in decision-making and have a “voice”; “teams and job redesign,” since working in teams and groups can enhance worker outcomes while maintaining an adequate level of independence; “training and skill development,” which is fundamental, as long as the organisation allows and encourages people to put the new skills in practice; and, “cross-utilization and cross-training,” which primarily has variety as an important factor, making the job more interesting. This issue increases both transparency and the person’s job security level; “promotion from within,” which is significant for diverse reasons but the primary aspect is that it gives employees a feeling of equity at work, simply because it gives them priority over outsiders and rewards their extraordinary effort in doing an excellent job; “high wages,” which are significant since they draw more candidates, so the organisation has better choices, but also show a focus on people (Pfeffer, 1994).

Furthermore, “information sharing” can provide additional meaning to a person’s work because it is not only related to sharing information with colleagues, it is also about understanding how their work relates to the organisation, as well as to each other’s work in the University (i.e., related to a specific work process, which could be the work the programme administrators do to support the students). Moreover, shared knowledge goes beyond the work process and includes shared knowledge of how the organisation works and its

financial state, among other issues, so there is information given to them by the organisation, as previously stated.

When corporations and organisations assign jobs with high wages, they contribute to the fact that their staff members have adequate wealth which, in turn, enhances the persons' independence and self-respect. That is important since a "living wage," is obligatory but not enough (Bowie, 1998a).

Unfortunately, many organisations do not raise the minimum wage because they claim that it is too expensive. Higher education is also transformed from a welfare state to a market state (Ainley, 2004). Universities are transformed to "marketizable" institutions, which for example in the United Kingdom, are growingly having their structure adjusted in a "corporate" way (Rutherford 2005, cited in Canaan & Shumar, 2008). Prior research in higher education shows that academic salaries have fallen in real terms over many years (Taberner, 2018) (see chapter one). However, the leaders of corporations who increased the minimum wage, as well as other low wages, believe that, in doing so, it increases rather than decreases profitability. Corporations that increased the minimum wage, like Costco, remained competitive, with an average hourly salary of \$ 20, while its turnover rate was only five percent, far less than the industry average (Bowie, 2017).

Similarly, there are various companies that respect their people and choose to adopt, what Ton calls, the "*good job strategy*". They supply jobs with respectable pay and benefits, as well as solid work schedules. Moreover, they create jobs with the main goal to help their employees do well and find "meaning and dignity" in what they are doing. These firms are thriving, despite the fact that they consume a lot of money for their employees, making sure they have good training, are inspired, and do a good job. Various of these organisations which do well financially choose to have a good job strategy while fighting to provide the most competitive prices. The good job strategy is a specific strategy, which amalgamates a high "investment" in the workforce, with a group of running resolutions (i.e., the assignment of tasks and responsibilities to employees). This strategy is the result of observations related to the way some organisations were successful in giving both low prices and making employees happy and satisfied (Ton, 2014).

These organisations manage to satisfy all their stakeholders at the same time and continue to exist in a competitive position over time. The primary reasons are that they are better at adjusting in a fast manner to changes in the marketplace and more capable of distinguishing themselves from their competitors, by establishing relationships with their customers, convincing them to want and appreciate their collaboration (Ton, 2014). Only few organisations follow this example; the majority do not, primarily due to the fact that they do not give priority to their employees.

### 2.2.3 The “Formula of Realm of Ends”

The formula of “Realm of Ends,” in Kant’s moral philosophy is explained in this section. People in the “realm of ends,” both “co-create” and “follow” the rules and policies in the organisation; therefore, they are both “co-creators” and “followers” of those rules at the same time. In other words, people are “subjects” and “sovereigns” simultaneously (Bowie, 2017). Kant explains the way he views the “realm” as follows:

“By *realm* I understand, the systematic union of different rational beings through common laws...For all rational beings stand under the law that each of them should treat himself and all others never merely as a means but in every case also as an end in himself. Thus, there arises a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws. This is a realm which may be called a realm of ends...because what these laws have in view is just the relation of these beings to each other as ends and means” (Kant, [1785] 1990, p.50).

Kant’s “Formula of Realm of Ends” refers to the fact that all cooperative enterprises among persons ought to hold a “moral dimension” because they are comprised of people, who are moral since they have dignity, and humanity which should be respected rather than exploited in any way. Thus, organisations of all kinds, ought to be “moral communities” (Bowie, 1999). Kant claims:

“Morality, therefore, consists in the relation of every action to the legislation through which alone a realm of ends is possible. This legislation must be found in every rational being...the necessity of acting according to that principle is called practical constraint...[hence] duty...[which] pertains not to the sovereign of the realm of ends, but rather to each member and to each in the same degree” (Kant, [1785] 1990, p.51).

A moral view of organisations, based on the above statement, is a Kantian view, where all people involved share their goals and have common objectives. It is the opposite of an instrumental view of organisations, where people involved have their own personal aims and objectives. Therefore, organisations and all kinds of establishments, that share goals and objectives, are named “realm of ends” in Kantian terms. When the goals are not shared within an organisation, and the individuals primarily aim to achieve their personal objectives, then the organisation is considered by its people as an “instrument” which they use to accomplish their goals. Furthermore, they also use the people of the organisation, hence its staff members. This is not what organisations are considered to be in this study, this is opposite to a moral view of organisations, to the “realm of ends,” where people have shared goals and do their best to achieve them. In order to make sure that a moral view is maintained, and a “realm of ends” created, the people involved should accord, between and among themselves, on the rules, regulations, policies and procedures that are to preside over the organisation and their handling of each other. Thus, this accord will reshape and change the organisation into a collaborative enterprise. Therefore, all corporations, firms, organisations and institutions, are considered as “moral communities” (Bowie, 2017).

Consequently, considering organisations as moral communities, all people involved are moral beings, have dignity, autonomy, humanity and responsibility, as explained above; they also share goals based on which, they co-create and follow rules and policies that are acceptable to all involved. However, not all forms of management in organisations are relevant to this moral view and some could not function at all along these lines, like the top-down bureaucratic model of management (Bowie, 2017). A primary reason for this is because a bureaucratic mechanism, with its strong hierarchy, damages the dignity and, as such, the autonomy and freedom of its people. The bureaucratic system directly speaks to its workforce and claims, “‘Do not do what you want, do what we tell you to do because we pay you for it.’ The bureaucratic mechanism alone produces alienation, anomie, and a lowered sense of autonomy” (Ouchi, 1981, p.72).

A moral view of organisations, from a Kantian perspective, necessitates a more democratic and less-top down management structure in order to be

implemented appropriately (Bowie, 2017). Furthermore, moral organisations are called to help not only their own people and staff but, also, other human beings, and other organisations in society, thereby supporting various causes and issues; for example, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (Bowie, 2017).

Moral organisations have several common principles to be considered by managers who want to follow a Kantian moral perspective: 1) The organisation ought to take into account all relevant and significant stakeholders in all resolutions; 2) the organisation ought to ask all relevant and significant stakeholders to become involved in the formulation of all major policies and regulations, or have a procedure through which these procedures are approved by everyone before they are executed. Encouraging participation is important for the preservation of individuals' autonomy, and respect (both self-respect and mutual respect); 3) the interests of one stakeholder should never take precedence over others, which means that all interests should be considered equally; 4) in the case of an occasional relinquishing of the interests of one or more stakeholders due to a specific situation, that case should never be resolved solely due to a bigger number of stakeholders; 5) no proposition or procedure can be embraced that is incompatible with the Kantian principles, discussed previously. Furthermore, no proposition or procedure can disrupt or break into the "humanity in the person" of any of the significant and relevant groups (stakeholders) to the organisation; 6) the management of corporations that are for-profit have an "imperfect duty of beneficence," which means that they have a duty to occasionally achieve implementing corporate social responsibility. Furthermore, no decision can be made that does not respect, equally, all relevant and significant stakeholders, and that does not treat them always as "ends in themselves" and never merely as means only. All role and function relationships between and among the relevant and significant stakeholders ought to be reigned over equity without any form of discrimination. Equity and justice are also extremely significant when evaluation procedures take place in an organisation (Bowie, 2017).

In conclusion, the above stated explanation of Kantian moral theory in general, and more specifically the "Formula of Humanity as an End," and the "Formula of the Realm of Ends," form the basis for the proposed definition of "Human

Sustainability”. The human sustainability definition and its implementation are discussed in the following section.

### **2.2.4 Definition and implementation of “Human Sustainability”**

Consequently, I define human sustainability in this study, based on Kant’s “Formula of Humanity as an End” and the “Formula of the Realm of Ends” (Kant, [1785] 1990) as follows: “Human sustainability is when organisations respect human beings as free, rational and responsible, include them in policy formulation and decision-making and encourage them to build mutual respect with all persons within and beyond their organisations.”

This definition could apply to all organisations and institutions in all sectors, both for-profit and not-for-profit; its purpose is twofold: First, organisations and their managers ought always to treat employees as “ends in themselves”; meanwhile, employees, based on consistency, ought to treat everyone else in the organisation, and beyond, the same way (mutual respect). Second, the management of organisations co-create and follow the main organisational laws, policies and regulations with all employees and other important stakeholders of the organisation in such a way that all members of the organisation are, at the same time, creators because they create the rules and followers because they obey to the rules. Therefore, managers of organisations need to deeply comprehend the right reason human beings are entitled to respect, which involves respecting their autonomy, dignity and humanity; furthermore, based on consistency they need to respect others as well. Consequently, if the managers and organisations comprehend the “reason” human beings are entitled to respect, then they are more likely to adopt the human sustainability definition and implement it accordingly.

I emphasise the point of implementation because, often, having a strategy does not necessarily means implementing it, although this is often implied.

Therefore, although it is necessary to have a strategy that focuses on human sustainability, this strategy alone is not sufficient, without its implementation. Prior research shows that organisations, which manage to achieve their goals, comprehend the significance of putting in practice all the decisions and policies that are included in their strategy, as well as acknowledging the fundamental

role of their workforce in this process. Consequently, triumph and positive results can be reached after the execution of the strategy (Pfeffer, 1998).

Equity and justice are of primary importance when evaluation procedures take place in an organisation which are related to different roles, functions, tasks and responsibilities. Assessments of the workers in the job ought always to be implemented in such a manner that the humanity of all involved is judged (Bowie, 2017). Decision-making by agreement has been the issue of much research worldwide, and the data demonstrate that the unanimity approach creates more ingenious decisions and more successful execution in relation to single decision-making (Ouchi, 1981). An interesting and clarifying explanation of this equity decision-making process in organisations is the following:

“The group can be said to have achieved a consensus when it finally agrees upon a single alternative and each member of the group can honestly say to each other member three things: 1. I believe that you understand my point of view. 2. I believe that I understand your point of view. 3. Whether or not I prefer this decision, I will support, because it was arrived at in an open and fair manner” (Ouchi, 1981, p.37).

Establishing a decision for a significant issue, in this manner, may be time consuming but, once created, all individuals who are taking part will usually promote and believe strongly in it. This is highly significant, especially for major decisions since, often, it is more important for people involved to know and be dedicated to the decision than what the decision, itself, actually involves. This is the case since, even with the “best” decisions, if people are not committed, they will never be implemented successfully, whereas even if we have “less good” decisions, but people are really engaged, they will then be executed in an effective manner. The engagement is frequently the driving force for successful implementation (Ouchi, 1981).

The majority of organisations do not focus on human beings, they focus on making money for their shareholders, prioritising them and not equally considering the remaining stakeholders. This idea is very limiting and not sustainable, due to the fact that the shareholders primarily focus on a short plan of action and evaluation of success (Hoffman, 2018). Lynn Stout, a Cornell Law School professor, believes that the efforts of shareholders are “short sighted,

opportunistic, willing to impose external costs, and indifferent to ethics and others' welfare" (Hoffman, 2018, p.38).

This way of doing business needs to change, and "new conceptions of the corporation's purpose" should be established and implemented (Hoffman, 2018). Organisations need to operate based on a purpose, which needs to be defined based on the inclusion and mutual respect of all stakeholders rather than only the shareholders. Freeman states:

"The new narrative says that successful businesses are about more than money. They are driven by purpose. They create value for customers, suppliers, employees, communities, as well as the people with money, financiers...that is how we create value for each other and trade...people are complex creatures, not the simple self-interested maximizers of the old story" (Freeman & Moutchnik, 2013, p.5).

So, the question, now, is "How do we implement human sustainability?" The answer to this question is that sustainable organisations could adopt and implement this human sustainability definition. Some organisations, have already started defining their purpose along these lines, focusing on all their important stakeholders, trying to make a difference for their people, in order to become more viable and sustainable. Sustainable organisations are discussed in the following section.

### **2.2.5 Sustainable organisations**

A sustainable organisation is viewed in the context of "work systems": private and public, for-profit and non-profit organisations of various types, which have been created with the aim of work. A "sustainable work system" is capable of operating in its environment and reaching its economic, operational, human and social goals. It should be able to please the needs of numerous stakeholders, rather than one only, and aim at long-term "dynamic efficiencies" (i.e., "innovation," "learning") as opposed to only short-term "static efficiencies" (i.e., "profitability"), including "diversity and richness" (Kira & van Eijnatten, 2009):



“A sustainable organization thus builds on the integration of its unique members, and from this integration something further emerges - group-level and organizational-level phenomena that can be shared by, but go beyond, individual members. However, in an optimally complex organization, the integration of distinct individuals is not too tight, but flexible. There still remains room for diverse, even contradictory, ideas that can be constructively debated...[thus] the shared mental models, structures, and practices end up being not one-dimensional, but complex: they are all characterized by wholeness growing from the flexible integration among different points of view” (Kira & van Eijnatten, 2009, p.237).

Organisations, both profit and not-for-profit, that focus on human sustainability, are sometimes called “hybrid organizations,” [since] the hybrid model is “sustainability-driven”, concentrating not only on doing less harm to society and the environment, but also trying to ameliorate such issues. In order achieve this, they have a system which is based on procedures of constructive and supportive relationships and is empowered by “sustainability based organizational values,” long term planning for a gradual development, and supportive top management (Haigh & Hoffman, 2012). This system is put forward by the following three foundational pursuits:

“1. Driving positive social/environmental change as an organizational objective; 2. Creating mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders; and 3. Interacting progressively with the market, competitors, and industry institutions” (Haigh & Hoffman, 2012, p.127).

These sustainable organisations can adopt various hybrid models. For example, a model could be one based on “relational bureaucracy” which pronounces an alternative to the “conventional bureaucratic rule-bound, one-size-fits-all approach”. The essence of “relational bureaucracy” has the possibility to furnish the needed structures for accountability, and also encourage a “caring and responsive professionalism” (Douglass & Gittell, 2012, p.277). Sustainable organisations focus on their people, and the relationships between and among them, such as relationships with their employees, their community and other stakeholders. They not only perform better under normal conditions, but also under unexpected events, and/or crises, according to research examining the responses of ten major airlines and the way they reacted to the attacks of the 9/11 events (Gittell et al., 2006). For example, the contradictory narratives of Southwest Airlines and US Airways indicate “the model of resilience” that was

tested. This is a business model achieved through the long-lasting positive relations between and among employees, together with enough financial holds, and helped Southwest to recuperate quickly and return to its usual functioning, after the attacks of 9/11, without having to resort to layoffs (Gittell, 2006).

Consequently, relationships, and the way these relationships are coordinated, become of primary significance. Furthermore, human sustainability, as defined above, enhances relational coordination. Hence, treating people as ends in themselves is, itself, not only a moral choice but, also, a relational choice, a relational action, or a relational response. Therefore, human sustainability is not simply about how the organisation treats people; it is also about how all people involved with the organisation treat each other and how this impacts key organisational performance outcomes in normal and stressful times. This thesis adopts the relational coordination theory, which provides important insight into human sustainability, as discussed in the following section.

## **2.3 Relational Coordination Theory**

The theory of relational coordination (RCT) provides an important insight into human sustainability, since it not only focuses on relationships, but, also, on the coordination and quality of these relationships, which is fundamental for the success of an organisation. Relational coordination theory states that relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect promote frequent, timely, accurate, problem-solving communication and vice versa, thereby enabling stakeholders to successfully and effectively coordinate their work. Conversely, when negative, these same relationships serve as barriers (Gittell, 2006). According to the theory, organisations are able to delineate their policies and actions related to their people in the different roles and functions, and to coordinate procedures, in order to facilitate their stakeholders to have common goals and objectives. This, in turn, enhances relational coordination (Gittell, 2000; Gittell et al., 2010; Gittell & Douglass, 2012).

Relational coordination theory provides us with a “new light” to see the role of organisational design, not as simply one that constructs the structures through which information can flow but, also, one that constructs the structures which enhance both high quality communication and high quality relationships between

and among the stakeholders who are involved. This frame of reference proposes a more positively “transformative role” of organisational design. The affluence and sustainability of an organisation depends on the quality of coordination among its participants. Effective coordination depends upon participants having a high level of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect (Gittell, 2003).

Shared goals signify “the degree to which participants perceive that other workgroups share their goals for the focal work process” (Gittell, 2016, p.236). They drive people to go further than “sub-goal optimization” and to proceed with the overall work process (Gittell, 2003). Shared goals expand a person’s motivation to participate in high quality communication and increase the possibility that they will engage in problem-solving communication rather than apportion blame when there is a problem, or when things do not go as expected (Gittell, 2012). However, although necessary, shared goals are not sufficient for effective coordination, so participants must also be joined by relationships of shared knowledge and mutual respect.

Shared knowledge signifies “the degree to which participants perceive that their work in the focal work process is understood by other workgroups” (Gittell, 2016, p.235). Shared knowledge tells people how their own job, tasks and responsibilities, and the job, tasks and responsibilities of others contribute to the overall work process, permitting them to act properly regarding this process (Gittell, 2003). This allows people to communicate with each other with greater precision because they are not only familiar with their own tasks and responsibilities, they also know how their tasks are connected to the tasks of individuals in other roles and functions (Gittell, 2012).

Mutual respect signifies “the degree to which participants perceive their work in the focal work process is respected by other workgroups” (Gittell, 2016, p.238). Mutual respect inspires and motivates participants to appreciate the worth of the contributions of other people and to reflect on the effect of their acts on others, additionally strengthening the tendency to act regarding the overall work process (Gittell, 2003). Mutual respect expands the possibility that participants will be well disposed to communication from their colleagues in other roles and functions, regardless of their respective status, “thus increasing the quality of

communication, given that communication is a function of what is heard as well as what is said” (Gittell, 2012, pp.401-402).

Consequently, relational coordination (RC), the core construct of relational coordination theory, is defined as “a mutually reinforcing process of communicating and relating for the purpose of task integration” (Gittell, 2002a, p.301). Relational coordination can be viewed as a mutually reinforcing process of interaction between relationships and communication that is frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving. It is necessary for the purpose of task integration (Gittell, 2012). All these kinds of relationships and their coexistence makes the difference since, jointly, they create the foundation for “collective identity” and “coordinated collective action” (Gittell, 2006). Relational coordination theory creates a validated measurement of relational coordination to assess the state of relational coordination in organisations, called the “RC survey” which comprises seven questions, one for each of its dimensions, and is used by all workgroups involved in the work process (Gittell, 2016). It is a network measure, asking each respondent to answer about their experience of relational coordination from each specific relevant work group, in order to identify patterns of hierarchy and invisible differentiation that would be lost in an overall measure of relationships (Gittell, 2016).

The most convincing explanation of why relational coordination works is indicated by Follett, who claimed that, “reality is in the relating” and through what she calls a “circular response,” “we are creating each other all the time” (Gittell, 2016, p.28). The mutually reinforcing process of communicating and relating of relational coordination, is constant with the concept of “circular response” (Gittell, 2016). Follett states:

“The reflex arc is the path of stimuli received in consequence of an activity of the individual...What we may now call circular response or circular behaviour we see every day as we observe and analyse human relations” (Follett, 1924, p.61).

“...reaction is always reaction to a relating...in human relations...this is obvious: I never react to you but to you-plus-me; or to be more accurate, it is I-plus-you reacting to you-plus-me. ‘I’ can never influence ‘you’ because you have already influenced me; that is, in the very process of meeting, by the very process of meeting, we both become something different. It begins even before we meet, in the anticipation of meeting” (Follett, 1924, pp.62-63).

Moreover, Follett (1949) comprehended, a long time ago, the importance of relationships, and their coordination in organisations as a fundamental issue relative to the viability and sustainability of businesses. Follett claims, regarding this matter:

“For a business, to be a going concern, must be unified. The fair test of business administration, of industrial organisation, is whether you have a business with all its parts so co-ordinated, so moving together in their closely knit and adjusting activities, so linking, interlocking, inter-relating, that they make a working unit, not a congerie of separate pieces. In the businesses I have studied, the greatest weakness is in the relation of departments. In some cases, all the co-ordination there is depends on the degree of friendliness existing between the heads of departments, on whether they are willing to consult” (Follett, 1949, p.61).

“Four fundamental principles of organisation are: (1) Co-ordination as the reciprocal relating of all the factors in a situation. (2) Co-ordination by direct contact of the responsible people concerned. (3) Co-ordination in the early stages. (4) Co-ordination as a continuing process” (Follett, 1949, p.78).

Relationships between roles and functions and their coordination have become increasingly important since Follett’s time, not only for businesses, but for all types of organisations and institutions, due to the constant socioeconomic, cultural and environmental changes. Therefore, relational coordination theory, which focuses on roles, and on work that is highly interdependent, uncertain and time constrained, is even more significant nowadays. Constant with Follett’s frame of reference regarding the “relational approach to coordination,” the relational aspects of relational coordination are not private relationships among people of “liking” or “not liking,” but “task-based” relationship ties. They are conceived as links between work roles and functions, rather than individual links between distinct individuals who occupy those work roles and functions (Gittell, 2012).

Relational coordination theory distinguishes certain dimensions of relationships important for the coordination of work. It also manages to bridge the boundaries between distinct roles and functions that are involved in the work process and are responsible for carrying out the work. Relational coordination theory centres on the creation of relationships between roles, rather than individuals (Gittell et al., 2010). This trait permits for the “interchangeability of employees allowing employees to come and go without missing a beat” (Gittell et al., 2010, p.504). This is a significant factor for organisations that aspire to attain high levels of performance, while permitting staff the adequate adaptability to satisfy their responsibilities in their personal lives (Gittell et al., 2010). Consequently, it is important to note the following:

“Role-based relationships may require greater organizational investments to foster than personal ties - for example, designing cross-functional boundary spanner roles and cross-functional performance measurement systems versus hosting afterwork parties - but they are also more robust to staffing changes that occur over time. High performance work systems that foster these role-based relationships may therefore provide organizations with a relatively sustainable source of competitive advantage” (Gittell et al., 2010, p.504).

This “web of relationships” strengthens, and is strengthened by, the frequency, timeliness, accuracy and problem-solving nature of communication, allowing participants to effectively coordinate the work processes in which they are occupied. Low-quality relationships have the opposed outcome, reducing communication and sabotaging participants’ ability to effectively coordinate their work. For example, when participants do not respect or feel respected by others who are involved in the same work process, they are more likely to refrain from communication, even eye contact, with each other. Alternatively, participants who do not distribute among themselves common goals and objectives regarding the work processes, are more likely to blame others than trying to solve the problem with them. Also participants who do not share knowledge between and among each other, lose the relative kind of connection, they do not communicate in a well-timed way, and also do not have a good comprehension of what the other people are doing in order to realise the imperativeness of communicating specific information to them (Gittell, 2003).

Relational coordination is a multilevel construct (Gittell et al., 2008). It is unbounded because it can be used within and above the range of particular well-defined groups and functions, at multiple levels of the organisation (i.e., individual, group, department, school, college, university) and across inter-organisational boundaries (Gittell et al., 2015). Organisations can foster relational coordination through the design of their organisational structures, including their practices and procedures, that deal with the management of their employees and staff in general. Selection is an important factor, especially in a situation of highly interdependent work. Selection for “cross-functional teamwork” has been shown to be especially significant in terms of affecting relational coordination throughout “functional boundaries” and, more specifically, strengthening the mutual respect aspect of relational coordination (Gittell, 2000).

Relational coordination is stronger in organisations that select and train employees for both functional and relational competence (Gittell et al., 2008). Relational competence is not simply “being nice” – it is the capacity to see the bigger procedure and see how each person’s work is linked to that of each other. Moreover, it is the capacity to see the view of others, to identify with their condition, and to respect the work they do, even if it necessitates diverse skills or is of a lower rank than one’s own (Gittell et al., 2008). This theory focuses on connections between workers, on the design of organisational practices that support these connections and on the influence these connections have on the organisational outcomes that are of interest (Gittell et al., 2008).

A significant factor for this study on human sustainability is the fact that relational coordination proposes a model that goes beyond, recommending that an organisation’s work practices can reinforce and assist “resilient responses,” if they are delineated in a suitable manner; for example, when they take the shape of a “relational work system” (Gittell, 2008). Results from this study, described in a research that focuses on nine orthopaedic units from nine diverse hospitals, demonstrate significant support for this model. This implies that relational work practices significantly contribute to reinforcing collective coping responses (Gittell, 2008). These significant findings are highly related to human sustainability, as it is defined in this study, identifying “relational coordination - communicating and relating for the purpose of task integration - as a collective

coping mechanism and as a resilient response to a particular type of external threat” (Gittell, 2008, p.42). Moreover, the theory of relational coordination claims that “there can be no organizational transformation -or social transformation- without personal transformation” (Gittell, 2016, p.12). However, it does not explain how this personal transformation of human beings in organisations takes place.

Relational coordination theory states that relational coordination supports learning and innovation, assisting organisations to have both “adaptive” and “operational” capacity. Operational capacity alone, although necessary, is not sufficient, because employees and organisations need to acquire new knowledge and innovate continuously (Gittell, 2016). Diverse innovations cut across organisational boundaries. Therefore, when participators come to know about what other segments of the organisation undertake, as well as about the interdependencies between and among these segments, they can more easily perceive and understand chances for innovation. This is the case because, in order to effectively manage knowledge across boundaries, the relationship between and among people involved is a relationship where they both evaluate and share each other’s knowledge (Carlile, 2004). Whenever participants are involved in timely, problem-solving communication with their collaborators across organisational boundaries, they can more easily implement the chances they recognise and single out. Additionally, the high-quality relationships that exist in relational coordination are likely to anticipate an enhancement in psychological safety between and among participators and to encourage the capability of staff to “collectively learn from failures” (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009, p.724). Qualitative and quantitative results suggest that if employees learn collectively from failures, then there is a reduction of the “identity threat” and “loss of face” when obtaining novel expertise or engaging in new role relationships, growing learning and innovation (Edmonson, 1999).

Relational coordination theory claims that relational coordination, when managing task interdependence, results in positive outcomes for diverse stakeholders important to the organisation when it is strong and negative ones when it is weak. This is always the case, but especially as work becomes more interdependent, uncertain and time constrained (Gittell et al., 2010). Relational coordination, in doing so, is different from what other organisation theorists



note as a more spontaneous form of coordination and is considered as follows. For example, as a “mutual adjustment” (Thompson, 1967 cited in Gittell, 2002b), or as “teamwork” (Van de Ven et al., 1976). Therefore, relational coordination theory is “unique” in recognising particular aspects of relationships that are essential to the “coordination of interdependent work” while emphasising the evolution of these relationships between roles rather than persons. Consequently, relational coordination theory and these high-performance work practices are applicable in sectors that have to preserve or ameliorate quality outcomes, while answering to financial constraints, which is a very common difficulty for various types of organisations in diverse industries (Gittell et al., 2010).

Therefore, relational coordination is different from all of the conventional “coordinating mechanisms” recognised in organisation design theory because it deals with the “interactions” among participators rather than the procedures for reinforcing or substituting those “interactions” (Gittell, 2002b). Task interdependence signifies that employees need to work together with others in order to reach goals related to a work process. Comprehending task interdependence permits staff to act with respect to the overall work process, instead of only drawing attention to specific individual areas of responsibility (Gittell, 2002b). Prior research demonstrates the important point that for managers those “routines” (i.e., boundary spanners, team meetings) could be very advantageous and practical as levels of uncertainty become bigger. Therefore, “routines” in the shape of “process maps” should be accepted as instruments for dealing with uncertainty between and among participants in the work process (Gittell, 2002b).

Consequently, relational coordination helps employees as a mediator, to coordinate their work with each other more effectively, hence enhancing production and achieving outcomes of a superior quality. Meanwhile, it utilises resources more efficiently. For example, hospital workers achieved better patient perceived quality of care, as well as shorter patient lengths of stay, since relational coordination is related to important decreases in the duration of stay in hospital (Gittell, 2002b). Relational coordination creates positive outcomes for employees who are involved in it and who encounter it from other colleagues, making it simpler to find the facilities and support needed to achieve

one's work (Gittell et al., 2008). Hence, the findings suggest that front-line employees can be co-partners for attaining "desired outcomes". For example, the results show support for attempts to ameliorate the training, salary and rank of nursing aids, in order to make them more active in reaching desired inhabitant outcomes (Gittell et al., 2008).

As Gittell (2016) argues, prior studies have methodically examined the impact of relational coordination on workers, covering diverse industries (i.e., accounting, airlines, banking, criminal justice, education, finance, healthcare) in different countries and continents (i.e., Australia, Canada, United States, Japan, South Korea, Israel, Pakistan, various European countries including the United Kingdom). The results across the studies suggest that employees, in diverse roles, functions, power and status levels, who encounter higher relational coordination, experience better outcomes (i.e., "increased job satisfaction"; "stronger shared mental models"; "increased proactive work behaviors"; "increased engagement in work"; "reduced burnout/emotional exhaustion"; "increased confidence and collaboration"; "increased sense of social support"; "increased motivation, productivity, identification with organizational values"; "reduced information asymmetry"; "increased equity"). This thesis focuses on three worker outcomes, which are all positively associated to relational coordination and discussed in the following section.

## **2.4 Worker outcomes**

The three worker outcomes examined in this study and discussed in this section comprise work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction.

### **2.4.1 Work engagement: A brief overview**

As a notion "work engagement" has progressively gained interest by institutions, organisations, scholars and researchers (Lee et al., 2016). One reason for this interest is due to its link to significant business results throughout the expanse of diverse types of institutions and organisations. Thus, engaged employees can assist the organisation to reach its goal, accomplish its strategy, and produce significant business results (Vance, 2006). Other reasons are due to its relation to employee well-being and performance (i.e., Christian et al., 2011;

Halbesleben, 2010). Therefore, organisations are interested in work engagement, as well as finding ways to evaluate, enhance and sustain it. This has resulted in many studies which have researched its possible antecedents and consequences (i.e., Halbesleben, 2010; Crawford et al., 2010). For example, job resources are associated with increased engagement, and not all demands are equal in relation to engagement. Thus, demands evaluated as “challenges” are more likely to assist, whereas demands evaluated as “hindrances” are more likely to damage (Crawford et al., 2010).

Diverse research has demonstrated that that employees’ work engagement influences organisational desired outcomes, which gains the attention of organisations. For example, the findings show that above the supply of “job-level resources,” “organizational and team-level resources” are fundamental in the enhancement of “engagement” and “well-being” (Albrecht, 2012). Work engagement is significantly related to frontline employees’ attitudinal and behavioural outcomes, so engaged staff members are “emotionally attached” to their organisation. They enhance customer satisfaction by doing more in their work than their tasks and responsibilities, as well as having less intentions to leave the organisation (Karatepe, 2013). Work engagement somewhat resolves the negative relationship between “organizational commitment” and “turnover intention” and when the relationship between employee-supervisor is improved, it could alleviate the total influence of organisational commitment on turnover intention, in such a manner to diminish the negative relationship between them (Zhang et al., 2015).

Kahn (1990) has coined the term from a psychological perspective, claiming that staff of an organisation appeared to question themselves unintentionally three questions in the diverse situations and to either “personally engage or disengage” based on the answers. Hence, “1) How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance? 2) How safe is it to do so? and 3) How available am I to do so?” (Kahn, 1990, p.703). Consequently, he proposes that engaged employees are physically, cognitively and emotionally involved in their work roles, and encounter a sensation of meaning (reward for investing in role performance), psychological safety (a recognition of trust and security at work) and availability (a sense of having the physical and psychological resources needed for the work). Saks (2006) evolves Kahn’s point of view by differentiating

between work and organisational engagement, claiming that organisations which want to ameliorate employee engagement, should concentrate on “employees’ perceptions” of the type of assistance they are given from their organisations.

The terms “employee engagement” and “work engagement” are both used in a similar way, although there is the belief that the term “employee engagement” has broader scope than “work engagement” (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Furthermore, “employee engagement,” being wider, can comprise an employee’s relationship with their work or professional function, job and organisation, while “work engagement” mentions particularly the relationship between an employee and their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). The top conditions contributing to employee engagement, according to the findings from the SHRM Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Survey of 600 U.S. employees, comprise 77% “relationships with co-workers,” 77% “opportunities to use skills and abilities,” and 76% “meaningfulness of their job” (SHRM, 2016).

Moreover, various related terms and definitions have been proposed by different scholars and practitioners, created based on their point of view, goals and context (i.e., Carasco-Saul et al., 2015; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Shuck et al., 2011). Maslach & Leiter (1997) do not differentiate between the concepts of burnout and work engagement, stating that the purpose of organisational strategy is to construct management structures and procedures that enhance engagement and stop burnout. Alternatively, Schaufeli et al. (2002) differentiate the concepts of burnout and work engagement, claiming that while engagement is the positive “antipode” to burnout, it is a separate, different notion and, as such, is not possible to be measured on a burnout scale. This thesis adopts their definition of work engagement, which focuses on the relationship between employees and the work they perform and refers to a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74).

Schaufeli et al. (2002) explain work engagement as a more “persistent” and “pervasive” state of mind, rather than a “momentary” and “specific” state, which is not centred on any specific thing, incident, person, or way of behaving. The authors define vigour, dedication and absorption as follows: “Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the

willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). "The final dimension of absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.75).

Based on this definition, dedication is not simply involvement, it is more than that, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Moreover, absorption is not the same as "flow," although it is similar, since it is a more "pervasive" and "persistent" state of mind, rather than a specific "short-term" experience (Schaufeli et al., 2002). They also created the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) to measure work engagement in these terms (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The principle model underscoring the view of Schaufeli et al. (2002) is the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). This model has guided much work engagement research (i.e., Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Hakanen et al., 2005; Simbula et al., 2011) including meta-analyses (Crawford et al., 2010; Halbesleben, 2010; Nahrgang et al., 2011).

In this framework, job and personal resources influence work engagement. Job resources are obtained from organisational structures, social and interpersonal relationships, work organisation, or the task (i.e., autonomy, feedback, supportive colleagues, supervisory coaching). Work engagement is "most likely when job resources are high (also in the face of high job demands)" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p.323). Personal resources incorporate individual traits and are positive "self-evaluations" that are connected to "resiliency". Therefore, according to the JD-R (Job-demands-resources) model of work engagement both "job resources" (i.e., autonomy, performance feedback, social support, supervisory coaching) and "personal resources" (i.e., optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, self-esteem), "independently or combined," foretell work engagement, especially when job demands are at a high level (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Work engagement also has a positive influence on job performance (i.e., in-role performance, extra-role performance, creativity, financial turnover) and staff members who are engaged and do well in their work, are capable of generating

their own resources, which then further enhance engagement over time. So, work engagement is forecasted by standard “job resources,” connected to “personal resources” and results in higher job performance, which makes it a significant indicator of “occupational well-being” for both staff and organisations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Hakanen & Roodt (2010) have observed, in their research, that the degree of work engagement is not decided based on employee rank or role at work and that, irrespective of function, work or occupation, it is feasible to feel vigorous, be dedicated and become absorbed at work. Therefore, they counsel organisations to centre on ameliorating job resources which, “by definition”, assist staff to reach their work objectives and enhance individual development, learning and advancement. Research shows that engaged workers have a better performance than non-engaged workers for various reasons (i.e., frequent experience of positive feelings like enthusiasm, joy, they have a better health, they create their own job and personal resources, they transmit their engagement to others) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). However, positive influences of job and personal resources could be decreased by job demands (i.e., unfavourable work environment, role overload and ambivalence, role conflicts and time constraints) that can lead to unfavourable physical and/or psychological stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Work engagement, when measured in studies by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) system occurs “on a continuum, from very low to very high” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003 cited in Havens et al., 2013, p.935). It is worth noting that not always its three dimensions, dedication, absorption and vigour, are equally high. For example, in a study with nurses, the levels of dedication were very high and the levels of vigour (energy at work) were very low, and this can happen simultaneously, since a person can be very dedicated and at the same time undergo low vigour (Havens et al., 2013).

However, despite the high interest in the concept of work engagement, the numerous studies undertaken and the creation of definitions and models, many reports convey a low level of work engagement of employees worldwide. For example, according to the “State of the Global Workplace” report 32% of working-age adults across 155 countries are employed full time for an employer,

but only 15% are engaged at work, which is defined as being highly involved and enthusiastic about the work and workplace. Furthermore, according to Gallup, businesses with the highest employee engagement are 17% more productive and 21% more profitable than those with the lowest engagement among employees (Gallup, 2017). High performing organisations have demonstrated that the driving force behind top performance is an engaged workforce (Harter et al., 2002). This crisis in the circumstances of innovation, productivity and performance has also been recognised by the government in the United Kingdom. The “Department of Business, Innovation and Skills” (2009) has affirmed the low level of employee engagement in the United Kingdom and the damaging results of this situation on the economy of the country (Motyka, 2018).

The harmful consequences of the low employee work engagement, is not only related to the economy and productivity, it is also, and most importantly, related to the health of the people (psychological, social and mental), since a high work engagement is demonstrated by research to be very beneficial to these matters. Engaged staff are full of energy, dedication, and enthusiasm to persist and finish their work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Work engagement, among other results, is positively associated with positive outcomes at the workplace, incorporating a more powerful relationship between “dedication,” “commitment” and “turnover intention” (Halbesleben, 2010). Moreover, research has demonstrated that work engagement is positively related to the following: job attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction, organisational commitment) (i.e., Hakanen et al., 2006; Saks, 2006); job performance and organisational citizenship behaviour (i.e., Bakker & Bal, 2010; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006); in-role and extra-role performance (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2006); business unit performance (i.e., Harter et al., 2002); and, client satisfaction (i.e., Salanova et al., 2005).

Meaningfulness is also an important factor that contributes to work engagement. Pratt & Ashforth (2003) distinguish between “meaningfulness in work” and “meaningfulness at work”. Meaningfulness in work results from the kind of work a person is doing and focuses on making the work and one’s responsibilities intrinsically motivating. Meanwhile, meaningfulness at work results from a person’s membership in an organisation and focuses on “whom one surrounds oneself with as part of organisational membership, and/or in the goals, values,

and beliefs that the organization espouses” (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003, p.314). The emphasis is on the procedures that organisations use to assist “meaning making” in and at work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Studies on engagement focus on elements that are significant for meaningfulness in work (i.e., job control, task variety, feedback); meaningfulness at work, conversely, is more likely to be affected by factors related to the organisation instead of one’s specific tasks. For instance, Saks (2006) found that job traits anticipated “job engagement,” and “procedural justice” anticipated organisation engagement.

The notion of work engagement is conceptually associated with the following: positive organisational behaviour, emphasising positive traits of individuals and organisations (Nelson & Cooper, 2007); positive psychology, emphasising positive “subjective experience” and the traits of “life worth living” (i.e., hope, wisdom, creativity, responsibility, perseverance), contrary to the emphasis on “pathology” which has predominated the discipline (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000); and, positive organisational scholarship (POS) (Cameron et al., 2003). Positive organisational scholarship focuses on the study of particularly positive outcomes, procedures and traits of organisations and their people, without being one single theory, emphasising the notions of “excellence,” “thriving,” “flourishing,” “resilience” and “abundance” which enhance the “positive human potential”. It tries to comprehend what could constitute the “best of the human condition” (Cameron et al., 2003, p.4).

Work engagement “translates into performance” in numerous industries through staffs’ interplay with customers, clients, students or patients. “It is in these interactions that the energy, dedication, absorption, or efficacy that lie in the heart of work engagement turn into action” (Leiter & Bakker, 2010, p.5). Various researchers have drawn attention to the importance of employee work engagement in increasing performance and positive organisational outcomes. Saks (2006) argues that there was only little empirical evidence to reinforce these claims. However, research on the association between work engagement and diverse performance categories has been increasing in recent years, in various geographical regions, industries (i.e., finance, education, hospitality, construction) (Motyka, 2018).



### 2.4.1.1 Work engagement in Higher Education

Considering the large amount of research undertaken on work engagement, especially in the private sector, there are not many studies in the public sector in general and in the field of education in particular. There are a few examples (i.e., Jevé et al., 2015; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). However, academics have expressed the view that the literature has not focused on comprehending the notion of employee engagement in public sector organisations (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017). The majority of empirical studies in the sector of education, explore engagement among teachers working at primary and secondary educational levels (i.e., Bakker & Bal, 2010; Hakanen et al., 2006; Li et al., 2015; Runhaar et al., 2013; Trepanier et al., 2015).

There is a small number of research studies that have examined engagement levels in higher education institutions (i.e., Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006). For example, a study on academics demonstrated the significant positive influence of “job resources” (i.e., role clarity, good supervisor relations and intrinsic task characteristics) among academics, foretelling higher levels of work engagement and organisational commitment (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Another study demonstrated that vigour in particular is characterised by “mental resilience” and the desire to work hard in one’s work, despite challenges. Hence, the findings show that female academics put more effort in their job, despite the challenges they face, in order to complete their tasks and responsibilities (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010).

Prior research on work engagement indicates that when lecturers have good relationships with management, it results in a more favourable connection with the organisation as a whole and, thus, greater organisational engagement (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Research including 349 professional staff employees from 17 different higher education institutions in the United States, to examine areas of their working conditions that could affect their own work engagement, suggest the following: employees’ views of “work overload” have a comparatively minor relationship with their attitudes and behaviours on the job, while their views of “role conflict” have a comparatively major relationship (Curran & Prottas, 2017).

There are some studies on work engagement and role relationships in the higher education sector. For example, a study indicates that the key to enhance the right kind of culture is to choose public sector managers who understand the “complexity of human behaviour” and comprehend the significance of creating “high-quality relationships” with staff (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017). Thus, hiring “good” managers is necessary but not sufficient. They have to be adequately trained in order to understand the best way to communicate with staff members and contribute to the creation of these high-quality relationships in the workplace (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017).

#### **2.4.1.2 Work Engagement and Relational Coordination**

Job demands and time constraints can be a detriment to work engagement. This issue is also related to research on work engagement and relational coordination. There is a growing research interest regarding the contextual factors that interact with relational coordination including complexity, uncertainty, time constraints, resource constraints and performance pressures. The results of these studies are mixed, since some studies indicate that job demands of various kinds are a predictor of relational coordination while other studies suggest that they are not, with relational coordination, rather, creating resilience among employees, enabling them to better handle job demands (i.e., Topping et al., 2019). For example, regarding the influence of contextual factors in “marketizable” universities, teachers and researchers are not sure whether their work is sufficient, whether they are “doing the right thing,” doing as much or well comparatively to others, regularly looking to ameliorate, to be superb. “And yet, it is not always clear what is expected” (Ball, 2003, p.220) (see chapter one).

Relationships with colleagues have also been connected with work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Studies have also shown that work engagement is infectious, which encourages employees to include various people in their field (Fasoli, 2010). The work engagement literature suggests that high-quality interpersonal relationships (IPRs), thus relationships that have high levels of all seven dimensions of relational coordination, shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, enhance work engagement (Warshawsky et al., 2012; Naruse et

al., 2017). Relational coordination between nurse managers and their colleagues was positively associated with work engagement. On average, nurse managers said they engaged with their workforce various times during a week. This elevated degree of work engagement indicates that nurse managers regard the type of their labour to be meaningful. Relational coordination of high-quality interpersonal relationships is as follows: higher among nurse managers and their colleagues in the same function; lower with colleagues from other functions (i.e., physicians); highly associated with work engagement; and, constant with the model of work engagement which mentions that “supervisory and co-worker relationships are instrumental in building work engagement” (Warshawsky et al., 2012).

Another differentiation in the literature indicates that high-quality interpersonal relationships with supervisors are a significant “source of motivation” for nurse managers, whereas high quality relationships with physicians, exercise more powerful influences on proactive behaviour (Warshawsky et al., 2012). Proactive work behaviour is discussed in the following section.

#### **2.4.2 Proactive work behaviour: A brief overview**

Proactivity is significant in the workplace nowadays, where there is more competition and greater pressure for innovation (Crant, 2000; Fay & Frese, 2001; Parker, 2000; Sonnentag, 2003). People who are proactive execute their main tasks and responsibilities better (Thompson, 2005). Proactivity is also important for individual career success (Seibert et al., 1999). Although there has been a substantial growth in proactive concepts, there is very little known about how the diverse behaviours connect to one another or about more general procedures and antecedents of proactive behaviour (Crant, 2000). This maybe the case because research on proactivity has not come out “as an integrated research stream in the organizational behaviour literature. There is no single definition, theory, or measure driving this body of work; rather, researchers have adopted a number of different approaches...and they have examined them in a number of seemingly disconnected literatures” (Crant, 2000, p.435). Instead there is a worry that there is a probability of diverse constructs that might double without being combined (Parker & Collins, 2010).

An uncertainty in the field of proactive behaviour is whether or not it is extra-role. Research shows that the border between in-role and extra-role behaviour is unclear and claims that there might be a need for reconceptualisation of extra-role behaviour, considering that it might be diverse between and among people (Morrison, 1994). Proactive persons tend to interpret their roles more widely and this more “strategic” and “proactive” viewpoint necessitates the restructuring of jobs and relevant authority structures (Parker et al., 1997). A change in power structure is necessary in order to create proactive, “broad-thinking” staff, “because such a change must be a lived experience and it can be neither contrived nor commanded” (Aktouf, 1992, p.419). Moreover, proactive persons tend to redefine their positions to include new tasks, responsibilities and goals (Frese & Fay, 2001). Adaptivity is different from proactive behaviour because it involves adapting to change, whereas proactive behaviour involves initiating change (Griffin et al., 2007).

This thesis examines proactive work behaviour (PWB), which is distinguished from other kinds of proactive behaviour (i.e., proactive strategic behaviour, proactive person-environment fit behaviour). Proactive work behaviour refers to employees’ self-initiated actions that go beyond the tasks and responsibilities of their role and focus on leading change in organisations (i.e., Bindl & Parker, 2011; Fay & Frese, 2001) (Urbach & Weigelt, 2019). Prior research has demonstrated that proactive work behaviour is positively related to diverse advantageous outcomes; for instance, individuals’ “job satisfaction,” and “affective organizational commitment” (Thomas et al., 2010). One positive view is to consider proactive work behaviour as taking charge, which demonstrates that staff members are more likely to take charge when they considered top management have embraced staff recommendations and staff-started change (Morrison & Phelps, 1999); or, as a personal initiative, that utilises an “active approach,” which has a “self-starting” and “proactive nature” that surpasses any challenges in order to reach an objective (Fay & Frese, 2001). These can be ways of coping with work stressors, such as time pressure or situational constraints (i.e., Fay & Sonnentag, 2002; Fritz & Sonnentag, 2009; Ohly & Fritz, 2010; Searle & Lee, 2015).

Recent research suggests that proactive work behaviour can also have costs for the proactive individual and examined the potentially negative effects for

people and organisations. For example, researchers proposed that proactive work behaviour might play a part in “employee stress” especially among staff members who do not have proactive inclinations or the characteristics that assist particular kinds of proactive work behaviour; or proactive work behaviour could play a part in “inter-employee tension” when colleagues do not agree with the “appropriateness” of it (Bolino et al., 2010). Furthermore, research indicates that employees who “go the extra mile” might undergo “citizenship fatigue” which can influence the future manifestation of “organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)” (Bolino et al., 2015). Organisational citizenship behaviour, according to Morrison & Phelps (1999), although similar, is different from proactive work behaviour. The results of several empirical studies on this potential “dark side” of proactive work behaviour support that it is related to elevated levels of strain and exhaustion (Fay & Huttges, 2017; Pingel et al., 2019; Strauss et al., 2017; Zacher et al., 2019).

Scholarly work has identified both “constructive” and “destructive” proactive work behaviours (Moss et al., 2003). This study focuses only on constructive proactive work behaviour. Other types of proactive behaviour are also identified. For example, Parker & Collins (2010, p.636) specify three wide “targets of impact” to which such behaviours could be administered: “the internal organization environment (proactive work behavior), the organization’s fit with the external environment (proactive strategic behavior), and the individual’s fit within the organizational environment (proactive person-environment [P-E] fit behavior)”. This thesis focuses on the first type and defines proactive work behaviour as “taking control of and bringing about change within the internal organizational environment” (Parker & Collins, 2010, p.637). It examines proactive work behaviour focusing on “taking charge,” “voice,” “individual innovation,” and “problem prevention” (Parker & Collins, 2010).

“Taking charge entails voluntary and constructive efforts, by individual employees, to effect organizationally functional change with respect to how work is executed within the contexts of their jobs, work units, or organizations. It...is inherently change oriented and aimed at improvement” (Morrison & Phelps, 1999, p.403). An exemplifying behaviour of taking charge is trying to create ameliorated processes in the work context (Parker & Collins, 2010). Prior

research indicates that employees are more likely to take charge when they recognise that senior management are willing to listen to their suggestions and to their started actions of change (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Staff members are also more likely to take charge to the degree that they have a “high level of self-efficacy” and an “internalized sense of responsibility” for encouraging change at work (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Self-efficacy is a significant predecessor of taking charge and similar behaviours (Axtell & Parker, 2003; Speier & Frese, 1997).

Procedural justice is another factor, according to research, that influences the level of taking charge. Employees are more likely to take charge when they perceive their organisation to be high in procedural justice. It seems that having fair policies and regulations makes certain that persons view themselves safe enough to be proactive. Conversely, the absence of procedural justice might make them perceive their taking charge as “overly risky” (McAllister et al., 2007). Moreover, the decision regarding taking or not taking charge is influenced by both context and personal traits. Thus, even within the same institution, some persons may be more likely to take charge than others, particularly those with “high self-efficacy” and “felt responsibility” (Morrison & Phelps, 1999).

“Voice is [a] promotive behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than merely criticize. Voice is making innovative suggestions for change and recommending modifications to standard procedures even when others disagree” (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p.109). An exemplifying behaviour of voice is communicating your points of view related to issues at work to colleagues despite the fact that your perceptions vary and others do not agree (Parker & Collins, 2010). The emphasis is on voice behaviours that question the status quo in a constructive manner (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Voice is related to discussing issues that influence an employee’s workgroup, searching details regarding those matters and presenting “innovative suggestions” even if others disagree (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Prior research demonstrates that “high-quality leader-member exchange” forecasts voice in the organisation (Burriss et al., 2008).

Scholarly research shows that employees are more likely to behave consistently with their individual traits if the circumstances activate facets of these

characteristics. This finding influences the level of voice (Parker et al., 2010). For example, Fuller et al. (2006) claim that “access to resources” forecast voice by means of perceived responsibility for change only for persons with certain proactive traits and not for those who do not possess such characteristics. Innovation and creativity are similar but not identical. Creativity refers to the construction of new and useful notions (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988); innovation refers to the construction or adoption of useful novel notions and notion implementation (Van de Ven, 1986). The definition used in this thesis starts with a “problem recognition and the generation of ideas or solutions, either novel or adopted” (Scott & Bruce, 1994, p.581). Then, the person,

“...seeks sponsorship for an idea...[and] finally completes the idea by producing a prototype or model of the innovation...that can be touched or experienced, that can now be diffused, mass-produced, turned to productive use, or institutionalized...Thus, innovation is viewed here as a multistage process, with different activities and different individual behaviours necessary at each stage” (Scott & Bruce, 1994, p.582).

An exemplifying behaviour of individual innovation is trying to find novel methods, technologies and/or ideas about products or issues (Parker & Collins, 2010). Persons involved in individual innovation could be expected to be involved in any mix of these actions at any one time, because innovation in this sense is depicted by “discontinuous activities” rather than separate, consecutive stages (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

Problem prevention is defined as follows. “The long-term focus on work enables the individual to consider things to come (new demands, new or reoccurring problems, emerging opportunities) *and* to do something proactively about them. Thus, problems and opportunities are anticipated, and the person prepares to deal with them immediately” (Frese & Fay, 2001, p.140). An exemplifying behaviour of problem prevention is aiming to discover the real cause of issues that are mistaken (Parker & Collins, 2010).

Proactive work behaviour is not always forwarded automatically, despite its advantages because it includes “uncertainty” for the future and initiates change which is not always accepted by others in organisations (i.e., managers, supervisors) who favour the “status quo” (Wu & Parker, 2017). Features of the

workplace can interfere to stop proactive persons from being so (i.e., job control, procedural justice) (Parker et al., 2010). One of the most significant impediments of proactive work behaviour is the absence of “job control,” since circumstances low in job control allow little horizon for “individual antecedents” to affect actions (Parker et al., 2010). For instance, research has demonstrated a stronger connection between feeling recovered in the morning and acting proactively during the day for staff members with high levels of job control than for staff with low levels of job control. Low levels of job control seem to suffocate peoples’ proactive work behaviour (Binnewies et al., 2009).

Consequently, due to the various possible uncertainties and dangers of proactive work behaviour, having an encouraging environment is likely to enhance proactivity (Parker et al., 2010). An encouraging environment inspires and stimulates people to experiment in diverse manners in order to undertake their tasks and responsibilities without being concerned regarding potential risks (Parker et al., 2010). Research indicates that in environments where proactive work behaviour is significant, chiefs and managers can take action to encourage and sustain this kind of behaviour. This happens despite the fact that such actions are not always easy to obtain because they do not always come “naturally,” particularly in situations with high levels of pressure, where they are more likely to interfere in order to do things faster with better results. Therefore, “coaching” or “training leaders” to comprehend what enhancement of proactive work behaviour signifies and how to give it within the organisation is helpful (Wu & Parker, 2017).

#### **2.4.2.1 Proactive Work Behaviour in Higher Education**

There is not much published in the field of higher education in general and in particular about employees regarding proactive work behaviour, despite the extensive literature in organisations. For example, some studies focus on students and their proactivity in coping with various situations, such as depression (Bagana et al., 2011), college transition in the case of freshmen (Wang et al., 2013) or commuting mode choices (Zhou, 2014). The proactive personality of college graduates is in relation to the following: successful job search (Brown et al., 2006); “citizenship” and “counterproductive” conduct in an academic environment (Islam et al., 2018); and, their academic “self-



efficacy” in education (Lin et al., 2014). The proactive behaviour of university students and its relation to the following: significant “emotional outcomes” (i.e., good communication with academics, “school-life satisfaction”) (Cho & Lee, 2016); and, their development of employability (Clements & Kamau, 2018).

Other studies focus on academics, their proactive personality and the way it is related to: job behaviours (“task and citizenship”) using the occurring mediator of “perceived role breadth” (Bergeron et al., 2014); the extent to which proactive personality is significant in the job adaptation of novel faculty members in the new academic environment (Wahat, 2009); and, “challenge and hindrance stress” regarding academic achievement (Zhu et al., 2017). Research on academics has also examined the influence of both organisational environment and their proactive behaviour to the research performance of universities, with “collaboration behaviour” being the most significant factor of research results (Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016).

Research in higher education has also focused on the “proactive behaviour” of the university towards its stakeholders, in order to achieve positive results. For example, a study examined “proactive recruitment strategies” in order to increase the “capacity” and “diversity” in Japanese higher education toward further internationalisation in the coming years (Kuwamura, 2009). Another study examined the “responsive” and “proactive” stakeholder orientation. “A responsive stakeholder orientation (RSO) would mean an organisational attempt to understand and satisfy the expressed needs of stakeholders, whereas a proactive stakeholder orientation (PSO) would represent an organisational attempt to understand and satisfy the latent needs of stakeholders” (Alarcon-del-Amo et al., 2016, p.132). The findings indicate the following: public universities with a more powerful RSO and/or PSO reach superior organisational performance regarding “beneficiary satisfaction,” “resource acquisition,” and “reputation”; executing an RSO is not sufficient in order to reach the most powerful level of performance aspects (i.e., reputation,) emphasising the need of PSO, in order to supplement the results of an RSO. Proactive stakeholder orientation involves various high-level relationships between and among stakeholders of a university, like any other organisation or institution (Alarcon-del-Amo et al., 2016).

### 2.4.2.2 Proactive Work Behaviour and Relational Coordination

Prior research suggests that high level relationships (IPRs), with shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect based on frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, may also promote proactive work behaviour linked to advanced organisational performance. Warshawsky et al. (2012), in order to measure proactive work behaviour, consider four subscales which comprise taking charge, individual innovation, problem prevention and voice. Their study proposes that high-quality relationships with physicians positively influence nurse managers' proactive behaviour. Moreover, it is the mix of nurse managers' work engagement, quality relationships with physicians, and the skills and practical knowledge of a nurse manager that most powerfully affect the level to which nurse managers behave proactively. In this case, proactive work behaviour is fundamental for the suppression of medical mistakes and the advancement of patient care (Warshawsky et al., 2012).

High levels of relational coordination can potentially lower the “status boundaries” between and among workers, which separate them, taking away the status hierarchy existing in various sectors, and resolving a great problem to innovation, enhancing higher levels of performance. Prior research indicates that employees with a creative and innovative attitude are more creative and innovative when they are attached to each other through relational coordination (Gittell, 2016). Thus, workers “are more likely to innovate, create new knowledge, learn from each other and from their failures, and to feel sufficient psychological safety to do so, when they have high levels of relational coordination with each other” (Gittell, 2016, p.27). High levels of relational coordination are also positively associated with the enhancement of job satisfaction which is discussed in the following section.

### 2.4.3 Job satisfaction: A brief overview

Job satisfaction (JS) is one of the most frequently studied aspects in organisational behaviour research and a subject of broad interest for people in organisations (Erro-Garces & Ferreira, 2019). Job satisfaction has become a matter of great interest during recent decades worldwide, due to utilitarian (i.e., decreased absenteeism and turnover, and increased productivity in the

context of work) and humanitarian reasons (i.e., workers' improved health and wellbeing) (Westover & Taylor, 2010). Studies focusing on utilitarian reasons, for example, have examined job performance and suggest that research on the "satisfaction-performance relationship" should not be stopped (Judge et al., 2001). Research focusing on humanitarian reasons was partly a continuation of Karasek's research on the job strain model, which is based on national survey findings of Sweden and the United States, which concludes that what is related to mental strain is the "combination of low decision latitude and heavy job demands" (Karasek, 1979, p.285). This research has produced further evidence that jobs involving high demand, low control and low social support could produce psychological strain (Totterdell et al., 2006).

There are various definitions of job satisfaction. For example, Locke (1976, cited in Clark, 1996, p.190) define it as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences". Price (2002, cited in Dahinten et al., 2016, p.1061) defines job satisfaction as "one's attitudes or affect towards a job". There are also diverse groups of job satisfaction theories, which can be reported as: (a) "discrepancy theories" which investigate the degree to which staff members' necessities or desires are satisfied within the workplace; (b) "equity theories" which underline "social comparisons" in the assessment of job rewards; and, (c) "expectancy theories" which emphasise employee motivation (Adams & Bond, 2000). However, all these theories, despite their differences, agree that job satisfaction could be defined as "the degree of positive affect towards a job or its components. This is determined by characteristics both of the individual and of the job, and particularly how work is organized within the corporate work environment" (Adams & Bond, 2000, p.538).

The thesis adopts this definition which could be considered as a positive concept reporting, especially, work attitudes (Utrianinen & Kyngas, 2009). Job satisfaction is positively related to the following: "Leader empowering behaviours" which are those that require "shared leadership" and cooperation between managers and other employees (Mehra et al., 2006). "Shared leadership" emphasises the chance of leadership in teams as a "shared, distributed phenomenon" where there could be various leaders, either arranged officially or in an unofficial, emergent manner (Mehra et al., 2006). "Structural

empowerment” claims that work is strengthened when a staff member has the possibility to use organisational empowerment structures (i.e., information, support and guidance, opportunities for professional advancement). Origins of empowerment could be formal (i.e., supervisors) or informal (i.e., peers) (Wagner et al., 2010). “Delegation” or “decentralization” of formal power in the organisation should take place for a thriving change (Wagner et al., 2010). “Psychological empowerment,” related to staff members’ psychological experiences of empowerment deals with manners in which the management applications are comprehended by workers and occurs when there is a feeling of “motivation” in relation to the work context (Cicolini et al., 2014).

A “decentralization” of formal power suggests participation of employees in decision-making, which could also be associated with job satisfaction. Past research might have underestimated the influence of participative decision-making (PDM) on job satisfaction, but most recent research has examined the topic. Diverse companies are trying to ameliorate the degree of job satisfaction for their staff by permitting them to participate in “job-related decisions”. This attitude might derive from the organisational point of view, whereby the principle drive for undertaking participative decision-making programmes would be to encourage profits in productiveness. Prior research indicates that while participative decision-making opportunities are a significant factor in encouraging job satisfaction, principals and heads should remember the other job traits which have been demonstrated, in past and present research, to be invaluable to staff (i.e., “interesting work,” “achieving something,” “working with pleasant people”) (Pacheco & Webber, 2016). Workplace flexibility is also related to an organisation which encourages participation of employees in decision-making.

Workplace flexibility has become a significant practice that permits various organisations to win workers by acknowledging their grown “work-life demands” (Rhee et al., 2019). Research indicates that policy use was higher when various policies were provided and that organisations should take into account that they could not satisfy unique “dependent care needs” with one policy. Providing “cafeteria style” benefits, permitting staff to choose from diverse options, might be a constructive manner for organisations to satisfy the different non-work necessities of their people (Butts & Casper, 2013). Moreover, it proposes

one way to make sure that “there is something for everyone, and no one loses out” (Hakim, 2006, p.291). Another study suggests that there are other approaches (i.e., the STAR approach), that aim for more “meaningful changes” to be constructed and “customized” to particular organisational conditions and job demands. In this case, staff and managers rethink, “when, where, and how work was done” and the way work was undertaken, and the manner in which they could provide professional and personal help to colleagues. This approach varies from the usual flexible work practices that permit some staff to modify their work, with their supervisors’ consent, without a wide investigation of the manner in which the work is undertaken (Kelly et al., 2014).

Furthermore, although there is research for the common types of flexibility, such as “flexitime” (i.e., compressed work weeks), “flexplace” (i.e., telecommuting or remote work) and “time off” (i.e., annual leave or paid sick leave), the “negative” sides of workplace flexibility that are pertinent to low-workers have not been appropriately researched. For instance, they deal with “last-minute notice” for overtime work (Rhee et al., 2019). Prior research shows that workplace flexibility, which permits people to control better their work schedule could decrease turnover intention. The findings suggest that the influence of workplace flexibility on turnover intention is not always straight, but is likely to be manifested indirectly through the decrease of work-family conflicts and the enhancement of job satisfaction. Consequently, low-wage staff who believe they have more workplace flexibility have less work-family conflicts, which increases their job satisfaction, thereby decreasing their intent to leave the organisation. This finding confirms related past research (Rhee et al., 2019).

A cooperative environment at work has a positive influence on job satisfaction and this is demonstrated by research. For example, research undertaken in 32 European countries (18 Western, including Great Britain, and 14 Eastern countries) indicates that various managerial innovations (i.e., “performance related pay,” “accelerated promotion,” “greater monitoring”) which aim to increase productivity could, in reality, “reduce” job satisfaction. These results indicate that people at work are “most satisfied” when the quality of their employment situation is elevated due to a “non-competitive” and “co-operative” work context (Borooah, 2009). Moreover, Western European had

higher levels of job satisfaction than Eastern countries. This result is primarily due to the fact that they were provided with the traits which enhanced job satisfaction, those that employees, based on this research, considered to be “important”. These attributes are related to the “external aspects of a job” (i.e., pay, holidays, promotion chances) rather than to the “internal aspects” (i.e., responsibility, usefulness, social interaction). Hence, employees who emphasised the internal aspects were more likely to be satisfied than those who emphasised the external aspects. One reason could be that external aspects are “competitive,” whereas, internal aspects are “co-operative” (Borooah, 2009).

International research on job satisfaction in six European countries including Great Britain, utilising non-panel longitudinal data for 1989, 1997, 2005, affirms earlier findings on the important roles of rewards and work relations in affecting job satisfaction. Both intrinsic (i.e., “career development through opportunities to update one’s skills”) and extrinsic (i.e., “pay and promotional opportunities”) rewards, and work relations with co-workers and management, are examined in relation to job satisfaction. The study confirms earlier findings that job and organisational factors, are good “predictors” of job satisfaction. Rewards, especially intrinsic (i.e., “interesting job,” “job autonomy”), according to the findings, are the “major drivers” of job satisfaction for the majority of countries for all periods (Westover & Taylor, 2010). The two major factors that enhance job satisfaction (i.e., intrinsic rewards and work relations with management) for Great Britain were considered by the local participants to be lower than the average levels for the six countries. The job satisfaction level of the respondents for Great Britain and Hungary was announced to be lower than the average for the six countries (Westover & Taylor, 2010).

Additional research in Great Britain indicates that job satisfaction, is U-shaped in age, hence decreasing from a “moderate level” at the start of employment and then increasing in a stable manner to retirement (Clark et al., 1996). Announced levels of job satisfaction are high, although they fell in the 1990s, lower among blacks than whites, slightly lower in union workplaces than non-union ones, high in small workplaces, and “largest of all” in not-for-profit organisations. People with university degrees reported the lowest levels of job satisfaction and women higher than men (Oswald & Gardner, 2001). Although women reported that they were more satisfied than men, this finding needs

further explanation. Thus, research in Great Britain indicates that women's higher job satisfaction does not reflect that their jobs are "unobservedly" better than men's but, rather, the fact that their jobs have been a lot worse in the past that they have lower anticipations (Clark, 1996).

This is the "gender-job satisfaction paradox," which is affirmed for the United Kingdom (Kaiser, 2007). A crucial factor for organisations to recognise is that women can choose from at least three kinds of careers that fit their goals, rather than only one. Hence, the "truncated career," of "home-centred" or "family-centred" women, which most likely ends when they get married and have children; the "adaptive career" of "adaptive women" which necessitates a work-life balance; and, the "hegemonic" or "greedy" career, of "work-centred women" which can become "all-consuming" particularly at the higher-ranking levels (Hakim, 2006). Scholarly research indicates that the percentage of women in these categories is approximately 60% for the adaptive and 20% for each of the remaining types (Hakim, 2006). Findings of research in Britain show that these three kinds of working women exist and are employed in the same professions, although in diverse kinds of work. This diversity creates new issues for organisations to consider. These are "career patterns" rather than lifelong aspirations that vary between the three types and not "occupational choices". Nevertheless, this reasoning necessitates further investigation, since it is based on limited research (Hakim, 2006).

Self-employed individuals reported higher levels of job satisfaction in Great Britain (Oswald & Gardner, 2001). The same is true for other countries in Europe (Millan et al., 2013). Moreover, research among European countries shows that self-employed persons are less likely to be satisfied with job security (Millan et al., 2013). Research on job satisfaction in European countries indicates that higher wages are related to higher job satisfaction and staff working full-time are more satisfied than those working in short or part-time jobs, with less than 20 hours weekly (Medgyesi & Zolyomi, 2016). Low-paid staff announce a lower degree of job satisfaction when contrasted with the higher paid staff in the majority of countries, excluding the United Kingdom. This reinforces the notion that low-pay employment in these countries mostly includes low quality. The findings also suggest that the "gap in average" job satisfaction between lower and higher remunerated people is noticeably broader in the Southern European

countries than in the remaining European Community (Diaz-Serrano & Vieira, 2005). People with a permanent job appear to be more satisfied than “temporary workers” but this is not a pattern for all countries. Job satisfaction is more likely to increase with higher “occupational prestige” and, among the demographic groups that participated, those with lower job satisfaction are men, the middle-aged and the “tertiary educated” (Medgyesi & Zolyomi, 2016).

Although the “tertiary educated” people reported lower levels of job satisfaction, individuals embrace training at the workplace. The Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) states that there is proof of a positive association between training and job satisfaction (Jones et al., 2009). Findings also indicate that organisations should concentrate on the quantity and kind of training they propose to their employees, since if they increase the amount of training, they could enhance job satisfaction (Jones et al., 2009). Training programmes could be constructed focusing on “care-based behaviour” which demonstrates staff care in practice and the way to enhance care in relationships. The focus should be on acquiring knowledge concerning ways of assisting, while proposing personal ideas. “Care-based training” can be connected to “off-the-job” or “on-the-job” training programs (von Krogh, 1998). Care in knowledge creation is at the core of knowledge management practices (KM) (von Krogh, 1998).

Knowledge management practices refer to which degree managers can generate all the knowledge sources embraced by persons and groups in the organisation and modify them into “value-creating activities”. The phases of the creation of new knowledge comprise diverse stages (i.e., initial sharing of knowledge, experiences and practices among people involved, construction of a new service/product based on shared knowledge, relevant documentation and proceeding to build and share the new product/service within the business) (von Krogh, 1998). Knowledge management practices usually comprise knowledge processes as mentioned and “infrastructures, capabilities and management activities” that assist and encourage knowledge processes (Kianto et al., 2016).

Findings on knowledge management research affirm that knowledge creation is related to “cultural factors” (i.e., collaboration, trust, learning). For example, groups are “most creative” when their associates cooperate, and they are more



spontaneous and less hesitant to act and speak when they have “mutual trust” (Lee & Choi, 2003). When knowledge management practices exist in the workplace, findings are associated with high job satisfaction. Hence, they indicate that “intra-organisational knowledge sharing” is the crucial knowledge management process, enhancing job satisfaction for the majority of employee groups. Knowledge-sharing practices are well examined, primarily because they could also contribute to peoples’ well-being. “Collegial support and encouragement,” together with a positive environment at the workplace, appear to be powerful contributors of both job satisfaction and high job performance (Kianto et al., 2016).

“Respectful treatment” of staff at all levels, is associated with job satisfaction. The Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SHRM) of 600 employees in the United States, informs that 67% of employees rated it as “very important,” positioning it at the top of the list, together with “culture” and “connection” and “feeling appreciated” by the organisation for doing a good job. Results indicate that appreciation could develop a “bond” between and among the various roles and functions (i.e., managers, employees). “Overall compensation/pay” is the second factor related to job satisfaction since 63% of participants mentioned it. “Overall benefits” the third, “job security” the fourth, and “opportunities to use skills and abilities” as well as “trust” between staff and top management, the fifth (SHRM, 2016). These results indicate that the presence of respect in an organisation can greatly enhance job satisfaction; this is also positively associated with a well-designed and structured workplace.

According to research, a well-structured workplace is also positively associated with job satisfaction, whereas a poorly structured one has the opposite effect. Thus, workers who are happy with their working environment, achieve better outcomes and are more productive. Poor work-place design is a fundamental reason for low productivity, low satisfaction, low degree of commitment and negative influence on health (i.e., headaches, tiredness, difficulty in concentration, annoyance of the eyes, nose, throat and lungs) (Bangwal et al., 2017). Modern workplaces are often open spaces, with diversely documented problems (i.e., noise, distractions, lack of privacy). On the other hand, individual offices could discourage communication, teamwork, and flexible use of space. Findings of a study undertaken on five different organisations,

including diverse roles of 228 employees, suggested, among others, that “easy access to meeting places” contributed to greater “group cohesiveness” and job satisfaction, and “distractions” might have a low effect on “self-rated performance” (Lee & Brand, 2005). Research also indicates that, although the findings did not demonstrate a “direct effect” of “ambient noise,” levels on job satisfaction, well-being and organisational commitment and less ambient noise were demonstrated to lessen the negative influence of “psychosocial job stress” on these three notions. So, the whole frame of reference of the situation must be taken into consideration, in order to fully understand the influence of “occupational noise exposure” (Leather et al., 2003).

#### **2.4.3.1 Job Satisfaction in Higher Education**

Job satisfaction of academics has been the subject matter of research in past decades (Rhodes et al., 2007). Oshagbemi (1996) researched the job satisfaction of academics regarding diverse components of their work in the United Kingdom. He discovered that academics were more satisfied with teaching and the interaction with colleagues, which indicated good relationships with their collaborators in general and in the “joint performance” of their tasks. The results suggested that academics were less satisfied with research and had “only moderate” satisfaction from the actions of the department’s principals and from the universities’ “physical conditions” and “working facilities”. Conversely, academics were “dissatisfied” with pay, promotion, and, to a “lesser extent”, with the undertaking of their administrative and managerial responsibilities (Oshagbemi, 1996). Further research demonstrated that the age of the academics is “significantly related” to these “core aspects” of their work (i.e., teaching, research, administration) (Oshagbemi, 1998). The higher education sector, since then, has changed from an “elite” to “mass system” with diverse changes that took place during this transformation (i.e., increase in external regulatory mechanisms like the Research Assessment Exercise, inspections by the Office of Standards in Education, and teaching quality assessments for the Quality Assurance Agency) (Rhodes et al., 2007).

Research on academics and job satisfaction took place in the transformed higher education sector both in the United Kingdom and worldwide and examined various issues. For example, leadership in general has a significant positive

effect on the job satisfaction of academic faculty in higher education in Lithuania. More specifically, the “serving leadership style” has the highest positive influence and “controlling autocrat leadership” has the lowest positive influence (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). In an international survey of the “Changing Academic Profession” (CAP survey), which is a common survey of academics in 18 countries from five continents, job satisfaction among academics in the United Kingdom seems to be low. Hence, less than half (45%) of participants said that their “overall satisfaction” with their present job is high or very high. Younger faculty participants seem to be the “most satisfied and the least dissatisfied,” and the older, “established” academics seem to be the “least satisfied and the most dissatisfied” (Bentley et al., 2013).

“Collegial social interaction” is related to job satisfaction and findings showed that the most powerful predictor of job satisfaction is for the academic participants to be acknowledged by other persons in the department (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). Prior research also demonstrated that remuneration and relative benefits are also related to job satisfaction. Thus, the majority of academics reported that low salary was one of the primary reasons for job dissatisfaction which, together with inadequate or even lack of benefits and allowances, additionally increased the problem of remuneration. “Better working conditions,” “inadequate opportunities for advancement,” “temporary contracts” and “job security” were also factors of dissatisfaction. “Commitment to student interest” was reported as the principle motive for staying at the university (Moloantoa & Dorasamy, 2017).

Scholarly research emphasises that job security enhances job satisfaction among academics (Moloantoa & Dorasamy, 2017). Prior research that compared international faculty with people in the United States suggested, among other issues, that international academics were less satisfied with the choice and impact they had to select “committees,” “content of their courses” and the focus of their work, in relation to their American colleagues. Faculty did not have very diverse realisations from their colleagues in the United States regarding “departmental climate,” “peer interaction” and “overall satisfaction,” which is different from past research (Mamiseishvili & Lee, 2018).

Academic job satisfaction has been the main focus of research in higher education and there is not much that focuses on the administrators in the field. “Cumulatively,” research in this sector indicates that there is “little unity” in comprehending job satisfaction in a college or university environment (Smerek & Peterson, 2007). There are some studies that include both academics and administrative staff. For example, in a study with 142 participants (55.8% administrative, 21.8% academic support, 25.4% academic), results show that the factors, which negatively influence job satisfaction, are “work overload,” “pressure” and “unclear management and work role”. Participants are not satisfied with their training which, according to past research, is related to job satisfaction because “learning opportunities” and “skills’ development” enhance it (Dorasamy & Letoane, 2015). Further research on both academic and administrative staff at a public university indicates that training, teamwork, and employee empowerment can significantly enhance job satisfaction. A “nurturing environment” that ameliorates the recognition of empowerment has a positive influence on staff and can eventually improve organisational effectiveness. Thus, inspiring staff to be responsible and allowed to take decisions they are capable of, should be taken into consideration and included in the organisational culture and policies (Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016).

A university satisfaction survey in the United Kingdom including full-time and part-time staff of administrative manual, technical, teaching and research roles that examined the pay and the satisfaction degrees of people, demonstrates the following: the “gender pay gap” is changeable both between universities and also between the grades of staff; degrees of satisfaction with “pay” and “promotion prospects” do not necessarily differ between men and women, contrary to past research, but they do differ between academic and administrative female employees; there is an association between the dimensions of the “gender pay gap,” “job grade” and “expression dissatisfaction” since women in academia work in a “non-gender-segregated” profession and convey dissatisfaction with their remuneration. Nevertheless, for administrators the female dominance of their rank and their higher degrees of satisfaction seem to be connected with a bigger pay gap (Smith, 2009).

Scholarly work in higher education that focuses only on administrators suggests that improving the “work itself” is of supreme importance; this finding is further

supported by previous research. Additional predictors that enhance the job satisfaction of administrators comprise “effective supervisors” and “senior management”. Therefore, appropriate “supervisor training” to ameliorate communication, management and decision-making is a “significant level to impact job satisfaction in this context” (Smerek & Peterson, 2007). A study on 270 non-academic staff indicates that there is a positive and significant association between job satisfaction and performance (Inuwa, 2016).

Findings also indicate that administrative staff members’ job satisfaction is “most strongly affected” by their “inner motivation” and by “the external reward system”. Administrators recognise that they are satisfied with their job when they are “internally motivated” and when they have good remuneration and incentives. So, inner motivation has a substantial influence on job satisfaction when it is “measured according to the job task, which implies that the staff members’ inner motivation is highly associated with their job task related satisfaction” (Jung & Schin, 2015, p.894). This finding is also supported by past research. These results indicate that organisations should concentrate on inspiring their employees by acknowledging their work, furnishing a degree of work autonomy and making available “self-development” chances, according to suggestions of motivation studies (Jung & Schin, 2015). Moreover, results demonstrate that a bureaucratic hierarchy, where the decision-making takes place at the higher positions and the lower roles are more likely to be excluded, demotivates employees of lower positions. The university’s reward system for its staff members also has an important influence on job satisfaction (Jung & Schin, 2015).

#### **2.4.3.2 Job Satisfaction and Relational Coordination**

Relational coordination theory claims to influence employee job satisfaction due to both its “instrumental” benefits for successfully completing work and its “intrinsic benefits” for enhancing positive connections with other persons (Gittell et al., 2008). A cross-sectional multi-level study of 15 Massachusetts nursing homes is the first study that demonstrates evidence of the influence of relational coordination to job satisfaction (Gittell et al., 2008). Furthermore, results show that in addition to ameliorating job satisfaction, relational coordination improves “performance outcomes,” and “resident quality

outcomes”. In doing so, it enhances the give and take of information pertinent to the care of a certain resident under circumstances of “interdependence,” “uncertainty” and “time constraints” (Gittell et al., 2008). “Task interdependence” occurs between staff and other colleagues who work with residents, comprising other nurses, nursing aides, housekeeping staff and activities staff; “uncertainty” occurs regarding the unpredictable physical and mental state of the elderly residents; and, “time constraints” occur due to the necessity of residents needing help in order to undertake basic everyday tasks and routines (i.e., necessity for help to eat, necessity to go to the toilet, to wear their clothes, to do basic everyday tasks) (Gittell et al., 2008).

Additional research demonstrates the association of relational coordination to job satisfaction. For example, the results of a cross-sectional study on quality care offered by community health nurses to community-dwelling frail persons, shows both the importance of relational coordination and its positive association to primary care professionals’ satisfaction with the delivery of this type of care (Cramm et al., 2014). Another study aiming to explore how relational coordination in the home care teams was related to the employees’ experience of job and quality care also demonstrated the association of relational coordination to job satisfaction. The findings regarding the seven dimensions of relational coordination (shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect, and frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication) indicated that, the frequency of communication with the other workgroups was not significant for any of the end results, in relation to the elderly, but they were significant in connection to involvement and job satisfaction. Furthermore, relational coordination toward nurses was associated with involvement and job-satisfaction (Albertsen et al., 2014).

High levels of relational coordination also foresee a higher degree of job satisfaction with the job of colleagues in positions of lower status, which is of primary importance in organisations. The administrative and other forms of hierarchy that exist in various industries signify that employees are more likely to disdain the labour accomplished by collaborators who are lower in the hierarchy. For instance, pilots are considered to scorn the work of flight attendants who, in turn, despise the work of service agents, who disdain on ramp agents, who look down on cabin cleaners; this can, moreover, take place

in various professions across organisations (i.e., between physicians and nurses and the other roles in the hospital) (Gittell, 2016).

## 2.5 Summary of literature review

This chapter examined the theoretical perspectives related to this thesis. This study focuses on human sustainability and argues that it needs to take a more central position in research, education, business and public policy. The growing interest in sustainability is more oriented towards physical (i.e., environmental and ecological sustainability) than human resources. Although this “ecological” perspective is a well-founded one, it is very limited. The reason for its restriction is that it misses giving a central position to human beings and the way their behaviour has an impact on it, and vice versa (Faber et al., 2010). The Academy of Management division on the natural environment has, as one of its goals, dealing with people in organisations for sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010a). Moreover, in September 2015, all member states of the United Nations decided on new global Sustainable Development Goals. These initiatives demonstrate that, nowadays, it is highly significant for organisations to realise that companies and their management practices also have profound effects on human beings and the social environment.

People in organisations are “very, very unhappy” with their leaders. There are a lot of data that demonstrate that places at work are frequently “toxic environments” which are negative for both employees and employers and, as far as research indicates, there is no proof that there will be improvement soon (Pfeffer, 2015). Consequently, as Pfeffer (2018, p.22) argues “...we have not begun to scratch the surface when it comes to reporting on and promoting human sustainability”. This thesis views human sustainability as related to human beings, relationships, roles, coordination and communication, between and among roles, within and beyond their organisation; thus, to all stakeholders of an organisation (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2007). “A stakeholder in an organization is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p.46).

All stakeholders of businesses, organisations and institutions, are people (Freeman et al., 2018). All persons ought to be respected due to their dignity and humanity (Kant, [1785] 1990). Stakeholder management “is based on a moral foundation that includes respect for humans and their basic rights” (Freeman et al., 2018, p.3). It is important to understand that the ethics of business are not different, thus “of a lesser grade”, from everyday ethics, as some managers and others have indicated, claiming that business ethics are of a “less strict variety” than the everyday ethics, “but are *in addition to* the duties that existed prior to organizational scheme of cooperation” (Phillips, 2003, p.163). Hence, organisations and businesses should treat people as they should be treated in everyday life, not break the “norms and standards of society” and propose “a brand new set of moral considerations based on stakeholder obligations” (Phillips, 2003, p.163). Moreover, the stakeholder approach is distinctive in its prominence on the relationships that create the networks from which new “value creation ideas” are initiated (McVea & Freeman, 2005). Thus, the fundamental idea is that “business can be understood as a set of relationships among groups that have a stake in the activities that make up the business...To understand a business is to know how these relationships work” (Freeman et al., 2007, p.3).

This thesis focuses on respect for the dignity of all stakeholders who are human beings, and their relationships. It focuses on human sustainability (HS), relational coordination (RC) and the influence of these two dynamics on worker outcomes, proposing a conceptual framework named, “The Cycle of Human Sustainability” and aiming to explain the process of personal transformation of employees in organisations.

I define human sustainability in this study based on Kant’s “Formula of Humanity as an End” and the “Formula of the Realm of Ends” (Kant, [1785] 1990) as follows: “Human sustainability is when organisations respect human beings as free, rational and responsible, include them in policy formulation and decision-making and encourage them to build mutual respect with all persons within and beyond their organisations.” This definition could apply to all organisations and institutions in all sectors, both for-profit and not-for-profit, and its purpose is twofold: First, organisations and their managers ought always to treat employees as “ends in themselves”; additionally, employees, based on consistency, ought



to treat everyone else in the organisation, and beyond, the same way (mutual respect). Second, the management of organisations co-create and follow main organisational laws, policies and regulations, with all employees and other important stakeholders of the organisation, in such a way that all members of the organisation are, at the same time, creators because they create the rules, and followers because they obey to the rules.

Sustainable organisations could adopt and implement this human sustainability definition. Some organisations, have already started defining their purpose along these lines, focusing on all their important stakeholders, trying to make a difference for their people, and becoming more viable and sustainable. A “sustainable work system” is capable of operating in its environment, to reach its economic, operational, human and social goals and please the needs of numerous stakeholders rather than one only (Kira & van Eijnatten, 2009). Sustainable organisations focus on their people, and the relationships between and among them, such as relationships with their employees, their community and other stakeholders. They not only perform better under normal conditions, but also under unexpected events and/or crises (i.e., the way they reacted to the attacks of the 9/11 events) (Gittell et al., 2006).

Consequently, relationships, and the way these relationships are coordinated, become of primary significance. Furthermore, human sustainability, as defined above, enhances relational coordination. Hence, treating people as ends in themselves is, itself, not only a moral choice but, also, a relational choice, a relational action or a relational response. Therefore, human sustainability is not simply concerned with how the organisation treats people; it is also concerned with how all people involved with the organisation treat each other, and how this impacts key organisational performance outcomes, in normal and stressful times. The theory of relational coordination provides important insight into human sustainability since it not only focuses on relationships, it also focuses on the coordination and quality of these relationships, which is fundamental for the success of an organisation.

Relational coordination theory states that relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect promote frequent, timely, accurate, problem-solving communication and vice versa, enabling stakeholders to successfully and

effectively coordinate their work. Conversely, when negative, these same relationships serve as barriers (Gittell, 2006). According to the theory, organisations are able to delineate their policies and actions related to their people in the different roles and functions, and to coordinate procedures, in order to facilitate their stakeholders to have common goals and objectives. This, in turn, enhances relational coordination (Gittell, 2000; Gittell et al., 2010; Gittell & Douglass, 2012).

Relational coordination is a multilevel construct (Gittell et al., 2008). It is unbounded because it can be used within and above the range of particular well-defined groups and functions, at multiple levels of the organisation (i.e., individual, group, department, school, college, university in higher education) and across inter-organisational boundaries (Gittell et al., 2015).

A significant factor for this study on human sustainability is the fact that relational coordination proposes a model that goes beyond, recommending that an organisation's work practices can reinforce and assist "resilient responses" if they are delineated in a suitable manner; for example, when they take the shape of a "relational work system" (Gittell, 2008). Moreover, the theory of relational coordination claims that "there can be no organizational transformation -or social transformation- without personal transformation" (Gittell, 2016, p.12). However, it does not explain how this personal transformation of human beings in organisations takes place.

Relational coordination theory states that relational coordination, when managing task interdependence, results in positive outcomes for diverse stakeholders who are important to the organisation when it is strong and negative ones when it is weak. This is always the case, but especially as work becomes more interdependent, uncertain and time constrained (Gittell et al., 2010). Consequently, relational coordination helps employees as a mediator to coordinate their work with each other more effectively; hence enhancing production and achieving outcomes of a superior quality. Meanwhile, it utilises resources more efficiently. This thesis examines three worker outcomes (work engagement, proactive work behaviour, job satisfaction) which are all positively associated to relational coordination.

Therefore, considering these theoretical perspectives I reflect on the aims of the study and proceed to undertake research to answer the research questions. The aims of this study are twofold: First, to examine how human sustainability, as it is defined in this study, influences relational coordination in the University; and, second, how both human sustainability and relational coordination influence the three worker outcomes. The research questions are the following:

Research question 1: “How does design for human sustainability affect relational coordination?”

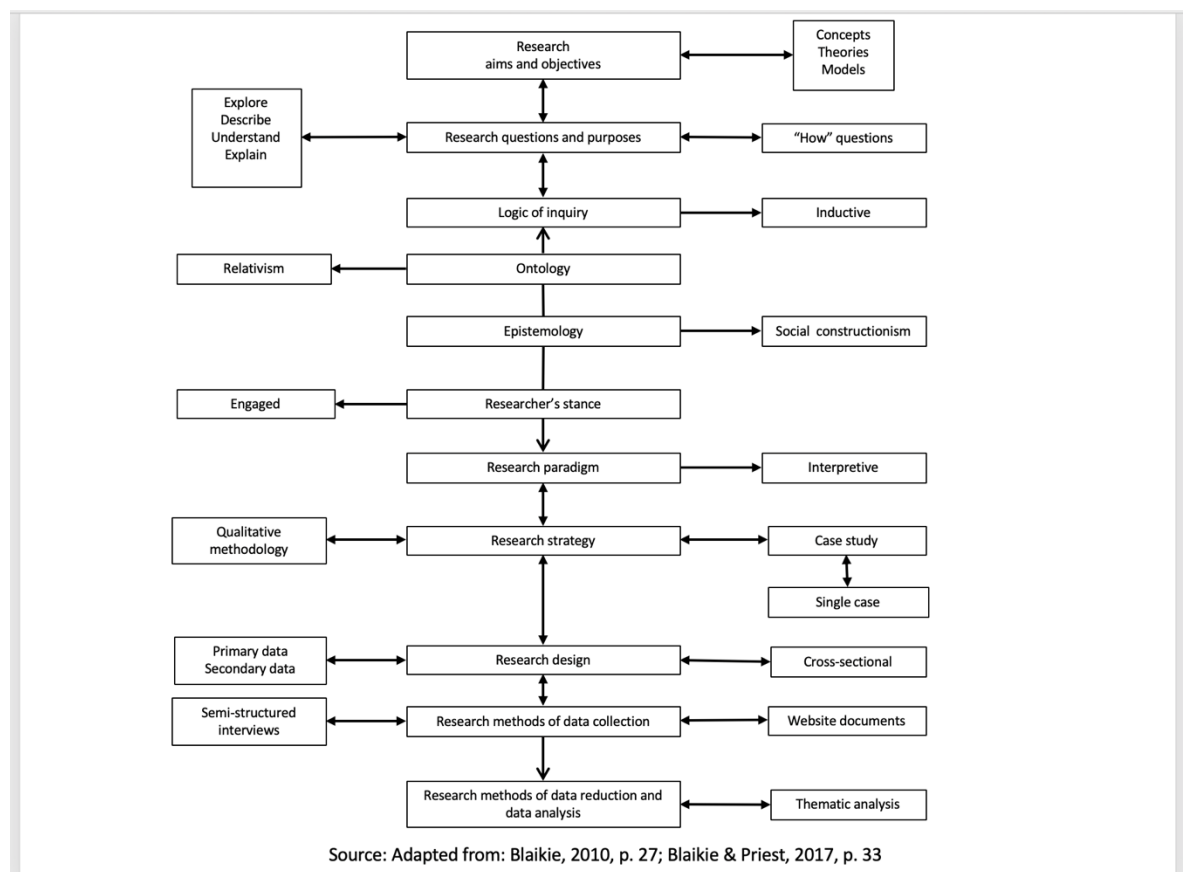
Research question 2: “How do human sustainability and relational coordination affect worker outcomes?”

Research questions constitute the most significant component of all research (Blaikie, 2010). The objectives to answer these research questions are framed from an interpretive perspective, the research strategy is a case study research strategy, the type of the research is cross-sectional and its context a large university in the United Kingdom. The research methodology of this study is discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3 Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the research methodology of the study. The chapter is structured along the philosophical and methodological decisions taken to undertake this research study (Figure 3-1). The outcome of a sequence of decisions initiating from the origination of a research question and moving on to discover and utilise a suitable way to answer, is very important for the quality of research. Hence, “transparency” becomes pertinent making the research process, with its diverse “steps and decisions”, comprehensible to the readers. Relevant research aims and theories are introduced in previous chapters and the figure below shows how they relate to the philosophical and methodological decisions (Flick, 2007b). The links between the main components of research illustrated (i.e., logic of inquiry, research strategy) are interrelated and consistent between and among each other (Blaikie, 2010). Therefore, the arrows that connect the decisions are “double-headed” suggesting that the “design process is not linear and is bound to involve movement in both directions” indicating its “iterative nature” (Blaikie, 2010, p.34).

**Figure 3-1 Philosophical and methodological decisions of this PhD research**



### 3.1 Research questions and purpose

It is important to state the research question(s) in the explanation of the methodology of a research study (Flick, 2018). Good research usually relies on a well-specified, if rather broad, research question (Gioia et al., 2012). All research studies are based on research question(s) which explain their “nature” and “scope” (Blaikie, 2010). A research question provides an “explicit statement” of what the investigator wants to have information on (Bryman & Bell, 2015). “Clarity in relation to the focus of the research is usually achieved by setting out the main research questions to be investigated” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p.4). Research questions with clarity are fundamental for the positive result of a research study, since they focus on what is significant (i.e., what to collect as data), and on what is not significant (i.e., for the specific study) (Flick, 2007a). A significant factor of the success of a research study is “clear conclusions” derived from the collected data; this is highly dependent upon the clarity of the research questions (Saunders et al., 2007). Research is “built around a question” (Thomas, 2016, p.44). There are diverse ways for developing research questions (i.e., start with a broad note and then narrow down the research question or the contrary) (Flick, 2007a). It is important to formulate research questions that provoke new understanding and this is dependent upon the quality of the related literature review (Saunders et al., 2007; Thomas, 2016). Moreover, this new understanding could produce “innovative” theories (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013).

Social research can have eight key purposes: “explore, describe, understand, explain, predict, change, evaluate and assess impacts” (Blaikie, 2010, p.56). These purposes require different research questions. Flick (2018) states three major kinds of good research questions (exploratory, descriptive, explanatory) which are related to different purposes of research. “Exploratory” centres on “a given situation or change”; “descriptive” describes a specific “situation, state, or process”; “explanatory” centres on a “relation.” This goes beyond the “state of affairs” which is the aim of a “what” question and examines a “factor or an influence” related to that specific situation (Flick, 2018).

The two research questions of the study are the following:

Research question 1: “How does design for human sustainability affect relational coordination?”

Research question 2: “How do human sustainability and relational coordination affect worker outcomes?”

The above stated research questions are clearly stated and formulated (Saunders et al., 2007). They are clear and explicit statements regarding the undertaken research (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The purpose of questions framed in “how” terms focuses on “surfacing concepts and their inter-relationships” (Gioia et al., 2012, p.26). These research questions aim to bring new knowledge and encourage theory development (i.e., conceptual framework of the cycle of human sustainability) (Saunders et al., 2007; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). In doing so, they focus on exploring and describing the situation and the context, in order to explain it, focusing on relationships. Thus, this research aims to explore, describe, understand and explain the subject matter under investigation (Flick, 2018). This attempt to explanation is significant “the ultimate challenge for social researchers is to go beyond description to explanation” (Blaikie & Priest, 2017, p.1).

In order to answer research questions, researchers utilise different “logics of inquiry” (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). The logic of inquiry, an essential element of any social research study, is discussed in the following section.

### **3.2 The logic of inquiry: Inductive**

According to Blaikie & Priest (2017, p.12) there are four major logics of inquiry: “inductive, deductive, abductive, and retroductive.” Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) state that a usual distinction is between inductive, deductive and abductive. “Induction is the process of observing a number of instances in order to say something general about the given class of instances” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.224). In contrast, in deduction, theory comes before the data (Saunders et al., 2007). Researchers use the abductive logic of inquiry in unpredictable

circumstances and need to comprehend and explain a subject matter (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

The logic of inquiry in this study is inductive because it is the most suitable to adequately answer the research questions. Induction, in its diverse variations, is the most extensive perspective to analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Various qualitative researchers refer to induction as “analytic induction,” which can predominantly be defined as “the systematic examination of similarities within and across cases to develop concepts, ideas, or theories” (Pascale 2011, cited in Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.224). In this way, theory comes after the data. The principle purpose of induction is to permit research findings to appear from the recurrent, supreme, or important themes innate in raw data, without the constraints forced by methodologies which have a certain structure. Deduction, which is often used in experimental and hypothesis-testing research, is not appropriate since the major themes are frequently unrecognised, reframed or unnoticeable (Thomas, 2006). Furthermore, its utilisation is suitable because it assists the ability to: abbreviate large and diverse raw text data into a shortened, summary configuration; set up understandable connections between the research objectives and the summary findings obtained from the raw data, and to make sure that these connections are both able to be shown to others and sensible based on the study’s aims and objectives; initiate a model or theory about the experiences and procedures that can be seen in the text data. Induction is frequently utilised in social science research (Thomas, 2006).

The choice of a logic of inquiry can be influenced by various factors such as a researcher’s predilection for some ontological and epistemological assumptions (Blaikie, 2010). Ontology, epistemology and axiology are discussed in the following section.

### **3.3 Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology: Relativism, Social Constructionism, Engaged**

All researchers should reflect on their own research orientation taking into consideration its’ underlying ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions which can influence the manner in which research is undertaken. The selection of an orientation is complicated since it is affected by diverse

considerations (theoretical, philosophical, ideological), in addition to the researchers' prior life situations, skills, innate beliefs and values (Blaikie, 2007). Every research study is based on philosophical assumptions related to what represents valid research and how data about a phenomenon should be collected, analysed and utilised (Mingers, 2003). These are the researchers' assumptions based on which they position themselves on the ontological, epistemological and axiological continuum.

The first set of assumptions are ontological. The word "Ontos," which gives the root "onto," at its most basic means "being" or "reality" (Macintosh & O'Gorman, 2015). "Ontology as a branch of philosophy is the science of what is, of the kinds and structures of objects, properties, events, processes and relations in every area of reality" (Smith, 2004, p.155). Ontological assumptions can, generally, be divided into two extremes, objective and subjective (Macintosh & O'Gorman, 2015). As we move from assumption to assumption across the objective-subjective continuum, the essential attributes of what composes sufficient knowledge changes (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) propose a continuum of ontologies which are from one extreme to the other: "Realism," "internal realism," "relativism" and "nominalism". Other theorists propose different names including more categories of ontologies on the ontological continuum from objectivism to subjectivism. For example, Blaikie (2007) names them as follows: "shallow realist," "conceptual realist," "cautious realist," "depth realist," "idealist," "subtle idealist". This thesis reflects the ontological assumptions of "relativism" according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) and of "idealism" according to Blaikie (2007). "Relativism" claims that the truth is not one but many and the facts are dependent on the perspective of the viewer (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). "Idealism" means that reality, the "external world", is what persons create or "construct". Therefore, whatever people think is real it is real because they think so (Blaikie, 2007).

The second set of assumptions are epistemological. The term "epistemology" is derived from the word "episteme" which means knowledge. Therefore, epistemology is the study of knowledge (Macintosh & O'Gorman, 2015). "Epistemology was the first significant philosophical product of the breakdown



of the unitary world-view with which the modern era was ushered in...[and] sought to eliminate this uncertainty by taking its point of departure...from an analysis of the knowing subject” (Mannheim, 1936, p.12). Epistemology is positioned between the two extremes of “object” and “subject” starting either one or the other and tries to obtain from one or the other the chance of “valid knowledge” (Mannheim, 1936). It focuses on how we know what we know.

There are various epistemologies between these two extreme positions of object and subject on the continuum, and different theorists propose different continuums with diverse categories and names. For example, Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) propose a continuum of epistemologies, from one extreme (objectivism) to the other (subjectivism) and name them as: “strong positivism,” “positivism,” “constructionism” and “strong constructionism” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Other theorists propose different names including more categories of epistemologies on the epistemological continuum from objectivism to subjectivism. For example, Blaikie (2007) proposes one continuum with more categories of epistemologies from objectivism to subjectivism and names them: “empiricist,” “rationalist,” “neo-realist,” “constructionist” and “conventionalist”.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) claim that the fundamental concept of positivism, which is at one extreme of the epistemological continuum, is that there is an external social world and it can be measured in an objective rather than subjective manner. On the other extreme of the epistemological continuum, there is constructionism and strong constructionism. Blaikie (2007) states that as we are dealing with “social enquiry” in this discussion, “constructionism” refers to “social constructionism”. Lincoln et al. (2018, p.137) argue that constructivists are inclined towards the “antifoundational,” which is a term utilised to “denote a refusal to adopt any permanent, unvarying (or “foundational”) standards by which truth can be universally known.” As Lincoln (1995) proclaims, “truth” and any accord related to what is “valid knowledge” emerges from the relationship between stakeholders of a particular “community”.

This thesis reflects the epistemological assumptions of “social constructionism” because it deals with social research focusing on the socially constructed

meaning of reality. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) state that the fundamental concept of social constructionism is that the “external reality”, the social world, is determined by persons rather than by “objective and external factors”. Thus, it is significant to respect the manner in which persons make sense of their experience. They further suggest some major implications of social constructionism. First, the researcher is part of the subject matter under study. Second, the beliefs and interests of persons are related to the subject matter under examination and the driving force of knowledge creation. Third, explanations aim to enhance the overall understanding of the state of affairs. Fourth, ideas are brought about and developed from the collection of rich data. Fifth, notions should include multiple perspectives. Sixth, the units of analysis of a study could incorporate the complexity of whole situations. Seventh, generalisation is relevant to “theoretical abstraction.” Finally, sampling necessitates small numbers of cases that are selected for specific reasons.

A third set of assumptions, although distinct, is associated with the ontological and epistemological issues, and focuses on human nature and the relationship between human beings and their environment (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Hence, “we have in our minds a prior judgement...Without such prior judgments, without, in other words, a system of values, we should never be able even to focus any social fact” (Stark, 1958, p.16). The role of values is crucial and values may have an effect on the research process at different times (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Burrell & Morgan (1979) claim that values can also be either “radical” which implies change, or “regulatory” which focuses on normative guidelines.

A significant decision that all researchers need to make is what “stance” to take in relation to the research process and the people who participate in it. “What the relationship will be between the researcher and the researched” (Blaikie, 2010, p.50). The researcher, based on their values, could occupy a position along a continuum which has as its two extremes the dimensions of “detached” and “engaged” (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Researchers could either strive to be independent or detached from what they are studying or get closer to the subjects of study and be engaged with the research. Blaikie & Priest (2017) named this researcher’s positioning as a “researcher’s stance” along a continuum with the extreme positions of “outsider” and “insider.” They claim that researchers need to position themselves somewhere and the stance they

decide to embrace influences the manner the research problem is set in a frame, planned, managed, and the conclusions that the research creates (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). The axiological assumptions of the thesis are oriented towards subjectivism and social constructionism and characterised by the “engaged” position of the researcher, who becomes an “insider” and, as such, closer to the subjects of study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Blaikie, 2007).

Consequently, the ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions of the thesis are all interrelated and constant. This combination of assumptions makes logical sense and commonly occurs in practice (Blaikie, 2007). In conclusion, I want to reemphasise the importance of explicitly stating my philosophical orientation (ontology, epistemology, and axiology) since it has significant implications for the methodology I have utilised. This is due to the fact that “different ontologies, epistemologies and models of human nature are likely to incline social scientists towards different methodologies” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p.2). It has been typical since Kuhn (1970) to name specific integrations of the above stated assumptions (ontological, epistemological, axiological) as paradigms (Mingers, 2003). Research paradigms are discussed in the following section.

### **3.4 Research paradigm: Interpretive**

Morgan (1980) claims that the concept of paradigm made popular by Kuhn (1970) is useful in this respect; furthermore, probably one of the most significant implications of his work derives from the identification of a paradigm as an alternative reality, which means that it designates an implicit or explicit view of reality. Blaikie & Priest (2017) specify that Kuhn (1962) introduced the concept of “paradigm” earlier into philosophical, scientific and everyday discussion, despite the fact that it was used in sociology in the 1970s. Moreover, they argue that debates regarding the relative quality of paradigms took place for many years.

“The paradigms of a mature scientific community” can be easily designated, despite infrequent equivocations. However, the designation of “shared paradigms” is not the designation of “shared rules” (Kuhn, 1962; Kuhn, 1970). Hence, scientific communities share a paradigm which comprises the points of

view of the “nature of reality” (ontological assumptions), notions, theories and “techniques of investigation” that are considered as suitable (epistemology) and “examples” of prior scientific attainments that furnish “models” for scientific practice (Blaikie & Priest, 2017).

An important characteristic of paradigms is that they are “incommensurable” which means that they are inconsistent with each other due to diverse assumptions and methods (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Moreover, Lincoln et al. (2018) argue that, although at the “paradigmatic” or “philosophical level” the positivist and the constructivist views are incommensurable, within each paradigm “mixed methodologies (strategies)” could be accepted. So, they clarify that the “argument” in the social sciences was not related to “method” as various critics suppose. In order to understand the various points of view, it is fundamental that researchers are completely aware of the assumptions upon which their perspective is based, as well as to get to know other paradigms than their own, so they are able to fully appreciate the nature of their own starting point and paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Blaikie & Priest (2017) argue that the decision regarding a research paradigm should be deliberate, defensible and made clear, since this will permit researchers to know exactly what they are aiming for. In doing so, they should always consider their research aims, objectives and research questions. The best decision is to choose a paradigm, related to and based on certain assumptions (ontological, epistemological, axiological), that could give the best possible answer to the research questions of the study.

Nowadays, in the framework of academic research, certain current approaches could be regarded as “paradigms” whereas others, maybe smaller than paradigms might be considered as “schools of thought” or meta-methodologies (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Blaikie & Priest (2017), who claim to utilise the “paradigm” in a constant manner with Kuhn’s views, argue that three types of paradigms are now usually used in research, which are based on the approaches to social research espoused by the three main founders of sociology, Durkheim, Weber and Marx. They are not meant to be prescriptive and should be considered “as typifications, as abstractions that bring together similarities and recognise differences” (Blaikie & Priest, 2017, p.12).

According to Blaikie & Priest (2017) the neo-positive paradigm is an updated version of the classic positivist paradigm. Its ontological assumptions are “realist” and its epistemological assumptions are of “falsificationism.” The aim of the interpretive paradigm is dual: to recognise and report the “typifications” that “social actors” utilise in relation to the research problem and to develop knowledge as a foundation of a theory. Its ontological assumptions are “idealist” and its epistemological “constructionist.” The critical realist paradigm aims to determine and initiate the system that creates a “described regularity” in a specific setting. It focuses on visualising what system or systems are working and then proceeds to discover proof for their circumstances and way of working. Its ontological assumptions are usually “depth realist” but not always, since one of its versions overlaps with the interpretive paradigm. Its epistemological assumptions are usually “neo-realist”.

It was decided that the interpretive paradigm was the best one to be used due to its relevance to both my world view and to answering the research questions. Neither the neo-positivist nor the critical realist paradigms could be adopted because both function with realist ontological assumptions. Hence, they accept that social reality exists independently of the persons involved in it. This occurs even if they vary regarding their perspective related to the amount of influence social activity has on the nature of reality (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). Therefore, they do not fit with the current research, which is based on the assumption that social reality does not exist independently from its social actors or researchers. The ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions that reflect this thesis are relativist or idealist and social constructionist and are related to an engaged researcher’s stance.

Moreover, the purpose of this research was neither to uncover a direct cause and effect relationship nor to test an established theory. The research’s aims and objectives, as set out in this research, emphasise the examination of “how” human sustainability influences relational coordination and “how” both human sustainability and relational coordination influence worker outcomes in the University. Thus, the complexity of its aims and objectives and the context dependency of this study aligns it with the interpretive paradigm. Investigating this process necessitates researchers to perceive facts and values since reality is

accessed indirectly through others and it is essential to access different viewpoints in order to socially construct reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

Consequently, this thesis reflects the interpretive paradigm, which generally states that social reality does not exist independently from either researchers or persons involved but is created through “shared interpretations” which social actors constantly create and recreate. Anything away from these shared interpretations could be debated. Its common type of research design is “iterative” since stages overlap, and iterations predominate. Its usual researcher’s stance is “insider,” typified in various ways, for example, an “empathetic observer,” since the researcher is aiming to uncover a part of the social life of the persons’ involved. Its logic of inquiry is either inductive or abductive. Its research process starts with an engagement in the social life of participants to discover the concepts and understandings they utilise and that are related to the research questions. Its data are usually primary and textual (i.e., transcripts of interviews) examining case studies, always generated and pronounced as daily concepts, which are subsequently abstracted into theoretical concepts that enhance understanding. Its samples are usually non-probability small-scale ones. Its usual methods of data collection are utilised to give rise to qualitative data which, in concurrence with data analysis, can create and develop “typified” concepts that advance theoretical knowledge (Blaikie & Priest, 2017).

The focus of the study is on frontline employees who work in the University, exploring the work they do to support the students. Moreover, the programme administrators are examined within their relationships with the other professional roles, within a particular unit/School in the University. The interpretive paradigm is the most suitable for this type of analysis. It provides the type of understanding that goes beyond my understanding as a researcher to the understanding of the persons in the University; this understanding is referred to as “Verstehen.” The notion of Verstehen is central in qualitative research and frequently applied by Weber who obtained it from Wilhelm Dilthey. Verstehen signifies “studying people’s lived experiences which occur in a specific historical and social context” (Snape & Spencer, 2008, cited in Hennink et al., 2011, p.17). It indicates the understanding of the everyday experiences and lives of the persons under investigation from their own point of view, in their own

circumstances and reporting this utilising their own terms and notions (Hennink et al., 2011).

Therefore, the ultimate goal of this research is to achieve *Verstehen* and give rise to qualitative data which, in concurrence with data analysis, can create and develop concepts that advance theoretical knowledge. In adopting this position, the study was designed to collect and compare data from diverse perspectives. This furnishes a rich and informative range of data that permits for the induction of ideas and a theoretical abstraction of reality. The research strategy, research design, research methods for data collection and data analysis of this study are explained below. Research strategy is discussed in the following section.

### **3.5 Research strategy**

Considering the underlying philosophical assumptions of this study the research strategy is developed. This is a broad plan that focuses on “how” the two research questions will be answered (Saunders et al., 2007). There are different research strategies researchers can utilise such as experiment, case study, survey, action research. It is worth noting that all research strategies are equally important, with no one better than the other. Therefore, the decision on a particular research strategy depends on the philosophical assumptions, research question(s), aims and objectives, amount of available information, time availability and resources. Each strategy can be utilised for “exploratory,” “descriptive” and “explanatory” research (Saunders et al., 2007).

Adopting an interpretive paradigm, the purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the daily experience and life of the persons under investigation from their own point of view and in their own circumstances. The two research questions focus on “how” observed phenomena take place (i.e., human sustainability and relational coordination), “how” one influences the other (i.e., human sustainability influences relational coordination) and “how” both of them influence the workers’ outcomes (the work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction of the programme administrators).

The research strategy comprises the “methodology”, a “subfield of epistemology ... the science of finding out” (Babbie, 1983, p.6). Researchers are instructed to

use methodologies that are consistent with the premises and aims of their theoretical perspective (Rynes & Gephart Jr., 2004). Thus, a case study research strategy utilising a qualitative methodology was selected as the most suitable research strategy for this study as it is concerned with the specific essence and complexity of the case under examination (Stake, 1995). It centres on the individuals and their relationships with colleagues at various levels in the University (i.e., in their function, department, School, University) based on the diverse, complex and highly bureaucratic processes. The study's research strategy, involving a case study and qualitative methodology, is discussed in the following section.

### **3.5.1 Case study research strategy: Single case study**

Although case study research methodology is widely used there is no single understanding of “case study” or of a “case” in the social behavioural sciences and the manner in which they are explained and used are very different in the diverse disciplines and fields of study (i.e., sociology, anthropology, political science, organisational research) (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Flick (2007a) states that when researchers undertake a case study, they can consider as a “case” either a person, or an institution (i.e., a person's family), or an organisation (i.e., where a person works), or a community (i.e., where a person lives) or an event (i.e. a person experienced), depending on the topic and the research question of a particular study. There is a widespread literature regarding the design, utilisation and goals of case studies of all kinds (i.e. single, multiple). Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) claim that in the management sector, there are, generally speaking, three main positions along the epistemological continuum. The positivist (one end) represented by Yin, the constructionist (the other end) represented by Stake, and the positivist and constructionist (in the middle) represented by Eisenhardt. These three perspectives are briefly explained below.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) acknowledge Yin as the most well-known positivist advocate of case studies in the social sciences. A usual sample of this perspective, which focuses on validity, is up to 30 cases, and the analysis is “cross-case”. Yin (2018, p.286) defines a case study as “a social science research method, generally used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and



in its real-world context.” In contrast, Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) claim that advocates of the constructionist epistemology, such as Stake (1995), do not consider validity issues as much as they aim to produce a rich report of the everyday life and behaviour that takes place in groups, organisations and institutions. Finally, they argue that there is an “intermediate position” evolved especially across the work of Eisenhardt (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) which is encouraged by both the positivist and constructionist positions, using various methods of data and undertaking both “within-case” and “across-case” analysis, often involving from four to 10 cases.

It was decided that the constructionist epistemological perspective (Stake, 1995) was the best to utilise in this study due to its relevance to my world view, and the ontological (relativism) and epistemological (social constructionism) assumptions that underpin the research paradigm (interpretive) of this thesis. Boblin et al. (2013) argue that it is fundamental to clarify the perspective despite the fact that, often, researchers do not. Researchers often use either the principles of Yin, who is used more frequently, or both the principles of Yin and Stake, without further explanation in relation to their philosophy, paradigm and methodology.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) mention some main traits of constructionist case studies. First, investigation takes place usually through observation and personal relations and includes interviews. Second, they are undertaken within single institutions and include sampling from various individuals. Third, the data collection is undertaken at a certain time or during a certain period of time and could include perceptions or observations of what took place. Hence, the unit of analysis could be the person, or particular events (i.e., interchange of some learning). Fourth, the design of the case study is emergent, the sample consists of one or more case studies, and the analysis is “within case”. Both advantages and limitations were considered before deciding to adopt a case study research strategy.

Siggelkow (2007), who’s views are, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015), close to the constructionist perspective, emphasises the strengths of the case study research strategy by stating obstacles and charges case study researchers often face and provides persuading statements to overcome them. First, “small

sample”. The example of a “talking pig” indicates that we need to create only one pig that talks to show the mistake of a common notion that pigs cannot talk. Therefore, Siggelkow (2007, p.20) believes that “a single case can be a very powerful example.” Although, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) argue we cannot find a “talking pig” organisation, there are diverse examples where single cases can be fascinating in a unique manner (i.e., the corporation which is doing notably better (or worse) compared to others in the same sector). Second, Siggelkow (2007) continues, a “nonrepresentative” and “biased” sample, arguing that it is frequently advantageous to select a specific organisation which, due to its particularity, permits the researcher to obtain a certain understanding that other organisations could not give. This understanding would allow the researcher to comprehend more organisations.

Furthermore, Siggelkow (2007) discusses significant uses for case research. First, “motivation” because cases are frequently a great manner to “motivate” a research question. Second, “inspiration” because often cases inspire new ideas. Inductive research strategy that is often utilised allows a theory either to be generated from the data or assists in “sharpening” a theory that already exists by focusing on “gaps” and starting to “fill” them. Third, “illustration” because it “gets closer” to concepts and is able to “illustrate” their “causal relationships” in a straight manner. This is also one of the major advantages of case study research when compared to research that utilises large-samples, since “research involving case data can usually get much closer to theoretical constructs and provide a much more persuasive argument about causal forces than broad empirical research can” (Siggelkow, 2007, pp.22-23).

Case study research also has some potential limitations or problems. Simons (2009) who, according to Schwandt & Gates (2018), is from a similar perspective to Stake (1995), explains the following major weaknesses of case study research. First, the large amount of data gathered can be hard to process. Second, reports could be lengthy and comprehensive for stakeholders to read. Third, accounts could “over-persuade”. Fourth, the involvement of researchers in the everyday life of participants could be unchecked and their subjectivism questioned. Fifth, the picture it provides regarding the way things take place could be deformed. Sixth, it could be essentially conservative, since it refers to a specific time period, despite the fact that people have moved forward. Seventh, the manner

in which conclusions are formulated. Finally, the validity and usefulness of the study to guide policy are questioned.

This study is a single case study. Single cases have been a significant methodology utilised by researchers to forge ahead in the field of management. They have utilised single cases to investigate diverse and complicated organisational processes (i.e., “corporate venturing,” “change,” “organizational identity”). However, researchers often consider the single case study as one to keep away from, despite the novel and rich theoretical knowledge provided, because it is difficult to deal with (Ozcan et al., 2018).

The case study research strategy of this thesis has an “interpretive” orientation, since interpretation is a significant part of research (Stake, 1995). My aim as a qualitative case researcher following this approach was to conserve the multiple realities of the actors, the persons who participated and the diverse and even opposed perspectives of what was happening. This focus on the “lived experience” in case study research is skilfully depicted in the work of Stake (1995) in the United States and Simons (2009) in the United Kingdom (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Stake (2005, p.460) claims that the goal of case study is more than being a part of scientific methodology because it is valuable in “refining theory, suggesting complexities for further investigation as well as helping to examine the limits of generalizability.” Case study can be a respectful power in establishing public policy and in showing human experience (Stake, 2005).

This thesis reflects the perspective of Stake (1994, 1995, 2000, 2005) and Simons (2009) and utilises their definitions. Hence, “case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p.xi).

“Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme, or system in ‘real-life’ context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods, and is evidence-based. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution, or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action” (Simons, 2009, p.21).

The case study research methodology based on these two definitions gave me the orientation necessary to undertake this research in a manner consistent with my world view, the philosophical assumptions and the paradigm adopted in this thesis. Although I undertook an extensive literature review and identified a part in the literature of relational coordination to which I could contribute to with this research (see chapters one and two), I did not have a structured theoretical framework to guide data collection and analysis. Therefore, two of the reasons I decided to undertake a case study research strategy of this type are to contribute to this part of the theory of relational coordination by “filling it” and to generate a theoretical framework (Siggelkow, 2007). Although having a theoretical framework at the start gives safety, focus and facilitates analysis, it could result in “false consensus, making the data fit the framework, or failing to see the unexpected” (Simons, 2009, p.33). Also Stake (1995), being consistent with the constructionist epistemology, points out that researchers could utilise a conceptual framework to guide the study, but it is not necessary.

Consequently, considering all these issues and following Stake’s advice, I opted for the more challenging and less straightforward option of aiming to generate a theory based on the data, based on the “lived experience” of the actors. The literature review regarding the main concepts of the study (human sustainability, relational coordination and worker outcomes) guided me in formulating the questions of the interview guides for the interviews, as well as undertaking the data collection and analysis. This chosen approach has the advantage that could guide towards a distinctive comprehension or “potential theory” of the case. However, its disadvantage is that it is often difficult to “make sense” and create a theoretical framework based on opposite and complicated qualitative data (Simons, 2009). Despite this difficulty, the focus was always on the interpretive orientation, aiming to respect and maintain the interpretations of the actors (i.e., programme administrators, academics), and to conserve the “multiple realities,” the diverse and even opposed perspectives of what was happening (Stake, 1995).

My decision for this type of qualitative case study research strategy is based on the consideration of both its strengths and weaknesses, as mentioned earlier. However, Simons (2009) argues that not all of them are potential limitations of a qualitative case study for various reasons. First, following the

constructionist/interpretive perspective the subjectivism of the researcher is “an inevitable part of the frame” (Simons, 2009, p.24). The involvement of the researcher can be controlled and checked in various ways (i.e., ethical approval). Second, although the reports are not always able to depict everyday life as lived (since in this way they are always “historical”) the knowledge derived is significant for diverse issues (i.e., the “partial nature” of interpretations and perceptions) facilitating the audience to understand, for themselves, regarding their relevance and importance. Third, there are different manners to reach conclusions from one or more cases that are relevant to other contexts. These conclusions arise from a “qualitative data base” and are of interest to “tacit and situated” comprehension regarding their connection to other cases, contexts and circumstances. Fourth, especially for policy reasons, the manner in which the findings were generated and presented is important. Finally, it is significant to understand that often in case study research the goal is not a “formal generalization” to determine policy formulation. On the contrary, the goal is “particularization” which includes a large and rich amount of data of a single case, setting or context. This can provide knowledge to practice, build the value of the case, and/or build on the understanding of a particular topic.

Therefore, considering strengths and potential weaknesses, an in-depth instrumental case study was appropriate for this research which includes the perceptions and points of view of multiple stakeholders to furnish theoretical explanation. Undertaking a single instrumental case study was productive as it permitted me to explore the concepts of human sustainability, relational coordination and worker outcomes at an individual, School and University level.

#### **3.5.1.1 Selection criteria**

I used a single instrumental case study for this research as explained by Stake (1995, 2000, 2005). I chose to undertake this study at a large university in the United Kingdom and selected four Schools from four different Colleges. The interest was instrumental because studying this particular university would allow me to gain the necessary knowledge and comprehension to properly answer the two research questions. Another reason I chose this university were its traits (i.e., large size). Research of this type could provide findings that would have a

greater potentiality for transferability or give a “sounder basis for extrapolation of findings to other contexts” (Simons, 2009, p.30). Of course, this is not always the case since, occasionally, an “unusual,” or uncommon case, can assist to “illustrate” issues that we do not usually acknowledge in “typical” cases (Stake, 1995).

The first such criterion “should be to maximize what we can learn...many of us case-workers feel that good instrumental case study does not depend on being able to defend the typicality” (Stake, 1995, p.4). I considered all these fundamental arguments when I selected the University. The focus of the study is on frontline employees, the programme administrators, and explores the work they do to support the students. Despite the fact that research on relational coordination indicates that frontline staff are crucial for the effectiveness of the organisation, research into this topic remains limited. Frontline employees play a critical role but, in many industries, the frontline role is ignored (Gittell et al., 2008). In addition, the programme administrators are also “boundary spanners” in this university context because they have to bring together all the relevant functions to serve the programme and their students. As Gittell (2016, p.68) states, “the boundary spanner, whose job is to integrate the work of other people around a project, process or customer, is another key role to be designed by organizations.” The unit of analysis within a qualitative case study can be very diverse (i.e., individuals, roles, groups). The unit of analysis in this study is the frontline employees and their relationships with other professional roles, within a particular unit/School in the University. It is, therefore, a multi-level analysis. A qualitative case study aims to deal with that unit in-depth, in detail, in context and holistically (Stake, 1995). Thus, I was interested in a holistic analysis.

### **3.5.1.2 Identifying case sample and negotiating case access**

Special awareness should be given to this component of the study, both because the researcher necessitates multiple access to the case study organisation and also because the institution desires to protect its status in permitting the researcher access. Diverse authors wrote about access matters in organisational research (Hartley, 2004). When the researcher needs to undertake research in institutions, various levels are usually involved in an organisation or institution in

the procedure of access. First, there is a level of people accountable for approving the study. Second, there is a level of persons to be studied (i.e., participants at interviews) (Flick, 2018). Therefore, I built my own relationship and negotiated access with each person. I thought carefully about how I could convince persons to participate in the study (Simons, 2009).

First, case access was not facilitated by any specific persons. Therefore, I negotiated access with each person starting with the Head of School, since their permission was necessary in order to undertake research in the School and contact participants. I focused on selecting Schools from diverse Colleges in the University and aimed to have four Schools from four different Colleges. I emailed to various Heads of Schools in the University introducing myself and informing them about my research, the topic, the purpose, the ethical approval, the necessity for access and the type of access (i.e., necessity to contact people in the School for interviewing). I also attached at each email my updated curriculum vitae, the letter of approval by the ethics committee and the letter of permission from the Clerk of Senate. This was a legitimate approach to gaining access since, when the investigator does not have any private links to individuals regarding the research “short introductory emails” are a successful manner (Ozcan et al., 2018). The final sample included four Schools from four different Colleges, so the initial goal was achieved.

Second, I gained the permission of the actors, the persons I wanted to interview. The process of selecting the persons, events or items regarding which data will be collected is a significant part of all research. While data selection is a more general issue than sampling, one or more sampling methods are usually utilised in social research. This is the case for both qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering (Blaikie, 2010). The usual sampling for this type of case study is “purposive” and this is the one used. This means that I selected to interview persons who had a significant role regarding the subject matter under study and from whom I could “learn more about the issue in question” (Simons, 2009, p.34). According to Flick (2018) purposive sampling has several main traits. Its strategies focus on “formal” or “abstract” norms. Its strategies centre on specific cases and their contribution to the insights in the research. The emphasis is on the advancement of knowledge certain persons (or groups) who participate in the study can furnish regarding the sector or the subject matter.

Considering all these issues, my aim was to include in the sample as many programme administrators as possible, across the four Schools, and enough of their colleagues (i.e., finance, academics, line managers) with whom they collaborate in order to do their work to support the students. I was trying to achieve a large sample in order to get a rich amount of data. I created lists of names of people based on these roles in the four Schools and emailed them a similar letter to the one emailed to the Head of School, adjusted accordingly, based on the role of the person. Thus, the letter included the duration and place of the interviews, as well as the ethical approval obtained, and emphasised the significance of their anonymous and confidential participation. I further attached to each email the plain language statement, which informed them about the research, and the consent form they needed to sign for my records at the date of the interview. These two documents were also included in the ethics application and approved by the ethics committee (Appendices D & E).

I emailed all these documents to potential participants, including the consent form, in order to give them all the relevant information before deciding to participate in the study. This is an ethical way of inviting people to participate in a research study since it allows them to make an informed decision regarding their participation. Participants replied by email and, where they agreed, a time and date were finalised through emails for the interview to take place. All interviews were undertaken at their workplace and their preferred room based on their arrangements (i.e., office, booked room). I put much thought into how to gain informed consent and followed the procedures of the School and University. Their informed consent was honoured, and everything participants signed that was included in the consent form was maintained (Simons, 2009). This is an ethical and transparent way of gaining access. The final sample from all four Schools includes 45 persons holding various roles (Appendix A).

### **3.5.2 Qualitative research methodology**

The philosophical assumptions and paradigms adopted by researchers influence the selection of a research methodology, which could be qualitative or quantitative. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), the word “qualitative” indicates a prominence on the “qualities of entities” and on procedures and meanings which are not investigated in terms of, for example, quantity or



frequency. Qualitative researchers emphasise the socially constructed nature of reality, the close relationship between the investigator and whatever is investigated, and the contextual constraints that formulate research. They search for answers to questions that emphasise “how” social experience is constructed and makes sense. Qualitative researchers stress the “value-laden essence” of research. In contrast, quantitative research stresses the measurement and analysis of “causal relationships between variables” rather than procedures. Quantitative researchers state that their research is undertaken from within “a value-free framework”.

These different perspectives result in diverse manners of studying the same issues. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) describe some major strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methodologies relating them to their respective epistemologies (positivism and social constructionism). Hence, in positivism/quantitative methodology, strengths are: broad reporting; possibly “fast and economical”; effortless when justifying procedures. Weaknesses are: “inflexible and artificial”; not adequate for “process, meaning or theory generation”; suggestions for “action” are not clear. Social constructionism/qualitative methodology: Strengths: welcome “value” of data from diverse sources; allows “generalizations” far away from the current sample; have considerable “efficiency” comprising “outsourcing potential”. Concerning weaknesses: access can be challenging; difficult to allow for “institutional and cultural” differentiations; involve problems in harmonizing “discrepant information”.

A qualitative research methodology is selected for this research because it is the best fit with its position in the philosophical, epistemological and methodological continuum. Thus, qualitative methodology is consistent with the logic of inquiry (inductive), ontology (relativism), epistemology (social constructionism), interpretive paradigm and the social constructionist perspective of the selected case study research strategy. Strengths and weaknesses are also considered when deciding to use a qualitative research methodology.

Qualitative research has grown continuously and is recognised in diverse disciplines (i.e., information systems) (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2007). Cassell

(2018) argues that qualitative research methodology has greatly contributed to our comprehension of organisation and management and is now welcomed; furthermore, it has continued to advance in the sector. Cassell (2018) argues that an “all-encompassing” definition of qualitative research is the following: “Qualitative research has become associated with many different theoretical perspectives, but it is typically oriented to the inductive study of socially constructed reality, focusing on meanings, ideas and practices, taking the native’s point of view seriously” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000 cited in Cassell, 2018, p.201).

Qualitative research is often identified as inductive, as in the logic of inquiry of this study, as researchers will frequently go close to the “subject matter” unaccompanied with numerous “preconceived” notions to test but rather allow the “empirical” sphere to determine the questions that are more valuable (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interpretive qualitative research is distinctive in its capability to face issues of “description,” “interpretation” and “explanation” which are also the goals to answer the two research questions of this study. Regarding theory development, qualitative research aims to “generate”, “elaborate” or “test” management theories (Bluhm et al., 2011). These issues make qualitative research very relevant to the aims, objectives and research questions of this thesis.

Other issues that make qualitative research suitable for this single instrumental case study include: its goal is to comprehend or explain ways of behaving, perceptions and values, recognise procedures and understand the context and circumstances of persons’ everyday lives. The actors involved say their point of view through interviews. Few participants are necessary since the focus is on the depth rather than the breadth. Data are textual and produced through various methods (i.e., interviews, documents). It is interpretive, since investigators aim to interpret the meanings that actors assign to their perceptions and experiences (Hennink et al., 2011).

The traditional supremacy of quantitative research over qualitative research supplied the latter with a “language” and a “host of habits” especially in the part of showing reliability and validity. These components were broadly espoused without being questioning since they looked righteous, appraising their

suitability and objectivity over time. Consequently, approaches for preserving the rigour of qualitative research have, problematically, endured (Morse, 2018). Approaches are not appropriately “applied to descriptive and interpretive research to the detriment of qualitative inquiry. We have become our own worst enemy, with qualitative researchers reviewing the research of their colleagues, paradoxically to demonstrate rigor of the articles they are reviewing and demanding inappropriate strategies” (Morse, 2018, p.797).

Morse (2018) has recognised five phases in the development of qualitative rigour. First, prior to 1960 (rigour and methods were informal); second, 1970 to 1980 (start to worry as a reply to positivist criticism, i.e., absence of hypotheses, generalisability); third, 1980s to the mid-1990s (the espousal of Guba and Lincoln criteria, i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability); fourth, 1990s to the mid-2000s (the growth of “standards” and “checklists”); fifth, mid-2000 to the present (the emphasis on “internal methods of building rigor,” i.e., the acknowledgement that qualitative research should be reached during the process of research rather than granted after fulfilment). The novelty is that results should be created in a conscious and deliberate manner, in a “stepwise building process,” that concludes in the right decisions. This is done during the procedure of research and not as an after-research assessment would furnish the research with “certainty,” “confidence” and “solid results”); sixth, 2005 to present (the comprehensive assessment of the finalised research, i.e., Tracy (2010) eight criteria for superb qualitative research).

Following this brief history of rigour in qualitative research it is obvious that there has been a slow recognition that reliability and validity are neither plainly announced by researchers on their own nor given by reviewers. “Rather they are something that is built into the process of inquiry” (Morse, 2018, p.804).

However, according to Morse (2018), the discussion is still active regarding the issues of creation of rigour in the study, of quality and how it is understood. She proposes a framework for establishing rigour in qualitative inquiry, emphasising that this “approach to rigor does not discard appropriate strategies: It merely shows the appropriate use of each strategy with various hard or soft data types. The use of an inappropriate strategy invalidates the project” (Morse, 2018, p.814).

Consequently, utilisation of strategies aimed at validating “soft” data keeps the research “shallow” and “superficial” and harms “creative interpretation” (i.e., the use of member checks to validate experiential data such as perceptions of participants obtained with interviews). To utilise strategies for verifying interpretive inquiry on “hard” descriptive data is frequently pointless. Descriptive data ought to be examined for “accuracy” instead of regarding what they implicate, and for “statistical validation” instead of “peer verification” (i.e., the researcher must check transcriptions of the audio recording for transcription errors and assure accuracy). The amount of strategies and when to utilise them should be decided by the researcher depending on the project and their skilfulness. Morse (2018) also proposed some methods for increasing rigour by data manipulation (i.e., saturation). Nevertheless, she points out that the aim is to create trustworthiness, as Guba & Lincoln (1985) claim, and position adequate rigour in the methods, so that the investigator is “certain” of the findings and the “consumer” is sufficiently “confident” to apply, or to proceed, based on the findings (Morse, 2018).

Morse (2018) informs that in order to establish rigour in qualitative research it is the responsibility of the researcher and it involves various steps to be taken during the research process. First, the researcher ought to clarify the aims and objectives, the research question(s) and the kind of data necessary to achieve these issues. Second, as data are gathered the investigator ought to acknowledge the kind of data, understand their importance, incorporate or eliminate, and either validate or verify appropriately. Third, these steps could be reported and explained in the final document, such as this thesis, so that readers can recognise the internal building of rigour. Following this advice, I aimed to achieve rigour throughout the research process. This research strategy allowed me to utilise diverse methods, since both the case study research and qualitative research methodologies permit that use (Hartley, 2004; Bluhm et al., 2011). The research design and methods of data collection and analysis are discussed in the following sections.

### **3.6 Research design**

The research design section focuses on decisions about the types of data utilised in the study and the timing of the study.

### 3.6.1 Types of data

Decisions regarding data sources are dependent on the investigator's potential to access them after obtaining the required approvals (Blaikie, 2010). Having obtained the ethical approval and permissions, and before deciding upon the methods to utilise in order to collect and analyse the data, it is helpful to examine the type of data necessary and the shape in which the data are needed (Blaikie, 2010). There are three kinds of data that can be utilised in social research: "primary" data that are collected by the researcher; "secondary" data that have been collected by another person and are utilised in their "raw" shape, and "tertiary" data that are secondary data that have also been examined by someone else (Blaikie, 2010).

This study utilises primary and secondary data due to the nature of the research topic, aims and objectives and research questions. Primary data are defined in this study as the "new information that is collected directly by the researcher" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p.339). This is the main form of data in this study and all analysis and interpretation is based on these data collected with semi-structured interviews. Primary data can guide the researcher to novel understanding of the context under examination and to considerable confidence in the research findings (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Primary data are collected from various sources (i.e., interviewing persons holding different roles within and between functions) to acquire diverse perspectives and points of view and acquire a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied. As Stake (1995) suggests, this can assist the identification of similarities and diversities.

Secondary data are defined in this study as the "research information that already exists in the form of publications or other electronic media, which is collected by the researcher" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p.341). This is the secondary form of data used in this study and consists of the analysis of the University's website (i.e., text publicised, staff survey). Secondary data are utilised in this study to obtain additional information regarding the University to add knowledge and to compare it when relevant to the primary data (i.e., participants' perceptions on certain issues).

### 3.6.2 Timing of the study

The timing of the study is an essential element in research design. Collection of data is possible at one or diverse points in time. Hence, either in the present, in the past, or organised for a certain time in the future. Decisions regarding timing establish whether the study is “cross-sectional” or “longitudinal,” “retrospective” or “prospective,” or “historical” (Blaikie, 2010). Cross-sectional research is “the study of a particular phenomenon (or phenomena) at a particular time” (i.e., a “snapshot”) (Saunders et al., 2007, p.595). Longitudinal study is “the study of a particular phenomenon (or phenomena) over an extended period of time” (Saunders et al., 2007, p.601). Furthermore, in a cross-sectional study contrasts of some cases are usually made on “one occasion,” whereas the longitudinal study comes back to the area two times or more usually to repeat the same data collection to examine advancement and modification in the sector and in the subject matter under investigation (Flick, 2007a). This study is cross-sectional, primarily due to the time restrictions of the PhD study. Therefore, data were collected through interviews during the time period between June 2018 and February 2019.

The methods utilised in order to collect the primary and secondary data during this time period is the subject matter of the following section.

## 3.7 Research methods of data collection

Gioia et al. (2012) advise researchers that the data collection section of an inductive/interpretive methods section should be explained well and in-depth, in a rigorous manner. Following their advice, I explain in detail the primary and secondary forms of data collection.

### 3.7.1 Qualitative research interview

There are various types of interviews and different authors assign them different names. For example, Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) mention three main types of interviews: the “highly-structured” which has a fixed structure; the “semi-structured” which has certain questions that can be directed in a malleable way; and, the “unstructured” which has no interview guide or informal questions. Bryman & Bell (2015) consider the following types of interviews: “structured,”

“standardized,” “semi-structured,” “unstructured,” “intensive,” “qualitative,” “in-depth,” “focused,” “focus group,” “group,” “oral history” and “life history”. They claim that there is an overlap between these categories and that combinations are possible. For example, “qualitative” and “in-depth” interviews for certain scholars occasionally refer to an “unstructured interview” but, more frequently, they refer to both the semi-structured and unstructured types.

The interview is the principal way to reach “multiple realities” and for this reason qualitative researchers are utilising it in order to uncover and depict the “multiple views” of a case study (Stake, 1995). Following Stake’s (1995) advice I used interviews as the method to collect primary data. Considering the various types of interviews and their purposes the “qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth” type was chosen for this research. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, so the method of “qualitative interview” is consistent with it. A “qualitative interview” provides ways by which “rich” and comprehensive data can be collected from participants to release features of their lives, perceptions, or experience (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). “A semi-structured life world interview is...an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.6). An “in-depth interview” is a chance, normally with an interview, to examine “deeply” and create novel aspects and understanding (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). This type of interview gave me the possibility to answer in the best possible way the two research questions of this research.

The researcher, in order to design a “semi-structured interview”, creates the structure with a list of themes and questions to investigate in a flexible manner. This means that there is a flexibility regarding the sequence of the issues, to follow up points, or even omitting some questions. The order of the questions may vary based on the movement of the discussion, new issues may arise that could be worth asking and misunderstandings can be clarified. It is relevant for an exploratory purpose of a research and very relevant for an explanatory one (Saunders et al., 2007). This list is often called an “interview guide,” “interview schedule” or “topic guide” (Thomas, 2016; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). These advantages make it suitable to answer the research questions of this study. It is also the type most frequently utilised in small-scale social research (Thomas,

2016). For example, the flexibility was fundamental to this research as it permitted me to explore diverse perceptions from diverse roles of persons within the complex University environment.

Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) claim that the qualitative face-to-face “semi-structured” interview permits the researcher to be part of the “live situation,” listen to the participant’s voice and see their “facial expressions” which go hand in hand with their talk. This furnishes a “richer access” to the persons’ “meanings” than a written text (i.e., the transcript produced afterwards). They advise the researcher regarding this issue suggesting that it could be fruitful for them to dedicate a few minutes after the interview in order to think about what they have learned from these expressions and ways of behaving of the participants. They recommend recording this information (i.e., notebook, audio recording) since this will provide invaluable information during the data analysis process. Following their advice, I had a notebook which I called “The interview diary” and recorded all these thoughts which I used during data analysis. These advantages cannot be reached with other methods (i.e., structured interviews).

Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) state the most common criticisms of the qualitative research interview and provide answers to them. First, it is “not scientific” and only mirrors “common sense”. However, there is no single absolute definition of a “scientific interview”. Second, it is “not quantitative” but only “qualitative” and, as such, “not scientific”. Until recently the quantitative perspective was dominant in social sciences but this is changing. Third, it is “not objective” but only “subjective”. However, the strength of the interview is its “privileged access” to the participants’ daily life. Fourth, it “does not test hypotheses” so it is “only explorative” and as such “not scientific”. This is not happening. An interview could take the shape of a “process of continual hypothesis testing” where the investigator tests hypotheses (i.e., based on the interchange of “direct,” “leading,” “probing” and “counter” questions). Fifth, it is “not a scientific method” because it is “too person dependent”. The effect of human interaction is not necessarily negative provided that the quality of the investigator’s “craftsmanship” is superior. Sixth, it provides results which are “not trustworthy” and “biased”. The deliberate utilisation of the subjective point of view does not necessarily mean a “negative bias”; it means that the individual points of view of participants and researcher can furnish a “distinctive



and receptive” comprehension of the daily world life. Seventh, it provides “unreliable results” due to leading questions. However, contrary to what is usually thought, it is suitable for engaging “leading questions” which could enhance rather than damage the reliability of findings (i.e., confirm the “reliability” of responses). The deciding matter is not to use, or not use, leading questions since “a controlled use of leading questions may lead to well-controlled knowledge” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.199). Eighth, rather than provide an “intersubjective” it provides a “subjective” interpretation (i.e., different readers discover diverse meanings). “Unacknowledged biased subjectivity” is problematic but not “perspectival subjectivity” which, once clarified, can be a strength rather than a limitation. Ninth, it is “not a valid method” based on “subjective impressions”. The “craftsmanship” of the investigator advances their capability to examine, question and “theoretically interpret” the results in order that this does not happen. Finally, it does not produce generalisable findings because it includes few participants. Not only the number of subjects necessary depends on the aims of the study, but also the current conception of social sciences does not necessarily centre on “global generalization”. “Transferability of knowledge” has substituted the global generalisation focusing on contextual differences, “heterogeneity” and revealing new ways of undertaking qualitative research.

Brinkmann & Kvale (2015) advise researchers that the good interviewer, probably attains high quality interviews if they focus on the particular context of the interview when they find themselves in front of their interviewee, rather than focusing on “quality as such.” Furthermore, due to the danger, from the part of the researcher, of “naturalizing” the specific form of “human relationship” the interview reflects, they advise researchers to be careful and not do it. The reason is that investigators regard the individual, face-to-face interview as a normal and “natural” event. However, this is not right since some “rights,” “duties” and “repertoire of acts” exist that are available when joining the contemporary sector of “communicability” of interviewing in qualitative research and others that are not available. Therefore, researchers should get to know how to “defamiliarize” themselves with it, in order to comprehend and value its task in the creation of scientific scholarship. Following such advice, and

considering the interview's strengths and weaknesses, I moved on to collect the data.

### 3.7.2 Interview data collection

Participants were well prepared for the interview since they had received both the plain language statement and consent form by the initial emails sent to them inviting them to participate in the study. Therefore, they already knew the purpose of the research and issues regarding audio-recording, anonymity and confidentiality. Five flexible interview guides were created for this research covering similar themes and issues modified accordingly based on the role of the person. These five variations were created for the following roles: programme administrators' managers, programme administrators, programme administrators' assistants, academics, and one interview guide for operations, finance and other support staff. All interview guides were based on the same topics and issues to be discussed during the interview (Appendix B). The interview guide is the "research instrument" because it "guides" the interview, but the investigator should also listen carefully and "react" to the interviewee's conversation (i.e., asking further questions). This reminds researchers of the fundamental issue that an "in-depth interview" is an interview and not a conversation where two people exchange information. Its focus is on "eliciting the story" of the participants and not the reactions of the investigator (Hennink et al., 2011). Furthermore, the primary goal of the interview is not to receive "simple yes and no answers" but a lot more than that (i.e., examples, a description of an episode, an explanation) (Stake, 1995). Following this advice, I focused on the interviewees' stories throughout the interview process, without making comments, and reminding them on every topic and, whenever possible, to provide examples.

All interviews started the same way. At the beginning of each interview, all persons were thanked once more for their participation and reminded of the purpose of the research. They were also asked if they wanted to take another look at the plain language statement (Appendix D). This allowed for a gradual setting of the "interview stage" considering that the "first few minutes of an interview are decisive" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.154). Consequently, interviewees were given the possibility of engaging with the researcher before

they were ready to speak openly and reveal their experiences and sentiments to a “stranger” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Moreover, all interviewees were assured that, despite the fact that questions were neither sensitive nor personal, if for some reason they considered them to be so, they could simply ask to proceed to the next question without having to explain the reason for doing so. This allowed them to feel even more relaxed about the interview. Only one of the 45 participants, and only regarding one topic, asked me to proceed to the next one since they did not want to express themselves. Finally, all interviewees, at the beginning of the interview, were asked to describe their role, main tasks and responsibilities, nationality and how long they had been working at the University. These topics allowed participants to further adjust to the interview setting since they were easy to answer and gave them confidence. All these factors allowed for a positive and relaxing setting of the “interview stage” and establishing rapport with the interviewees. This rapport was increased and maintained during the interview and diminished at the end of the interview. “The idea is that the interviewer and interviewee meet as strangers, establish rapport and trust during the interview and then leave as strangers” (Hennink et al., 2011, p.125).

All interviews were face-to-face, undertaken in the University and arranged by the interviewees at a time and place suitable to them. Normally the place was a quiet room they had booked or their office, in cases where they were not sharing an office. A total of 45 interviews were undertaken, across the four Schools (Appendix A). The issues under investigation were exhausted. Saturation, which is broadly utilised to increase rigour in this type of research, was achieved in this study (Morse, 2018). This is the case when “the researcher collects many similar instances of the phenomenon, so that certainty is incrementally built” (Morse 2015a, cited in Morse, 2018, p.809). The duration of each interview was between one and two-and-a-half hours, depending on the time the interviewees had available. The time requested with the invitation to participate at the research was one hour; however, some interviewees who were willing to discuss more and had available time expressed this view, so some interviews were longer. Forty-four interviews were audio recorded and one interview was not, since one person did not consent to the audio-recording. Notetaking substituted audio-recording in this single case. Forty-two persons agreed to the use of direct

quotes and three did not agree. Whatever the interviewees agreed was respected in both data collection and analysis. All audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, as soon as the interview was finished, and the notes were used for the one interview that was not audio recorded. The interview diary helped in the transcription process since it reminded me of the specifics of the interview. Any inconsistencies and uncertainties were clarified and confirmed with participants. All transcriptions from audio-recordings were verbatim and checked multiple times (Flick, 2018). All interview transcriptions were given pseudonyms and utilised as such in data analysis. Each person's pseudonym consisted of the initial of the School, the number of the interview, which was random, and their role (Appendix A). All names of places, people, and other details that can harm anonymity and confidentiality were excluded from transcripts.

Mason (2018) claims that data collection is not simply collecting data but “generating” them, since usually researchers do not plainly “gather” data that exist out there ready to be collected, even though occasionally this could happen. Consequently, the habitual task of a researcher is to try to discover the most effective way to “generate data” from the selected sources, usually through “active engagement” with them. Consequently, following her advice, I undertook 45 interviews and generated numerous pages of transcripts. Interviews were the primary method of data collection as they allowed me to generate all the primary data based on which the data analysis was constructed. However, additional material was collected as secondary data, directly related to the context, since it was published on the University's website. The secondary data collection is discussed in the following section.

### **3.7.3 Website documents as a data source**

Any study could employ the examination of documents (i.e., minutes of meetings, annual reports) (Stake, 1995). There are diverse manners in which documents can be utilised in a case study to depict and “enrich the context” and play a part in the examination of issues. This is a broad use of the word “documents”, all of which could provide information regarding ways the institution predicts itself or the way a situation has developed (Simons, 2009). Document examination is frequently a fruitful forerunner to interviewing to

indicate matters that could be beneficial to explore in the case study and to furnish a “context” for the understanding of interview data. It is also a vital method that can be used (Simons, 2009).

Guba & Lincoln (1985) state that documents and records are very helpful sources of information and they should be used more often in research, primarily due to the following reasons: First, they are often accessible, a solid and substantial source of information. Second, they are contextually pertinent and “grounded” in the “contexts” they are representative of. Third, they are frequently legally indisputable. Fourth, they are representative of official announcements that fulfil some “accountability requirement.” Fifth, they are “nonreactive.” Flick (2018) claims that online research is also used nowadays, and the Web has a great amount of “material” (i.e., institutional home pages) that can be downloaded and used in relation to the research questions of each study. However, there are some challenges in analysing Web pages since they are not broadly used in qualitative research. One major difficulty is defining the boundaries, particularly due to the fact that they are frequently altered, disappear and appear again from the Web (Flick, 2018).

I utilised the University’s website as a secondary source in order to generate secondary data and avoided statements based on them. I used them only for comparison with the primary data generated from the interview material. Diverse relevant documents on the University’s website were considered in order to obtain information regarding certain topics of the interview guide (i.e., certain questions of the University staff survey). The staff University surveys, undertaken in 2014, 2016 and 2018 were a major source of information in the website analysis, and the replies of respondents were utilised for comparison purposes with relevant topics of the interview guide. Other relevant documents on the University’s website were also considered for additional information regarding the University context, policies and procedures (i.e., announcement and letters by the Senior Management Group, hiring and promotion processes).

The main analysis of the thesis, which reflects the data structure, is based exclusively on the primary data generated from the interviews; this is discussed in the following section.

### **3.8 Research method of data reduction and analysis**

Gioia et al. (2012) advise researchers that the data analysis section of an inductive/interpretive method section should be explained well and in-depth, in a rigorous manner. Following their advice, I explicate my induction of categories, themes and dimensions in a detailed manner. Blaikie (2010) advises that when qualitative data are collected the procedure of data reduction and analysis could be integrated with data collection into a continual and developing procedure of theory construction. This will necessitate building categories and undertaking various types of coding. Following Blaikie's advice this analysis started with data generation and lasted through the formal writing up stage of the thesis. It was an iterative process. There are various kinds of data coding and analysis in qualitative research such as thematic and content analysis (Flick, 2018).

The thematic analysis method proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006) has been adopted in this study for data reduction and analysis. The strengths and potential limitations of this method were considered before its selection. The authors view thematic analysis as an independent method suited to diverse epistemological and theoretical frameworks. Hence, I used it constructively in this study to analyse all interview data.

#### **3.8.1 Analysis of interview data: Thematic analysis**

“Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning (“themes”) within the qualitative data” (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p.297). Thematic analysis, contrary to other qualitative analytic approaches, provides a method, a technique, rather than a methodology, so it is not restricted by theoretical obligations. Therefore, as a method it can be utilised and applied to a great range of theoretical frameworks and research paradigms (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This version of thematic analysis is developed primarily for utilisation within the qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013). It organises and describes the data in great detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis often goes further and “interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Boyatzis, 1998, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). The two key reasons to utilise thematic analysis are accessibility and

flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Analysis engages in a continuous going back and forth between “the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing...writing is an integral part of the analysis...so analysis is not a linear process...it is a recursive process...that develops over time” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.86).

The process of data analysis that I followed to undertake the data reduction and analysis in this study, based on the thematic analysis proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2013), includes the following six phases.

#### **3.8.1.1 First phase: Familiarising yourself with your data**

The purpose of this phase is to become “intimately familiar” with the entire data set and its context, and to start to perceive issues that could be related to the research question(s) of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I transcribed each interview in a timely manner, shortly after the interview took place. I checked the verbatim transcriptions multiple times through the data analysis; a laborious but necessary and worthwhile task, undertaken entirely on my own. This process facilitated an initial understanding of the data assisting me to familiarise myself with the interview material (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This started an “interpretative act” where “meanings” are established, which goes beyond the “mechanical act” of transcription (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I read and re-read the data and wrote initial ideas. Then I began the coding. The reading of the data was undertaken in an “active way” so I was with the entire set of data. Although time consuming, I did that reading and re-reading diverse times and made sure that no names of places, people, and other specifics appeared in the transcript. I checked multiple times for “accuracy”.

#### **3.8.1.2 Second phase: Generating initial codes**

I systematically coded interesting elements of the data throughout the whole data set, “collating” data relevant to each code. Codes recognise an element of the data, “semantic” or “latent”, that seems of interest to the researcher and make reference to “the most basic segment or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding is a procedure that is part of the data analysis while the researcher is organising

their data into “meaningful groups”. Coding depends on whether the themes (the units of analysis that are broader than the codes and appear in the third phase of analysis) are “data-driven” or “theory-driven”. In this study the themes are “data-driven” so they will primarily rely on the data. Although coding could be performed through a software programme, I opted for the more challenging decision to undertake it manually, in order to familiarise myself to an even greater extent with the data.

I worked in an organised manner giving “full and equal” importance to each data item and identified interesting repeated patterns across the entire data set. I identified the different patterns using highlighters of different colours while undertaking the manual coding. This process was very helpful. I initially recognised the codes and then coordinated them with data extracts that showed that code. I made sure that all data extracts were coded and then included under each code. I undertook that manually at first and then used the computer to elaborate on this coding process. Therefore, I undertook a “copy-paste action” copying extracts from the transcripts and including them under each code in Word documents. I created one folder for each School named data analysis School A, data analysis School B, data analysis School C, and data analysis School D. I included in each folder nine different Word documents, each representing one main code category. Each of these documents included all sub-categories of the code with the relevant extracts organised by the role of participants (i.e., programme administrators included first, programme administrators’ managers second, and so on). This order was random. Analysing in this way involved a lot of going back and forth but helped a great deal with the analysis. I also coded individual extracts of data in various codes, as they could fit to more than one code.

### **3.8.1.3 Third phase: Searching for themes**

I started the third phase of data analysis when all data were coded and collated. The purpose of this phase was to collate codes into possible themes and to collect all relevant data to each of these themes. The focus was to elevate the analysis from codes to potential themes, arranging them accordingly; thus, arranging codes under potential themes and extracts under codes. I experimented with different potential combinations of all these and discarded



some codes that were no longer relevant. I completed this phase with a series of “candidate themes” (Appendix C). I then coded the diverse extracts in accordance with the themes.

#### **3.8.1.4 Fourth phase: Reviewing themes**

This phase focused on the examination of the themes and ensured, first, that they fit in relation to the coded extracts (level 1), and, second, that they fit in relation to the entire data set (level 2). The ultimate goal was to refine all themes. I first read all the collated extracts for each theme and recognised whether they created a unified pattern. In some instances, the themes seemed to do so, in others they did not, in which case I examined whether the problem was with the theme or with some data extracts that did not fit with the theme. Finally, I managed to reach a set of “candidate themes” I was happy with and proceeded to level two of this phase, repeating the same process in relation to the whole data set. I made sure that my candidate thematic map “accurately” mirrored the meanings that appeared in the whole data set. In order to finalise this process, I reread the whole data set. This re-reading of the entire data set not only allowed me to confirm that the chosen themes were the proper ones, but also gave me the chance to code any extra data within themes that I did not do at an earlier phase. When I was satisfied about the way the themes fitted the entire data set, I moved on to the next phase.

#### **3.8.1.5 Fifth phase: Defining and naming themes**

The focus of this phase is a continuous analysis to clarify the particulars of each theme, and the broad story the analysis tells creating refined definitions and names for each theme. When Braun & Clarke (2006, p.92) state “define and refine” each theme, they mean “identifying the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall) and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures.” I tried not to create a theme that was broad enough to create confusion and I wrote a complete analysis for each one of them recognising its story and how it fitted with the general story of the entire data set. I also considered the relationship between the themes. At the end of this phase I was able to recognise which were and which were not the themes. I also tried to make the names of the themes brief for clarity purposes. At the end of

this phase I created the data structure which included all codes and themes in the form of first order and second order categories and the overarching theoretical constructs. This data structure is the basis for the analysis and discussion of the findings in the next three chapters of the thesis.

#### **3.8.1.6 Sixth phase: Producing the report**

The purpose of this phase is to create a complete analysis including the selection of powerful extract examples and relating the whole analysis to the research questions and the aims and objectives of the study. The data structure created in the fifth phase of analysis is the basis for the discussion of the next chapters in this thesis. I will make sure that the final writing of these chapters will include as many and powerful extracts as possible in order to provide a strong evidence for the issues discussed. I will make the story of this research, based on this data analysis, interesting, concise and logical and even go beyond description of the data and, as Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest, “make an argument” related to my research questions, in the conclusion chapter of this thesis.

Overall, I took great care in undertaking the data analysis in this study and followed the advice of Braun & Clarke (2006, 2013, 2017). In doing so, I managed to avoid five “potential pitfalls,” primarily by undertaking some actions. First, I thoroughly analysed all data. Second, I avoided using the topics and questions from my interview guide as themes. Third, I made sure that the themes were working well, consistently and without significant overlap. Fourth, I related the data and analysis in such a way that the analysis was well supported. Finally, the interpretations of the data were consistent with the theoretical assumptions of the study. Braun & Clarke (2006, p.96) point out that because thematic analysis is flexible it is significant for researchers to “be clear and specific about what [they] are doing, and what [they] say [they] are doing needs to match up with what [they] actually do.” This is what constitutes good thematic analysis, and I tried hard to adhere to this, following their advice in all six phases.

### 3.9 Ethics

Ethics is the way “we behave or should behave in relation to the people with whom we interact...establishing throughout the research process a relationship with participants that respects human dignity and integrity and in which people can trust. Participants need to know they are treated fairly” (Simons, 2009, p.96). The research was approved having satisfied all relevant ethical requirements. I took diverse steps to ensure that this is an ethical study, as explained throughout this chapter, in order to minimise the potential for harm to both participants and research context.

For example, the participation of all persons was voluntary, the anonymity and confidentiality were totally respected through the interview process but also after the interviews. I did not reveal any personal information of the persons to other stakeholders or anyone else. Transcripts and audio-recordings were anonymously and securely stored. I stored ethical consent forms separately. In short, I kept all the promises made to the ethics committee and to the persons who trusted me and my research and participated in this study. The plain language statement and the consent form were emailed to all participants when they were invited to participate so they were well informed before deciding to do so. The plain language statement was given again to interviewees before the start of the interview, in case they wanted to have a quick look once more. Informed consent was acquired from all participants by completing and signing the ethical consent form before the start of each interview (Appendices D & E).

All interviews were arranged at a time convenient for the persons who participated, since they were the ones to decide the place of the interview (i.e., their office, a booked room in the University). I assured each person before the start of the interview, that although the topics were neither personal nor sensitive, they could avoid discussing a particular one if they did not wish to, without explaining the reasons for doing so. This could be done simply by asking me to proceed to the next topic. These are only examples of what I explained in detail in this chapter, which indicate that each stage of the research was undertaken in an ethical manner, as promised to the ethics committee, and consistent with my integrity as a researcher. The data have been stored and handled in such a manner that safeguards the anonymity and confidentiality of

all 45 persons who participated in this research. I seriously considered ethics in everything I did throughout the research process, always keeping in mind Stake's (2005, p.459) advice, "Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict."

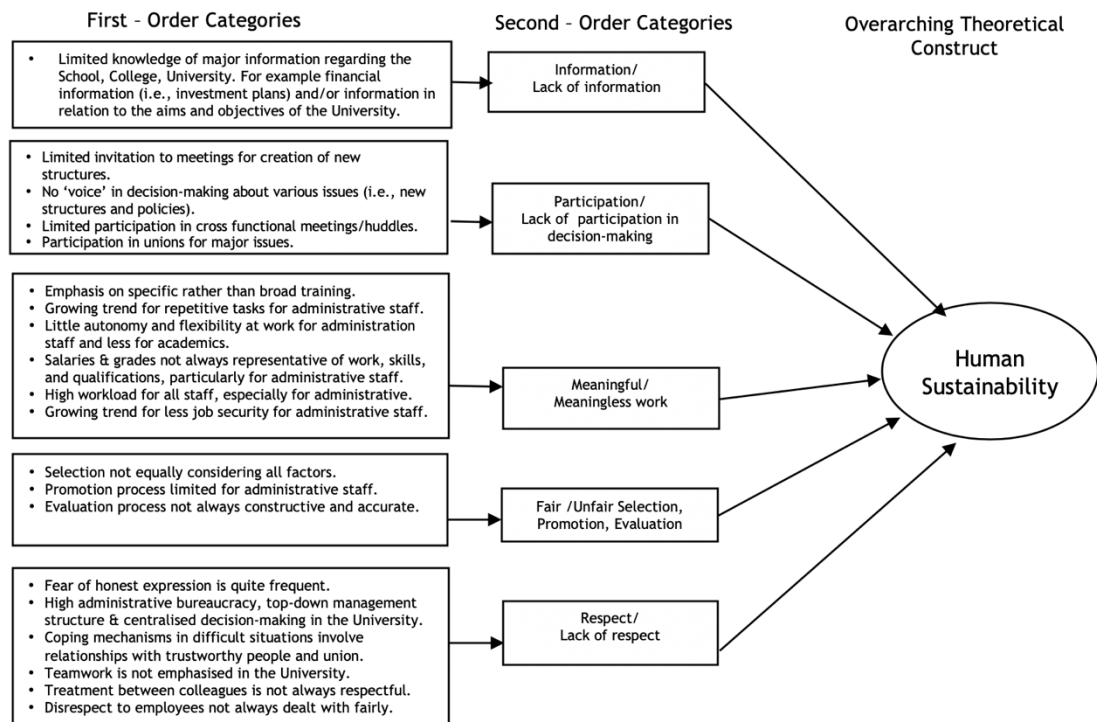
### **3.10 Summary of methodology chapter**

This chapter has discussed the philosophical and methodological assumptions, as well as the methods used in this research. Figure 3-1 illustrates all the decisions regarding the elements of this research process and its arrows indicated the interconnections between them. The way these decisions were made has been clearly explained by examining the various alternatives regarding each element of the research process. The next three chapters examine the findings of the study and are guided by the data structure created from the data analysis discussed in this chapter.

## Chapter 4 Human Sustainability

The purpose of this chapter is to examine human sustainability (HS) in the University. The chapter is structured along the key themes related to the theoretical concept of human sustainability and includes the following: Information/lack of information; participation/lack of participation in decision-making; meaningful/meaningless work; fair/unfair selection, promotion, evaluation; respect/lack of respect (Figure 4-1). The analysis is of the data collected from the interviews, across the four Schools and focuses on all roles involved in this research (i.e., administrative, academic, support staff). This means that all persons are considered for the examination of human sustainability in the University, and not simply the focal group, which is the programme administrators. The reason for this is that human sustainability focuses on human beings, and argues that, because persons are rational, autonomous, and responsible adults with dignity, organisations should respect people and not use them for their purposes and goals as a means only, but always, at the same time, as “an end in themselves” (Kant, [1785] 1990; Bowie 1999; Bowie, 2017).

**Figure 4-1 Data Structure - Overarching Theoretical Construct – Human Sustainability**



This thesis views human sustainability as related to human beings, their relationships and communication with others, within and beyond their own organisations. I define human sustainability based on Kant's "Formula of Humanity as an End" and the "Formula of the Realm of Ends" (Kant, [1785] 1990) as follows: "Human sustainability is when organisations respect human beings as free, rational and responsible, include them in policy formulation and decision-making and encourage them to build mutual respect with all persons within and beyond their organisations."

This definition is the basis for designing for human sustainability in this study. Thus, whenever human sustainability is mentioned in this thesis, in all chapters, it refers to the above stated definition. The implementation of design for human sustainability based on this definition, focuses on respecting the dignity of employees, providing them with significant information regarding the University (i.e., about investment plans), encouraging them to respect each other, providing meaningful work, and including them in the decision-making of organisational policies, considering their views related to diverse issues regarding the organisation.

Furthermore, based on constancy, defining, designing and implementing human sustainability in these terms, encourages persons to respect others for the same reasons they respect themselves, and expect others to respect them. Hence, achieving "mutual respect". The principle of consistency is fundamental when Kant talks about respect, since he claims that we should respect others for the same reasons we want others to respect us, and for the same reasons we respect ourselves. These reasons are primarily due to our dignity and humanity. As we recognise the same traits of dignity, autonomy and responsibility to ourselves, in order to be consistent, we should recognise them in others, as well, so we recognise the other human beings to be autonomous and responsible, just like we are (Bowie, 2017). Therefore, relations between people, and between the diverse roles in organisations, must be based on this consistency principle regarding moral relations since an organisation is comprised of people and the various sets of relationships between and among them (Bowie with Werhane, 2005).

Human sustainability in the University is analysed based on its key themes which represent the two extreme ends since it operates on a continuum from very low to very high. Therefore, the level of human sustainability in the University, as in most organisations, would fall somewhere between those two extremes. The analysis begins with the key theme of information/lack of information which is discussed in the following section.

## 4.1 Information/Lack of information

The degree of presence of information, among other factors, indicates the level of human sustainability (i.e., high, low) in the organisation. This depends primarily on whether the organisation treats its people always as ends in themselves, and never as means only (Kant, [1785] 1990). According to the “Formula of Humanity as an End” treating individuals always as “ends in themselves” despite the situation and the efficiency of the outcomes, is also related to the fact that organisations should provide sufficient information to their employees about major organisational policies and issues. For example, treating people always as ends in themselves in the University, despite the situation and the efficiency of outcomes, means that the Senior Management Group could provide employees with relevant information regarding major issues (i.e., University’s investment plans, how expenses are distributed in the Schools, Colleges and University as a whole).

Senior managers can build “empowered” workplaces to involve staff and support them in achieving their goals by making sure that there is access to certain opportunities, information, “support” and resources (Bergstedt & Wei, 2020). Pfeffer (1998) claims that “information sharing” is a fundamental element of “high-performance work systems” which means that employees need to know the main information of the University (i.e., financial information such as investment plans). Pfeffer (1998) explains two key reasons regarding this matter. First, information sharing on issues like “financial performance” shows that the organisation trusts its staff. Second, even capable and trained persons cannot encourage “organisational performance” if they don’t receive information regarding significant aspects of performance. In this case, extra training is necessary regarding how to utilise and explain this information.

Pfeffer (1998) argues that, despite the fact that information sharing as explained makes sense, sharing information about certain issues in organisations is not very extensive for the following reasons: First, “information is power and sharing information diffuses that power” (Pfeffer, 1998, p.95). However, if detaining information is the main origin of power of an organisation’s heads, then the organisation urgently needs to search for other principals. Second, information sharing could encourage information to seep out to other organisations, generating a weakness for the organisation. This means that organisations keep secrets from their employees which is counterproductive. When persons are not aware of what is going on and do not comprehend the main issues regarding the organisation, they cannot be expected to influence performance in a positive manner. Whitney (1994) agrees that numerous organisations seem “paranoid” regarding sharing information. Various of them are also confident that employees are not capable of comprehending the information that is accessible, which is a “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Furthermore, frequently other organisations know more about an organisation than its own staff. “Some information should be classified, but much that is classified should not be” (Whitney, 1994, p.73).

In addition, this limited sharing of information implies lack of trust from the organisation to its employees. Whitney (1994, p.65) advises the managers of organisations to share “as much information as possible about [the organisation’s] aim, mission, and values.” Furthermore, managers must give a “rich understanding of how employees’ specific missions and supporting objectives relate to the aims and values of the firm. People who know ‘why’ can add more value than those who merely know ‘how’” (Whitney, 1994, p.65). Case (1995) claims that when this information is available, employees view themselves as “partners” and are “empowered” in the sense that they want to do a better job. Having access to the main information in general, and to financial information in particular, provides employees with a better understanding of the finances and helps them realise how the organisation operates as a whole. Consequently, staff become more responsible and work more effectively, without too much supervision and orders from their managers.

The analysis of the interview material indicates that information sharing regarding major issues (i.e., University’s distribution of expenses, University’s investment plans) is limited in the University. The majority of staff (i.e.,



academics, administrative), across all four Schools, say that they do not know anything about major financial information regarding the School, College and University, unless their role necessitates that knowledge (i.e., working in the finance department, being Head of School). The majority of persons from different workgroups across all four Schools could not reply regarding these issues (Table 4-1).

**Table 4-1 Knowledge of staff regarding major financial information in the University**

“I know some [financial information], because I was involved in the accreditation process, but in general no, [it is not known]. It is quite confidential.” (A11, academic)  
 “[I do not know] information on investment plans and how expenses are distributed in the School.” (B1, programme administrator)  
 “Yes, [I know about financial information].” (B6, finance assistant)  
 “No, I know nothing about any of that [financial] information.” (C1, programme administrator)  
 “[I do not know] anymore [about financial information]. As a Head of School, I had to know.” (C9, academic)  
 “No, I am not really involved in those [financial] discussions.” (D5, administrators’ manager)  
 “No, [I do not] really [know about financial information].” (D2, academic)

Consequently, the level of information sharing is limited in the University. The second key theme is participation/lack of participation and is discussed in the following section.

## 4.2 Participation/Lack of participation in decision-making

The degree of presence of all staff in the decision-making process among other factors indicates the level of human sustainability (i.e., high, low) in the University. According to the “Formula of Realm of Ends” all persons involved both “co-create” and “follow” the rules and policies in the organisation; therefore, they are both “co-creators” and “followers” of those rules at the same time. In other words, people are both “subjects” and “sovereigns” simultaneously (Bowie, 2017). Organisations in this respect are “moral communities” because they are comprised of persons who are moral beings with dignity (Bowie, 1999).

Senior managers in organisations can build “empowered” workplaces to engage employees by showing “participative” decision-making (Bergstedt & Wei, 2020). The degree of presence of staff in decision-making depends primarily on whether the senior management of the organisation encourages such involvement. This

does not necessarily mean that everybody decides on everything but that the ideas of representatives of all workgroups (i.e., academics, programme administrators) could be actively considered regarding both general issues (i.e., salaries, pensions, ethical behaviour) and more specific aspects related to particular workgroups (i.e., job descriptions, flexible working hours of programme administrators). The literature suggests that asking for the employees' suggestions is fundamental for the success of organisations (Whitney, 1994). Therefore, organisations could “actively listen to act on their ideas about improvements of the product or service. Both the employee and the business will be richer for the effort” (Whitney, 1994, p.65). Frequently, senior managers underestimate the fact that the “most potent impact” could emerge from staff with lower grades and ranks in the hierarchical structure of an organisation (i.e., frontline staff) (Heymann with Barrera, 2010).

Decision-making by agreement has been the issue of a lot of research worldwide, which demonstrates that the unanimity approach, although longer to realise, creates more ingenious decisions, thereby resulting in more successful execution in relation to single decision-making (Ouchi, 1981). There are various ways organisations involve their employees and other stakeholders in the decision-making process (Mele, 2012). For example, “open-book management” which gives decision-making power to employees and all significant information (i.e., aim, financial) about the company (Bowie, 2005). Lower and higher degrees of participation can be distinguished as follows: A lower degree of participation comprises accepting precise and related information regarding the organisation and successively being asked to mention their perceptions regarding an issue, giving some solutions; a higher degree of participation encourages actual participation in decision-making at the level of consultation; furthermore, the highest and most rare degree, refers to “co-decisions” (i.e., managers and workers decide together) (Mele, 2012). “Co-decisions” reflect the level of decision-making based on which human sustainability is defined in this study and, whenever possible, organisations could aim at that level. The reason for this is that major decisions are relevant to all stakeholders focusing on the viability and sustainability of the organisation which influence all. Nevertheless, the higher level based on consultation is the minimum level that can exist in order to reach a medium level of human sustainability.

The analysis of the interview material suggests that the degree of participation of staff (i.e., academic, administrative) in the decision-making of organisational policies, across all four Schools, is low. For example, the majority of programme administrators say that they have never been invited to participate at meetings where decisions are taken, unless they have an administrative role to implement, (i.e., taking minutes). Consequently, they perceive themselves as persons without a voice in the University, which discourages them from expressing their views. The vast majority of academics also perceive themselves as not having an effective voice regarding major issues in the University. This is the primary reason they do not participate in the various kinds of meetings (i.e., School forums, meetings for the building of new structures). Time constraints and high workload are also significant reasons for low participation in these meetings (Table 4-2).

**Table 4-2 Participation of staff in the various meetings in the University**

“We have been invited to meetings for the new School, but I feel it is a waste of time, because they would not listen to the administrative staff.” (A7, finance assistant)  
 “The only meetings that I have been are [the] subject meetings...but I am taking the minutes, so...I do not participate.” (C2, programme administrator)  
 “Not much [influence decisions]. It depends on which rank of professors, where they are sitting [in the hierarchy], and so on. Academics in general, do not [influence] much [decision-making].” (A8, academic)  
 “There is a very big one [cross-functional meeting] with the Head of School, every quarter, [but] I seldom go, because it is more like a formality to me...I do not think the voice of the people is heard.” (A11, academic)  
 “No, I have never been involved [in cross-functional meetings].” (B4, administrative assistant)  
 “I do not go to the School forum and [to] the other forums, because I have to be in meetings all the time, and I really do not have the time.” (C10, academic)  
 “[I am] not [invited to the cross-functional meetings], as far as I am aware of.” (D4, programme administrator)

Various universities in the United Kingdom have undergone restructuring during the years following 2000 (Hogan, 2012). The analysis suggests that, the University announced a restructuring in 2010, moving from a faculty to school system, promising to build on existing relationships between stakeholders, among other issues, and to become one of the best universities in the world (University website). The Senior Management Group, since then the only group responsible for the decision-making of organisational policies, achieved some of its goals (i.e., internationalisation, increase in student numbers, attract more funding, higher rankings); nevertheless, this was often at the expense of its

people. My analysis of the data collected indicates that some of the consequences of restructuring comprise understaffed departments, high workload, high administrative bureaucracy, greater turnover, more sick and stressed people, and lower participation in decision making for all staff (i.e., academic, administrator). Diverse persons, across the four Schools, who have been working in the University since before restructuring, agree that restructuring, with its increased administrative procedures, took the power of decision-making away from staff members (Table 4-3).

**Table 4-3 A lower level of participation in decision-making for all staff in the University**

“I have seen in recent years the University...[making the person] a number...In the past it was not like that...We were treated like human beings, we were considered when decisions were made...management bosses, that top 5% who make all the decisions, do not care about the people who are doing the job. It is all just about money. It is quite sad.” (A4, programme administrator)

“I think the restructuring, instead of taking away, reducing, the administration, it did not.” (C7, academic)

“This is a long-learned lesson, which comes from the restructuring that happened in 2010, [and] which left quite a bit of scars in the School, [when] the departments were merged into one School...[and] there is still this culture. ‘We have talked about this, but I am making the decision, and the decision is this.’ And, if you talk to others in the School, they will feel...that the discussion was only there as a polishing bit, and the decision was taken away, before anything happened.” (B9, academic)

“I am not sure that most people feel that they really do shape policy, because [of] top-down [structure], it tends to be more [from the part of the Senior Management Group], ‘Here are our objectives, go and fulfil them,’ rather than, ‘What do you think our objectives should be?’ And I think that is a serious point. I think if [the structure] was more bottom-up, in terms of what the University should be striving to do, it might be easier for colleagues to contribute to actually achieving those [objectives], rather than being told, ‘Here is our grand plan,’ and [then] you look at the plan, [and think], ‘Oh, that is interesting. What is the interface between that and reality of what we actually do?’” (C8-academic)

Ginsberg (2011) claims that, in universities with a high bureaucratic administrative structure, staff members’ participation in decision-making is low. For example, the majority of academics have astonishingly little impact in their own universities’ decision-making processes, since this is held primarily by senior managers “whose names and faces are seldom even recognized by students or recalled by alumni” (Ginsberg, 2011, p.4). They primarily consult academics regarding the hiring and promotion of the faculty and not in other matters. International research in higher education demonstrates that the influence of senior academics at the institutional level varies, with people from Austria and the United Kingdom among those who feel that they are among the least influential academics of the twelve European countries participating (i.e.,

Germany, Switzerland, Norway). Thus, 65% of UK senior academics feel that they are without influence (Aarrevaara & Dobson, 2013). It is only in a small number of universities that academics have a voice in decision-making (i.e., investment, renovation or construction of buildings, number of students admitted) (Ginsberg, 2011).

Consequently, the Senior Management Group is not only invisible to students and alumni, as scholarly research indicates, and to the persons interviewed, as their above extracts suggest, but also to a greater amount of staff in the University, as the University's staff survey indicates. This survey includes a greater number of persons, from all roles, across all Schools in the University. Therefore, it is used as secondary data in this study indicating the way University staff perceive relevant issues. Only one fourth of respondents (24%) in the 2018 University staff survey say that the Senior Management Group are sufficiently visible. Less than one fifth of respondents (19%) believe that it listens to their views, contrary to the higher amount of people (48%) who believe they were listened to in the 2016 University staff survey (University website).

This constant decline of staff's participation in decision-making, accompanied with an invisible Senior Management Group, complicates the everyday University working life, which discourages the level of human sustainability. Acknowledging the significance of these results, the principal and vice-chancellor published a letter admitting that the "invisibility of the Senior Management Group" is a challenge that will be addressed in the following months. Moreover, they promised to work harder at making themselves more visible, as well as finding new ways of engaging with staff and listening to their views (University website). The interview material suggests that the highly administrative bureaucracy and the decreased power of staff in decision-making enhance a non-constructive and unhealthy conflict between the various organisational levels (i.e., department, School, College, University) and particularly between the School and the College. In addition to the creation of a rival climate, there is an increase in administration and its expenses, since both the School and College levels have their own administration with their relative expenses and expenditure priorities.

"...the Schools are still fighting [since restructuring] with this College for control over budgets and administration...when I was Head of

School, we got into trouble, because we had a member of the administrative team who was an experienced Human Resources person, but was not formally part of Human Resources...And we got into trouble [in doing that] from College and Human Resources [head office], because they felt we were undermining them. So...there is not so much [conflict], between the levels of School and department, but at School and College level there is [conflict regarding]...roles and responsibilities, [still] not resolved even now...The College in the past [before restructuring], was always powerful, but the extra layer [of the School level] did not exist, and we [the department] had an immediate relationship with the College. [Therefore,] we discussed things easier with less bureaucracy. So, I remain unconvinced [that the restructuring was beneficial in many respects].” (C9, academic)

Ginsberg (2011, p.23) suggests that this high administrative nature of schools and colleges in universities nowadays, is usually “supported by phalanxes of vice deans, associate deans, and assistant deans plus other officials.” All these people have high salaries, which keep on increasing. “Crushed under” these administrative structures and persons are the academics in their departments, who are doing the real job related to the purpose of the universities (i.e., teaching, research) and who do not have a voice in decision-making (Ginsberg, 2011). The analysis suggests that the findings of this research are relevant to the University. Various academics view administration to be highly bureaucratic and expensive, increasing the spending for administrative reasons.

“We used to have departments [before restructuring] within this College and Heads of Departments answered directly to the Dean of College. I think that was a good and [a] much more democratic system. This [post-restructuring system] has become a lot more managerial. It has introduced a level of bureaucracy and committees and so everything is replicated, College, School, department. Now, the Heads of Schools answer to the Head of College. So, the Heads of Departments have all the responsibility and no power, not [a] really decision-making power. Whereas in the past, [before restructuring] the Head of Department answered directly to the Head of College and then to the principle. So, we have this whole School level, and as I say, it is a distraction and it is a costly one in terms of time, administration and committees.” (C8, academic)

These numbers are very significant because, among other issues, they change the “spending priorities” of universities (Ginsberg, 2011). The interview material suggests that this is the case in the University, primarily regarding senior administrators and the Senior Management Group, since the spending priorities now are focused on administrative rather than the faculty needs (i.e., research,



teaching). The majority of staff perceive the salaries of the Senior Management Group to be very high in relation to others (i.e., academics), with regular annual increases, contrary to the salaries of the faculty, that are lower and not increasing in the last years (A15, academic).

“I am quite amazed on how low salaries are, for the post-doctoral [students] and lecturers, if I compare them to what we have in my home country [a European country]...I think there is quite a jump from post-docs to professors...I am really amazed [on] how they do not understand it, because it seems that the University is rich.” (B7, academic)

The analysis further indicates that although these spending priorities focus on administration, it is more towards the higher level of administration (i.e., Senior Management Group) or other administrators who have higher positions or positions in more specialised areas (i.e., Head of School). Diverse staff, across all four Schools, view this issue of understaffed frontline areas as a big problem, since they believe that these are primarily the areas that need persons in administration (A15, academic).

Consequently, the analysis indicates that due to restructuring and its various consequences, participation of staff in decision-making is low and spending priorities have changed, prioritising spending for higher administration (i.e., salaries). The majority of interviewees, across all four Schools, perceive that the diminished participation of staff in decision-making has often facilitated the creation of “unrealistic goals” and “unrealistic procedures” set by the Senior Management Group in collaboration with the Human Resources Head Office, and which is imposed on all staff. The goals are often very difficult to achieve and share with colleagues (C8, academic). The procedures are also challenging to deal with since they are not related to the University’s reality.

“We get a lot of policies and procedures from finance and procurement [as well], but it is very hard to work with [them], because [we] are working with human beings, with different people from different countries, from different cultures [i.e., graduate teaching assistants, [or] academics]...I do not think that Human Resources are aware of [what] these people [are doing]. It just seems very confusing.” (A7, finance assistant)

The low involvement of people in decision-making has also increased their low perceived confidence concerning the Senior Management Group in general and, more specifically, towards its abilities to lead change. Moreover, staff do not think that anything is going to change any time soon (C9, academic). The University staff survey, which includes more people from all roles in the University, is a source of secondary data, for relevant issues to the human sustainability analysis and suggests the following: Only one quarter (26%) in the University's 2018 staff survey, believe that the Senior Management Group provides effective leadership; less than half of respondents (41%) believe that the Senior Management Group have a clear vision for the future of the University, (42%) say that the reasons behind changes are usually explained to them, and (44%) say that they understand what the University is trying to achieve when the changes are made. Less than half of respondents (33%) have the opportunity to contribute their views before changes that affect their role are made, less than one quarter (22%) believe that when changes are made they are for the better, and (22%) believe that the University manages change effectively. Finally, only (32%) of respondents believe that action will be taken following the survey (University website).

Consequently, the level of participation in decision-making is limited in the University. The third key theme of the human sustainability analysis is meaningful/meaningless work and is discussed in the following section.

### **4.3 Meaningful/Meaningless work**

The degree of the presence of meaningful work, among other factors, indicates the level of human sustainability (i.e., high, low) in the University. This depends primarily on whether the organisation provides meaningful work to its staff. If the University focuses on treating its employees as ends in themselves, respecting their dignity and humanity, it cares about providing them with meaningful work, which is a “moral requirement” based on Kantian principles (Bowie, 1998b).

More specifically, from a Kantian perspective, meaningful work is work that has the following traits: an individual is entered without constraint; the worker is permitted to enact their “autonomy” and self-governance; the worker is



permitted to evolve their potential; a salary is given adequate for physical well-being; the moral growth of the members of staff is reinforced; and, it is not “paternalistic,” meaning that it does not dictate to members of workforce of how they ought to act in order to be happy and successful (Bowie, 1998b). Furthermore, of particular importance for meaningful work, is a consideration of the strengthening of the “rational capacities” of employees, so managers and organisations should put an emphasis on this issue and those mentioned previously (Hill, 1992). The analysis suggests the following themes, based on which meaningful work is examined: autonomy, job control and flexibility; workload; tasks and responsibilities; job security; salaries; and, human development. Autonomy, job control and flexibility are discussed below.

### **4.3.1 Autonomy, job control and flexibility of University staff**

Meaningful work, from a Kantian perspective, is work that permits the worker to enact their “autonomy” and self-governance (Hill, 1992). Prior research demonstrates that there are differences in job control that are related to the “job rank”. Thus, British employees, as other higher ranked staff in various institutions, had greater control in their jobs and higher autonomy, despite the fact that they frequently had greater “job demands” (Pfeffer, 2018). The literature in higher education indicates that academics believe that they have considerable autonomy regarding their work (i.e., how, when, and where to do teaching, research) (Kinman & Jones, 2004).

The interview material suggests, that the degree of autonomy of staff (i.e., administrative, academic), across all four Schools, varies depending on their grades, experience and roles (i.e., programme administrators’ managers have greater autonomy in their job than programme administrators). The vast majority of administrative staff viewed their managers to have more autonomy than themselves in the job. The majority of academics also perceived they have a high degree of autonomy in doing their job related to teaching, research and the various administrative tasks they have. Trust is a major factor of autonomy in the University regarding everyday work, and the majority of administrative staff believe that their colleagues trust them to do a good job (Table 4-4).

Table 4-4 Autonomy of staff in the University

“Yes, we can do the way we want to do our work. They do trust us.” (C4, finance and operations school administrator)

“I could make decisions on my own, but perhaps small things...not something that could have an impact. [For major issues] I would need to ask.” (A6, programme administrators’ assistant)

“In terms of teaching we have a lot of autonomy, in terms of how we design the courses, and assessments, we are kind of free in a way to do what we want.” (C6, academic)

“Yes. I can do research in whatever and whenever I want.” (C8, academic)

“[I have] plenty [of] autonomy...there is nobody who puts pressure on me, hanging over me [and] watching what I do.” (D1, programme administrators’ manager)

However, the analysis indicates that this autonomy is limited to everyday practical tasks and responsibilities, directly related to their roles (i.e., timetabling for programme administrators, teaching for academics) and not to more strategic issues (i.e., change of procedures). Therefore, the type of autonomy and job control people have over their job is not the type of autonomy where staff can control their work and become involved in decision-making for organisational policies. As explained above, persons are not involved in this kind of strategic decision-making which results in their limited job autonomy and job control for more strategic issues. The vast majority of administrative and academic staff do not have autonomy and various issues are beyond their control in the University (i.e., managers change priorities and deadlines regarding administrative work, academics do not have autonomy in influencing the University’s policies). The results of the University staff survey, which include all roles in the University, are used as a secondary form of data in this study when relevant issues are examined. Almost half of the respondents (42%) in the University’s staff survey in 2018 feel that the priorities are changed too frequently for them to work effectively (University website).

“[There is autonomy] in the day to day running of [my work.] But [in relation to] targets [and] goals, the University sets...in that sense, no [there is no autonomy]. But I can still decide what I teach, when I teach it, what I research, so, to an extent [there is autonomy], but there is that mismatch.” (C8, academic)

Furthermore, prior research demonstrates that there is a relationship between measures of job control and health, both “mental” and “physical” (Pfeffer, 2018). A cross-sectional study of employees in hospitals in Western Europe,

indicates that job autonomy is positively associated to health (Pfeffer, 2018). Another research study, that included 8,500 white-collar workers in Sweden, showed that when people influenced the restructuring process their organisations had undergone, and reached higher job control, increased levels of well-being were discovered that those with less influence and job control did not show. “The higher-control group had lower levels of illness symptoms for eleven out of twelve health indicators, were absent less frequently, and experienced less depression” (Pfeffer, 2018, p.150). Consistently with this research, when restructuring took place in the University, the number of sick and stressed people increased; one of the factors for this could be that people did not have any influence in the restructuring process and did not manage to control their jobs (i.e., layoffs, more frequent sick leave, stressed people with panic attacks).

There are a lot of sick people in here...[because of] stress, and that has never been dealt [by the] Human Resources or anybody in the University...People are overwhelmed.” (A4, programme administrator)

The interview material indicates that autonomy, across all four Schools, is also related to and influenced by flexibility. Many programme administrators who have flexible hours perceive themselves to be more autonomous in their work and manage their professional and personal life more effectively. For example, schools C and D have more flexible working hours for their frontline staff than schools A and B on a regular basis, whereas, schools A and B would be more flexible in accommodating specific needs (i.e., for health or family issues) (Table 4-5).

**Table 4-5 Flexibility of working hours for programme administrators in the University**

“I do not have any flexibility of working hours, so I work Monday to Friday, 9-5.” (B1, programme administrator)  
“We can start between 8 and 10 and finish between 4 and 6. And you can change. One day you can start at 8 the other day at 9, for example. They are very good.” (C3, programme administrator)

The analysis suggests that the vast majority of academics have a greater amount of flexibility due to the nature of their job and this enhances their autonomy and

job control (i.e., they can work from home when they do not have teaching or meetings). However, this flexibility, contrary to what happens with frontline staff, does not always help their work-life balance since they take a lot of work home. Prior research indicates that 59% of academics are working beyond the normal working hours (9-5, Monday to Friday) claiming to undertake between 10% to 20% of their overall workload during evenings and weekends. However, this has made the “boundaries” between work and private life unclear with more perceived conflict between the two. Moreover, the longer working hours create additional stress, and “psychological” and “physical” manifestations (Kinman & Jones, 2004). However, despite the unclear boundaries between work and home, and despite their wish to greatly separate the two, prior research shows that the majority of academics are satisfied with a higher level of “merging” of their private and professional lives in comparison to their academic-related colleagues (Kinman & Jones, 2004).

“In [the] academic role we have a lot of flexibility in our working patterns. We are lucky in that way, and I am very appreciative, and very aware that my professional services colleagues do not have those opportunities...but then again it is a payoff, because we are basically working seven days a week...At least six. And quite often we are working twelve hours [daily]. [For example], this month I have been working twelve hours a day, almost every day, and that is not sustainable [in the] long term.” (A14, academic)

The issue of managing the workload, either at work or at home, is fundamental for academics and other staff, especially after restructuring, since it has substantially increased. Workload is discussed below.

### **4.3.2 Workload and development of University staff**

Work is essential for a person’s growth, self-respect and respect of others. Kant argued that without work an individual cannot lead a happy life since, with work, they have set their “powers in motion” (Kant 1963, p.161). Thus, work is essential for the evolution of ones’ self (Bowie, 1998b). Furthermore, training and human development is fundamental for the person’s strengthening of “rational capacities”. Therefore, the University, as all organisations, could consider this when planning and organising training sessions for all roles (i.e., academics, administrative) (Hill, 1992). Organisations which have a “good job strategy”, among other things, are making sure they have good training for their

employees (Ton, 2014). When staff feel that they are developing and learning, “self-confidence” and “self-achievement” advance, ending in faith in themselves (Shuck et al., 2011).

Although work is beneficial and necessary a high workload can have the opposite effect. Restructuring creates a high level of workload for all staff (i.e., higher number of students, increased administrative work) and is often difficult to deal with. Prior research in higher education suggests that half of participants said that paperwork related to administration was high and their workloads were becoming “unmanageable” (Kinman & Jones, 2004). The analysis, consistent with this research, indicates that the majority of people, across all four Schools, have a high workload. The vast majority of programme administrators consider their departments to be understaffed, since although the student numbers increased during the last years the staff did not. Therefore, frontline staff struggle to manage with the workload.

“I would empathise, because they [programme administrators] have a lot of work and it is very difficult. I suspect that there is not enough administrative staff in those positions.” (A14, academic)

Restructuring, with its continuous introduction of new technological systems, increased staff members’ workloads, primarily due to infrequent and inadequate training. Training is significant for the organisations because it helps frontline people to focus upon and resolve problems and ameliorate their work by adopting new methods (Pfeffer, 1998). Studies of organisations in the United Kingdom invariably demonstrate that there are “inadequate levels” of training and “training focused on the wrong things: specialist skills rather than generalist competence and organizational culture” (Pfeffer, 1998, p.87).

These findings are relevant to the analysis which suggests that training of technological systems is often specific (i.e., excel), especially when it is directed to the lower grades, short in duration and not always explained properly. For example, the vast majority of frontline staff, across all four Schools, perceive as problematic the introduction of new technological systems. The sessions are inadequate and there is no follow up to ensure the appropriate implementation of what is learned. Training and skills development are crucial, as long as the organisation allows and encourages people to put their new skills

into practice (Pfeffer, 1994). Administrative staff perceive that this is often not happening due to time constraints and workloads which, frequently, do not permit them to put into practice what they have learned, unless absolutely necessary for their work. Additionally, there is no follow up from the University to make sure employees have understood the material, which delays implementation and increases workload (i.e., ask help from colleagues).

The vast majority of persons perceive training to be very specific on issues that are practical (i.e., Excel) and not strategic. This is not sufficient for human development in the University. Prior research in higher education demonstrates that limited opportunity for personal development is strongly associated with physical and psychological manifestation (Kinman & Jones, 2004). Specific training is principally oriented towards the lower grades, whereas training of people who are taking new roles and of higher grades (i.e., senior managers) is limited. Some academics suggested that training for the Senior Management Group would be beneficial (A15, academic). Prior research indicates that it is significant for managers to attend training that helps them to comprehend the staffs' point of view (Moberg, 2003) (Table 4-6).

**Table 4-6 Limited training for all staff in the University**

“When I first started, not only I had to do the [high amount of] work, but I also had to learn six different systems to use.” (D4, programme administrator)  
 “Trying to get things done is very difficult in the University, because the [technological] systems are [not] joined up.” (C4, finance and operations school administrator)  
 “Once you get further [up the grades] there is not so much training in the University, in general.” (A3, programme administrators' manager)  
 “There are a lot [of workshops] organised by the University (i.e., excel), but they could be more [useful]...The stuff that I have done and that I could put on a cv, that would help me get another job, is not much.” (C1, programme administrator)  
 “Training [exists] as long as, it is relevant to the work you are doing.” (A1, programme administrator)  
 “Sometimes it [the job] includes training, but sometimes it does not, so I have to learn for myself.” (B5, programme administrator)  
 “There [is] training in the University, but I do not feel that it is particularly useful...it is [also] difficult to keep the skills if you are not using them.” (B4, administrative assistant)  
 “The University runs courses on teaching and learning in the middle of the semester, [which] almost always clash with teaching. [Additionally], when everybody comes back [from the training] they do not have time to do what we talked about [during the training].” (C8, academic)  
 “There is nothing [in training] for people who are taking new roles...and [it] would be great if there were courses to learn about causes, about assessment regulations [and so on].” (D1, programme administrators' manager)

Consequently, training and human development are limited in the University and this increases workload for all staff. Additionally, restructuring, with its “unrealistic goals”, imposes on all staff (i.e., academic, administrative) higher demands. For example, demands on academics are many, prioritising grant capture and publishing. Prior research in higher education demonstrates that more than half of the academic respondents (i.e., 62%) in a UK study, are working more than the 48-hour weekly limit set by the “European Union’s Working Time Directive (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office [HMSO] 1998” and almost one third (22%) are working more than 55 hours per week (Kinman et al., 2006) (Table 4-7).

**Table 4-7 Workload for academic staff in the University**

“Before restructuring the pressure was primarily [coming] from teaching...But restructuring has brought a lot more of administrative involvement and work for everybody, [and an additional] pressure to do research and publish, that has become intense. The pressure to get grants has also become more and more intense.” (C8, academic)

“The pressures on all [are] very transparent...The academics are graded, not just in teaching, [but also] on research, [and] that is what really matters for this University in recent times. So, we have greater numbers to deal with and [primarily] those in the front line and the teaching [have to deal with] that. But the academics also have to do the research, [which is] what really counts in our bureaucratic evaluation process.” (A15, academic)

“The University just sees it as [we are] having one role. I do not enjoy being head of subject...because I am still expected to be research active [and] an excellent teacher. Work-life balance is a challenge, as it is for most people [in the University].” (C7, academic)

Prior research indicates that the “morale and satisfaction” of numerous academics have been unfavourably affected by high workloads (Bryson, 2004). Evidence claims that organisations would be more viable with employees who do not have a high workload. Pfeffer (2018) argues that, in these circumstances, employees would have better health, their “productivity” and “innovation” would increase, and the general health-costs, derived by both employees and employers, would be reduced. Moreover, a high workload limits “time” which is persons’ “single biggest resource available within universities” (Barrett & Barrett, 2008, p.3). The majority of staff (i.e., academic, administrative) view time constraints due to high workload as a real issue which, thereby, complicates their professional and personal life (i.e., helping colleagues less than desired, less time to take care of themselves) (Table 4-8).



Table 4-8 Consequences of high workload of staff in the University

“[Peoples’] workloads are overwhelming, so [they] do not have the same capacity or the time to help, because they have their own deadlines to meet.” (D4, programme administrator)

“It was almost like they were not expecting me to start...when I started there was no computer and I had to sit in the meeting room of the Head of Administration in the School.” (B5, programme administrator)

“[My colleague named X who is a programme administrator] has a very busy time, [because] the workload is far too much and she needs someone to help her. [But] that person [who helps her] comes in and helps for the day or so, but this [help] is not consistent. But this year, X said, ‘I am not going to do that [anymore].’ [Because], X used to take work home, and could not sleep at nights, and work on Saturdays and Sundays.” (C4, finance and operations school administrator)

“We have an awful a lot of students in my subject area...[so] it is tremendously difficult for the honours administrator [and]...that was very stressful for her, getting everything together.” (C6, academic)

“I know that I am not the only one [who delays submitting work to the frontline staff], so I think professional services are very used to dealing with academics and they have an idea about the difficulties of our job.” (A14, academic)

Restructuring not only increased workload of all staff in the University, it also modified their tasks and responsibilities in a remarkable manner. Tasks and responsibilities of staff are discussed below.

### 4.3.3 Tasks and responsibilities of University staff

Prior research shows that “task variety” is significant for “meaningfulness in work” (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The analysis suggests that the work of programme administrators had more variety before restructuring, when they were working in the individual departments, than after restructuring, when frontline staff were moved to the centralised open space “hubs”. The majority of staff perceive the pre-restructuring system to be better than post-restructuring regarding this issue. Programme administrators perceived their work before restructuring interesting because they had to deal with a great variety of issues (i.e., supporting the students, the academics, taking care of the building, making orders). Their relationships with colleagues in other functions (i.e., academics) and the students were of a better quality, they had more things in common and they knew a lot about the academic work (i.e., research).

Although the “loss” of programme administrators from their departments is equally felt in the four Schools, staff in Schools C and D, which are distributed in



more buildings, perceive this loss in a greater manner than staff in Schools A and B, which are distributed in one or two buildings. For example, in School C, all buildings, except one, where the central hub is located, are without frontline staff. Programme administrators in the hubs not only lost their everyday contact with their colleagues in other functions (i.e., academics) that allowed them to learn more and even get involved with other aspects of their work (i.e. research), but their tasks also changed and are continuously changing. The programme administrators who started working in the University before restructuring feel that their previous role was more diverse and interesting. The majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, say that although there is still some variety in their jobs, most of the tasks are increasingly becoming more repetitive and specific with a lot of “tick box” work (Table 4-9).

**Table 4-9 Specialisation of tasks of the programme administrators in the University**

“[In the past] different buildings [and departments] had different administration staff, and then they brought all the administration together in one building. This means that a lot of buildings do not have any administration staff, and the students can wander [around] and then they will come here [at the hub so we can] help them. It is not the best idea.” (C4, finance and operations school administrator)

“Somebody [the programme administrator] could make sure that the stationery was bought, the photocopier was working, little things like that, cumulative make a big difference...[Also] our secretary here would have been able to tell you what every member of staff was doing, what courses they run with the post graduate students. They knew, because they saw us every day, and it was a much more supportive environment. And vice versa, I think they actually enjoyed being based in an academic unit. On a social basis it was very pleasant too. And that is an element of the workplace, which should not be underestimated.” (C8, academic)

“Over the recent years, there is a culture in the University of [saying] ‘it is not my role.’ I think that the University is streamlining people’s jobs, so they have [specific] roles, and everybody sticks to them, whereas in the past it [was different]. One person would work out a problem and find the answer. Now [they are not trying to solve they just say] ‘[it] is not my role pass it on, not my role pass this on.’ [This] means [that] people are very limited in their job roles. So, it is not as helpful as it used to be.” (D4, programme administrator)

“We [had] one [programme administrator] in this building before, someone who dealt just with our subject area. But because of restructuring...we do not have [now]. The whole dynamic has changed, [and] not entirely for the better...Before [they] had to be an expert on so many things, whereas now [they are] very much teaching focused administrators in the School office...[who] are more [than one], but they are doing more subjects, and [although] that can be useful in its own way, I do not think we always feel [it]. Unfortunately.” (C7, academic)

“Over time, I feel that the administration people are under more and more stress and are pushed to deliver quickly. So, timely delivery is there, but it is more something like, ‘Ok. So, I can tick the box,’ as if I have been doing my thing. This is not as if [this job] was carefully planned, as it was the case when I started [working here], five years ago.” (A11, academic)

“We are conscious that, the job details change, that there is a drive towards rather than all of us doing a little bit of everything, a little bit of the University system, of timetabling, of [other things], [some] people might do only the University system, or only timetabling. More specialised things.” (C5, programme administrator)

Consequently, this specialisation trend focuses on increasingly specific tasks and responsibilities that do not help the evolution of a person's rational abilities; therefore, work becomes less interesting and meaningful. Another increasing trend in the University is regarding job security and this is discussed below.

#### **4.3.4 Job security of University staff**

“Employment security” indicates a long-term dedication by the organisation to its staff (Pfeffer, 1994). Employment security does not signify that the organisation keeps persons who do not do a good job since performance is important. It signifies that staff are not easily laid off for issues such as “economic downturns or the strategic mistakes of senior management over which they have no control” (Pfeffer, 1998, p.69). Job security and “job overload,” are also related to psychological ill-health (Johnson et al., 2019). It is also related to the physical health of staff (Pfeffer, 2018).

Pfeffer (2018) states that European research has demonstrated that job insecurity increased the frequency of mental health complaints and intentions of persons to quit. Moreover, prior research in higher education shows that turnover intentions are statistically correlated with bad physical health (Pfeffer, 2018). Scholarly work suggests that perceived job insecurity can result in “lowered commitment, morale, and motivation” (Tytherleigh et al., 2005, p.57). An employee who feels without power, unappreciated and “unsafe” may come to work and be physically present, but “mentally and emotionally not present. Feeling safe contributes to feeling that you are a part of something bigger, such as a family unit” (Shuck et al., 2011). The analysis suggests that staff, particularly administrative, worry about job security, especially since restructuring (i.e., sudden layoff of administrative staff with short notice took place). Numerous administrative staff in various roles, across all four Schools, now perceive the University to be a less secure place to work. This perception has been constantly increasing during the last 10 years, as people's trust in the Senior Management Group decreases (Table 4-10).

Table 4-10 Increasing trend of job insecurity for administrative staff in the University

“Things can change, and restructures happen...so I realise that no job is 100% safe.” (B6, finance assistant)  
“There is a certain level of insecurity now, that I would have thought four years ago...and moving forward for the next few years [it could get worse].” (C5, programme administrator)  
“No, [there is no job security], because my job is currently under review.” (D4, programme administrator)

Consequently, the analysis suggests that the University has been shifting over recent years from being a very secure and safe place to work to an increasingly less secure one. This further indicates that increases in salaries do not occur as they used to, especially after restructuring. Salaries of staff are discussed below.

### 4.3.5 Salaries of University staff

According to Kant (1963) organisations should give their employees jobs that provide sufficient payment which will give them enough money for their needs, for other purposes and some extra money to spend elsewhere. This will improve their well-being and persons will have self-respect and will lead a dignified and respectful life. Consequently, the University could give a salary adequate for its staff’s physical well-being (Bowie, 1998b). “High wages” are significant not only because they draw more candidates, which gives the organisation a greater choice, but also and most importantly demonstrate a focus on persons (Pfeffer, 1994). Furthermore, they enhance the persons’ independence and self-respect and encourage the respect of others in the organisation and beyond. For these reasons high salaries are important for the staff since a “living wage” is obligatory but not enough (Bowie, 1998a). Prior research in higher education shows that academic salaries have fallen in real terms over many years (Taberner, 2018).

The analysis suggests that the vast majority of staff, across all four Schools (i.e., academic, administrative) who know the average salary related to their role in the United Kingdom, are dissatisfied with their salaries, perceiving them as average to low. Academics claim that although they are not always receiving the

relative increases since restructuring the salaries and benefits of the Senior Management Group are increasing (A15, academic). This is a sign of inequality between the roles in the University which refers to both the amount of salaries and the relative increases. The lower salaries in relation to other universities in the United Kingdom affect all, especially the lower grades (i.e., lecturers). This makes it challenging for younger academics to accept a place in the University because they decide to go elsewhere, both in the United Kingdom and abroad, where they are paid more. For example, academic (A10) said that when they were a post-doctoral student in Europe, they were paid 20%-25% more, compared to what they are paid now as a lecturer in the University (Table 4-11).

**Table 4-11 Salaries of academic staff in the University**

“No, [I am not satisfied with my wage] it is below average... As the benefits of the senior executives and vice chancellor have been going up. We have lost something like 21% in the last ten years...There is a lot of discontent about pay.” (A15, academic)

“My observation is that we have lost people that were on board. Of course, there were various reasons, but salary was certainly a reason, and we lost very interesting candidates, because we could not offer them an attractive, competitive salary. So, there is something [to fix] here in the [University] system [regarding salaries].” (B7, academic)

The interview material further suggests, that similarly, the salaries and relevant increases of administrative and support staff, across all four Schools, are lower than the average salary relative to their position and grade in other universities in the United Kingdom (Table 4-12).

Table 4-12 Salaries of administrative staff in the University

“Some [salaries in the same role in other universities in the United Kingdom] are higher.” (A12, programme administrators assistants’ manager)

“I am not happy with the wage I get, and it is not representative of what people do. I have got a friend who works in a different university in this country, and basically her wage, for the grade that I am, is considerably more, and another friend who works in another university, [and] it is even further [higher] than that [the salary of the other friend].” (A7, finance assistant)

“No. I am not satisfied with it [my wage]. There was a role I was looking at in a different university...and the wage was three or four thousand [pounds] more a year.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)

“I do not think we are paid properly for what we do. I am not satisfied.” (C3, programme administrator)

“I am disappointed with the wage raises and the percentage that has been agreed in comparison to other universities or other sectors.” (D4, programme administrator)

Consequently, the analysis of the interview material suggests that all roles in the University (i.e., academic, administrative) are neither satisfied with their salaries nor with their increases. The results of the University staff survey, which include all roles in the University, are used as a secondary form of data in this study when relevant issues are examined. Only half of participants (50%) in the 2018 University staff survey feel their pay is fair considering their duties and responsibilities (University website). The fourth key theme of the human sustainability analysis is fair/unfair selection promotion and evaluation and is discussed in the following section.

## 4.4 Fair/Unfair selection, promotion, evaluation

The degree of presence of fair selection, promotion and evaluation processes, among other factors, indicates the level of human sustainability (i.e., high, low) in the University. Restructuring has also influenced these processes. The Senior Management Group, primarily, and the Human Resources Head Office are responsible for setting the criteria and procedures for the selection, promotion and evaluation of staff throughout the University. Fair/unfair selection process is discussed below.

### 4.4.1 Selection process of University staff

“Selectivity in recruiting” indicates the significance of selecting the appropriate people through a correct and transparent process (Pfeffer, 1994). This means



that the hiring process could consider and evaluate potential candidates examining equally all criteria, which are officially stated at the University's website (i.e. grant capture, publishing, research, teaching). As far as the hiring of academics is concerned, academics from different Schools can add some job-specific criteria.

The interview material indicates that the selection process has become more bureaucratic and detailed since restructuring, focusing on a "tick box" process. The majority of academic staff, across all four Schools, view the hiring process to have limited fairness since some criteria are consistently prioritised over others (i.e., grant capture). Thus, they perceive the order of priority of the criteria as follows: 1) grant capture, 2) publications, 3) research, 4) teaching, and then the remaining criteria. Academics view, therefore, an inconsistency between reality in the selection process and the way the criteria are officially publicised (i.e., University website) where all of them seem to be considered equally. Therefore, the majority of academics are concerned that, often, the selection of a colleague, based on this prioritisation of criteria, is not ideal. This means that although the selection could satisfy the University's goals and its immediate financial need it could severely damage its reputation and viability in the long run (Table 4-13).

**Table 4-13 Selection process of academics in the University**

"The hiring process now [after restructuring] has become very bureaucratic [and] overdetailed, [which] takes away responsible decision-making from the appointment committee...I hire lecturers and professors. So, for the main competencies...the emphasis has changed [after restructuring]. What has become dominant, is the ability of new members of staff to win grants, [which] I think distorts the role of a teacher and researcher. So, even if people have really good subject [knowledge], [and] they fit on what you want them to do in terms of fitting with the curriculum, [or] supporting the programme and the teaching or complementing your strengths...[So, if we suppose that some candidates were] absolutely fantastic, and have written material which is great, [or even have] published a book, but do not have a grant, the chances of being successful are very slim. That is becoming increasingly the case in the last few years, [which] is a pity, [since] it is distorting the reasons why you need good academic colleagues...it is too much emphasis on the money winning than teaching." (C8, academic)

"What we look for, [at the hiring process] is quite controlled by Human Resources [an academic is selected primarily] because of grant capture, publications, and teaching. Those are the things that [count]." (A14, academic)

The analysis of the interview material further suggests that the selection process for the administrative staff is also based on certain criteria that form two

categories: “required” and “desired”. Although the required criteria (i.e., knowledge of Excel, teamwork) do not necessitate a university education the desired criteria do ask for a university degree. However, the fact that almost all the programme administrators, across the four Schools, have at least one university degree means that the selection process is more oriented towards the desired rather than required criteria.

“I would be looking first for personable manner, people who are direct, people who express themselves clearly. Also, [I would be] looking at the curriculum vitae, at skills, [and]...certainly for administrators, who have previous experience of being programme administrators, [and also] certain qualities that [would] be around working with students, working with international people as well...teamworking.” (A3, programme administrators’ manager)

The analysis suggests that it is not clear whether it is explained to candidates in the hiring process that the promotion for administrative staff is limited, which means that in order to get promoted they need to apply to another job. This information is fundamental for people to know, in order to make an informed decision when accepting the job. Promotion is equally crucial for all staff in the University and is discussed below.

#### **4.4.2 Promotion process of University staff**

Promotion in general, and “promotion from within” in particular, is significant because it gives employees a feeling of equity at work, giving them priority over outsiders and rewards their extraordinary effort in doing an excellent job (Pfeffer, 1994). Prior research in higher education indicates that the majority of academic participants viewed that they had higher demands imposed on them to expand their research activity and to publish. More than half involved in teaching perceived their classes to be increasing in number (Kinman & Jones, 2004). The analysis suggests that the vast majority of academics, across all four Schools, perceive the promotion process as unfair since not all criteria are equally considered despite the fact that the University claims that they are. Furthermore, various persons said that they know colleagues who prioritise grant capture at the expense of teaching in order to gain promotion more easily. Diverse academics search jobs elsewhere and then discuss promotion in the University in order to get promoted more quickly (Table 4-14).

Table 4-14 Promotion process of academics in the University

“I have lost count of colleagues who ten or fifteen years ago would have been promoted deservedly and now they cannot...It is very demoralising, it is impossible if you do not win big grants to do excellently, despite assurances that it is not the case, it is in fact the case. So, it is all about money. It is a very bureaucratic and artificial set of targets. I mean my key complaint is that it does not reflect, it grotesquely distorts, what I actually do, in my day to day work. It does not recognise teaching as being important.” (C8, academic)

“Many of my colleagues...have understood that the way for them to get promotion is to focus on getting the research grant, finishing the book, spending less time with the students...I do not agree with that...The University’s criteria do include learning and teaching...but there is this assumption, that a book, and a huge grant will much sooner get you promotion than looking after students to such detail. An unfortunate assumption.” (C12, academic)

“You get a job from another university, and then you say you are going to leave, and then they give you the promotion. That is the easiest way to get promoted [in the University].” (A8, academic)

The analysis indicates that the administrative staff also perceive their promotion process as unfair for different reasons. Promotion is limited and the majority of them say “it is non-existent” since they need to apply for a different job in order to get promoted. Consequently, they are frustrated since they perceive this application process as unfair and the vacancies to apply for are limited. They also have a fear of success in the new position since usually there is no training for the new tasks. Thus, persons rely on the previous job holder to help, which is not always possible due to time constraints and high workload. Therefore, people apply to other jobs out of the University, increasing the turnover in these critical frontline positions, with consequences for all.

The analysis also indicates that restructuring created inequality issues, even within functions. Promotion of frontline staff who were doing the same job, was not always equal for all with the introduction of the Schools. The grades were not always adjusted accordingly, so frontline staff who have the same tasks do not always have the same grade. This differentiation in grades exists at the time of data collection in School A, encouraging persons to perceive promotion as unfair since some of them are grade five and others grade six (Table 4-15).



Table 4-15 Promotion process for administrative staff in the University

“I do not know about anybody [from administrative staff], who has been promoted. I mean, there are no mechanisms to work you out the ranks. So, what people usually do is applying for different jobs. I did that, the job was advertised, and I applied like any other outsider would [apply].” (C1, programme administrator)

“No. I am not satisfied [with the promotion process], but I do not know if you are going to meet anyone who is...It is a real struggle in [the] University.” (B6, finance assistant)

“We lack administrative support at the frontline, and we are top heavy in special projects, [i.e., accreditation] ... [because of] the promotional procedures within the University. If administrators want to move up the pay scale and the grading structure, they effectively have to move away from frontline student facing activities...So we actually lose a lot of...really good administrators, because there is no way...of promoting them and leaving them to deal with frontline activities. [This] is a real disadvantage, and a matter of short-sightedness in the way the promotion channel works...It has not been as bad in the past [before restructuring]. As the School has expanded, there has been a growth of administration that we are still basically short of, stretched frequently and far in servicing the frontline courses and programmes. [Before restructuring] you had reasonably senior [administrative] grades still fulfilling frontline roles. Now it tends to be the junior positions that deal with students, and the frontline teaching staff.” (A15, academic)

“When the new grades were given out...we all came together and we realised that [some were] grade four, [some]...were grade five, and [some]...were grade six. So those in the subject area with grade four, were put through the promotion and...they had to sit in front of a panel explaining why they think [they could do the job they were already doing]. It was awful...because...if you do not have the confidence to sit in front of a panel...and make your case, you just do not get promoted.” (A4, programme administrator)

The analysis suggests that the vast majority of both academic and administrative staff perceive their promotion to be unfair and they are not optimistic about their career development in the University. The results of the University staff survey, which include all roles in the University, are used as a secondary form of data in this study when relevant issues are examined. Less than half of respondents (39%) in the 2018 University staff survey are optimistic about their future opportunities for career development (University website). Selection and promotion processes reflect the way people perceive their evaluation in the University. The evaluation process is discussed below.

#### 4.4.3 Evaluation process of University staff

Equity and justice are of primary importance when evaluation procedures take place in an organisation. Assessments of the workers in the job ought always to be implemented in such a manner that the humanity of all persons involved is judged (Bowie, 2017). The performance appraisal process is the official evaluation system in the University for all staff. There is an evaluation system, as well, for early career academics who are enrolled in this programme. The

analysis of the interview material suggests that the majority of staff (i.e., academic, administrative) across all four Schools, perceive the performance appraisal to be limited, ineffective and “demoralising” (D2, academic). Academics argue that their objectives are continuously changing, which makes it difficult to examine them only once per year. Furthermore, they particularly dislike the grading system since they feel treated like school children.

All staff are responsible adults, have dignity and could be respected and treated always as ends in themselves, and not monitored or graded as if they were immature and irresponsible. Furthermore, in the performance appraisal process some criteria are considered more than others (i.e., grant capture) which makes the process perceived as unfair by academics. Some academics who are not from the United Kingdom noticed a trend of utilising this type of performance appraisal in other universities, both in the United Kingdom and abroad. This fact surprised them, as they believe that this form of appraisal has significant disadvantages which are usually viewed to be related to the recent restructuring of universities in some countries in Europe (Table 4-16).

**Table 4-16 Evaluation process of all staff in the University**

“The performance appraisal is the major evaluation. It is a horrible process. Because you cannot just write. ‘I have done this year, and I did that, and I was not very good at that but now I am very good at it.’...It is very complicated.” (A4, programme administrator)

“The performance appraisal was brought in after restructuring...it is a shameful [system]...because it is linked to performance, to pay, to promotion and it is based on an unrealistic set of targets...and whoever put the, ‘Here is what you need to do’ form together, does not have a clue about what I do and how many hours I work. It is unfair.” (C8, academic)

“Our job is evaluated through the performance appraisal [which] does not work...One reason, is that the objectives I am going to set now, will have changed tremendously when I next view them...[Also] the objectives I am going to set myself are kind of almost self-set, [since] I know that to succeed in my job, I need to be able to teach...to publish...” (B9, academic)

“Everybody hates it [the performance appraisal]. You have got to fill out a form, say how wonderful you are, meet with your line manager.” (D1, programme administrators’ manager)

“[It] is not easy to pull out members of staff that you do not think are perhaps working in a way that they should, so [the performance appraisal is] a false system...the worst part of it is grading people...So, it [the performance appraisal] should be a supportive discussion but then you slap a grade on it and that is demoralising for people.” (D2, academic)

“There are seven criteria that we go through every year at the performance appraisal...Getting grants is one...but I it counts [as] more than one.” (C10, academic)

“I am a bit sceptical about this [the performance appraisal]. In my home country [another European country], we do not have this regular assessment evaluation every year, [which] tends to put an [additional] pressure on people...The introduction of...the performance appraisal, has to do with all the managerial approach to universities in the United Kingdom [which]...are managed like business companies, and they have trends like translating this business model to academia...this originally has been more of an Anglo-Saxon thing, but some other countries [adopted it] (i.e., Sweden, Finland, Germany) because it promises higher rankings on the league tables, and in order to be competitive they think they have to follow the same practice...as far as I know, [other countries] (i.e., Italy, Spain), are [still] rather hesitant to [adopt it].”(C11, academic)

The analysis suggests that the vast majority of both academic and administrative staff perceive their evaluation to be unfair. The results of the University staff survey, which include all roles in the University, are used as a secondary form of data in this study when relevant issues are examined. The last three staff surveys show a continued decrease of popularity regarding the performance appraisal in the University. Hence, respondents who considered it useful in 2014 represent 56%, in 2016, 52%, and in, 2018, 49%. Only a fifth (21%) of respondents, in the 2018 survey believe that poor performance is managed effectively where they work (University website).

The fifth key theme of the human sustainability analysis is respect/lack of respect and is discussed in the following section.

## **4.5 Respect/Lack of respect**

Considering organisations as moral communities, all people involved are moral beings, have dignity, autonomy, humanity and responsibility. However, not all forms of management in organisations, are relevant to this moral view, and some could not function at all along these lines (i.e., the top-down bureaucratic model of management) (Bowie, 2017). The University, after restructuring, has become a more top-down bureaucratic hierarchical structure, which is less likely to be relevant to this moral view. Prior research in higher education demonstrates that lack of respect and self-esteem is one of the most stressful aspects of work among staff in academic and academic-related jobs (Kinman & Court, 2010). Respondents who had been treated in a disrespectful manner by managers or colleagues were more likely to announce more “physical” and “psychological” manifestations of poor health (Kinman & Jones, 2004). Prior research also shows that academics who perceived that their “hard work was counterbalanced by sufficient esteem, respect and support” were less likely to announce mental health issues (Kinman, 2016, p.512).

The analysis suggests that, usually, disrespect takes place between functions, and primarily between the academic and administrative staff. Various administrators perceive academics and colleagues from other functions to be respectful, but this is not always the case, particularly with academics.

“I would feel that it [my job now in comparison to my job before restructuring] is very different...to the extent that it is hard to even recognise the two jobs...The job, and the student numbers, the staff numbers, the workload, the policies and processes, everything has changed so much, it has become a lot more bureaucratic, all the paperwork and stuff...I would feel with the restructuring, and with the way the School is increasing everything, and the way the University [has changed], you [are not considered] as a person. I do not feel like quite involved in certain things, as you were back then [before restructuring] ...So, I would say it is very different and not always for the better.” (A12, programme administrator assistants’ manager)

The analysis indicates that there are other forms of disrespect. For example, when academics and administrative staff travel for work on behalf of the University. Persons in School B say that when colleagues travel for work to another country, the type of class they will fly depends on their grade and role (i.e., academics travel in business class and the administrative and support staff in economy). This might happen regularly in other Schools in the University as well, or only occasionally. It is not clear from the analysis, whether this is a School, College or University rule. Nevertheless, even if this happens occasionally, inequality is present, which is unfair, showing a lack of respect for the persons with lower grades.

“I think that there is a very clear divide [between academics and support staff]. It does not feel that we are ever equal to academics in a lot of ways, whereas in other places that I have worked that would never be a barrier...This is a big problem the University has, [which] they [the Senior Management Group], do not know how to knock down. For example, we have a lot of staff who fly to country X, in business, if they are academics, [and] support staff, who do not fly in business. What is the difference? They are both [travelling] to do the same job. Why is that hierarchy that constitutes that difference? Whereas in the other place [I was working] there was a very close team, there was nobody that felt different. Maybe pay wise, [yes there were differences], do not get me wrong, but [in general] no.” (B6, finance assistant)

Disrespect towards the staff, is not always dealt with in a fair way, despite the “dignity at work” statements publicly announced at the University’s website. This focuses primarily on sexual harassment and bullying and not on the everyday acts of disrespect that also need to be addressed.

### 4.5.1 Fear and coping mechanisms of University staff

As in most top-down bureaucratic and hierarchical systems, there is limited respect, not always resolved, and the fear of staff is cultivated in many different ways, both visible and invisible (i.e., fear of honest expression, fear of initiative, fear of innovating). “Fear starts or stops at the top. It is true, that a formal hierarchy gives people at the top the power to fire or harm the careers of people at lower levels” (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000, p.256). The analysis of the interview material suggests that the majority of staff, from all roles, in the four Schools, say that they are afraid, and would not feel comfortable to honestly evaluate the actions of a more senior colleague (i.e., Head of School) primarily due to lack of trust concerning damaging their reputation.

“When things do go wrong, it is not really dealt with. We have had academics here shouting at the administrative [staff], which is not really acceptable. But never spoken to, never were told, ‘do not do that again, that is not the way you deal with situations or colleagues.’ I have been honest in the past [when a senior member asked my evaluation], but it has...not really changed anything...[and] in this instance, when I said, ‘no this was not done very well,’ [I was treated] with hostility...Even if there was a questionnaire [from] the University saying, ‘How do things work?’ they [the other programme administrators] would [answer] ‘Well, everything is fabulous’ even if it is anonymous, and I would say to a number of them ‘Why did you do that? It is anonymous, they are not going to sack you’ and now you have made them think that everything is ok, when absolutely it is not ok.” (A4, programme administrator)

When fear is an issue in the University, it is even more challenging for staff to cope well in both normal and hard situations. Fear complicates the way people cope with, since they are afraid to ask assistance, talk about their problems, and manage to resolve them effectively. Hence, the coping mechanisms, according to the majority of persons, across all four Schools, are directed towards trustworthy relationships; thus, relationships with colleagues (i.e., for individually strenuous working conditions), unions (i.e., for issues related to pensions, salaries), as well as with friends and family members (i.e., wife, partner, a good friend). People use relationships in order to cope with challenges in the University. Staff will ask help from people they trust. These reliable relationships form the basis of persons’ most significant coping mechanisms in challenging situations in the University.

“[In] difficult situations...you...try to talk to people, whether they are colleagues or line managers or persons within the School that can help you solve [the problem] ...Family is [also] important here. If I would not have my partner, I would not have a second opinion.” (A11, academic)

The analysis indicates that the role of unions needs to be revisited nowadays. This could take place based on the current needs of employees who, despite their dissatisfaction in resolving daily issues, maintain their membership in order to have the protection “just in case something [goes] catastrophically wrong” (A4, programme administrator).

## 4.6 Summary of human sustainability

This chapter has examined human sustainability in the University across the different roles and functions. I define human sustainability based on Kant’s “Formula of Humanity as an End” and the “Formula of the Realm of Ends” (Kant, [1785] 1990) as follows: “Human sustainability is when organisations respect human beings as free, rational and responsible, include them in policy formulation and decision-making and encourage them to build mutual respect with all persons within and beyond their organisations.” This definition is the basis for designing for human sustainability in this study. The five key themes related to the theoretical concept of human sustainability are examined. The analysis of the data collected from the interviews, across the four Schools, focused on all persons involved in the research (i.e., administrative, academic, support staff), since they are all human beings with dignity who should always be treated as ends in themselves (Kant, [1785] 1990; Bowie 1999; Bowie, 2017). The findings of the analysis are briefly discussed below.

Information/lack of information indicates that there is limited information sharing between the University (i.e., Senior Management Group) and its staff members (i.e., academics, programme administrators) regarding main issues in the University (i.e., investment plans, aims and objectives). Participation/lack of participation suggests that the participation of staff (i.e., academic, administrative) in the decision-making process of organisational policies, is limited. The increase in administration changed the priorities in expenditures in the University by prioritising the needs of the Senior Management Group. Meaningful/meaningless work indicates that meaningful work is limited in the

University due to the following: autonomy and job control are more related to practical rather than strategic issues; workload is high and human development is limited; specialisation of tasks and job insecurity are increased for administrative staff; and salaries and their relative increases, for all staff, are average to low in relation to similar salaries in other universities in the United Kingdom. The majority of academic staff perceive the selection, promotion and evaluation processes to have limited fairness (i.e., prioritisation of certain criteria over others). The majority of administrative staff consider their selection focuses on the desired rather than the required criteria, their promotion challenging as a result of having to apply for another job before being considered for promotion, and their evaluation complicated and demoralising. Respect is not always present in the University and not always resolved accordingly which often encourages fear.

Restructuring is either directly or indirectly related to these findings which indicates that there is a limited consideration for design for human sustainability in the University. Findings are consistent with prior research in higher education, as explained in the analysis. Numerous academics in the United Kingdom “feel constrained by the relentless surveillance, monitoring and target setting by management” (Taberner, 2018, p.146) They are progressively losing their voice and control over their work and this creates unwanted “occupational stress and anxiety” which can have serious effects on health. Academics also worry about the decreasing quality in universities due to the prioritisation of quantity (i.e., higher student numbers, higher income). At the same time, managers are not interested in covering the departments with more staff, since they seem to focus on “economic efficiencies rather than simultaneously focusing on effectiveness in the daily realities of academic work” (Taberner, 2018, p.146).

As the analysis indicates, restructuring influences all staff, not only academics. Prior research in higher education, involving academic and academic-related staff, suggests that the most common reasons people want to leave higher education are the following: job insecurity, stress, work overload, excessive bureaucracy, few prospects for promotion and advancement in the sector and poor work-life balance (Kinman & Jones, 2004). Half of respondents in this research suffered “psychological distress” at a level that goes beyond the proportion announced in studies of the majority of other occupational groups.

Other less intense “psychosomatic” manifestations existed as well among staff (i.e., tiredness, headaches); approximately 8% of participants said they did not experience any of them during the last month before the study (Kinman & Jones, 2004). Further research demonstrates that, for both academic and non-academic staff, facets of work and work-life balance are associated to psychological and physical ill-health. Workload and job security are also associated to psychological ill-health (Johnson et al., 2019).

My analysis of the data collected suggests that people are frustrated with this way the University is managing its staff, and they want to change it. As one academic (A15) said “We need to change it. It does not need to be as bureaucratic and detached.” Beauchamp & Bowie (2004, p.257) claim that people principally want to be treated as “persons who are genuine partners.” They want decent salaries, job security, recognition from supervisors and being able to participate in decision-making. As Kant writes “every man has a legitimate claim to respect from his fellow men and is in turn bound to respect every other” (Arnold & Bowie, 2003, p.224). A person’s desire and right to be treated with dignity at work, to be able to grow and learn, to be connected to others, and to be a whole, integrated person cannot simply be sacrificed for economic expediency. We have a commitment, a “duty” to establish organizations that develop “people’s spirit” (Pfeffer, 2010b).

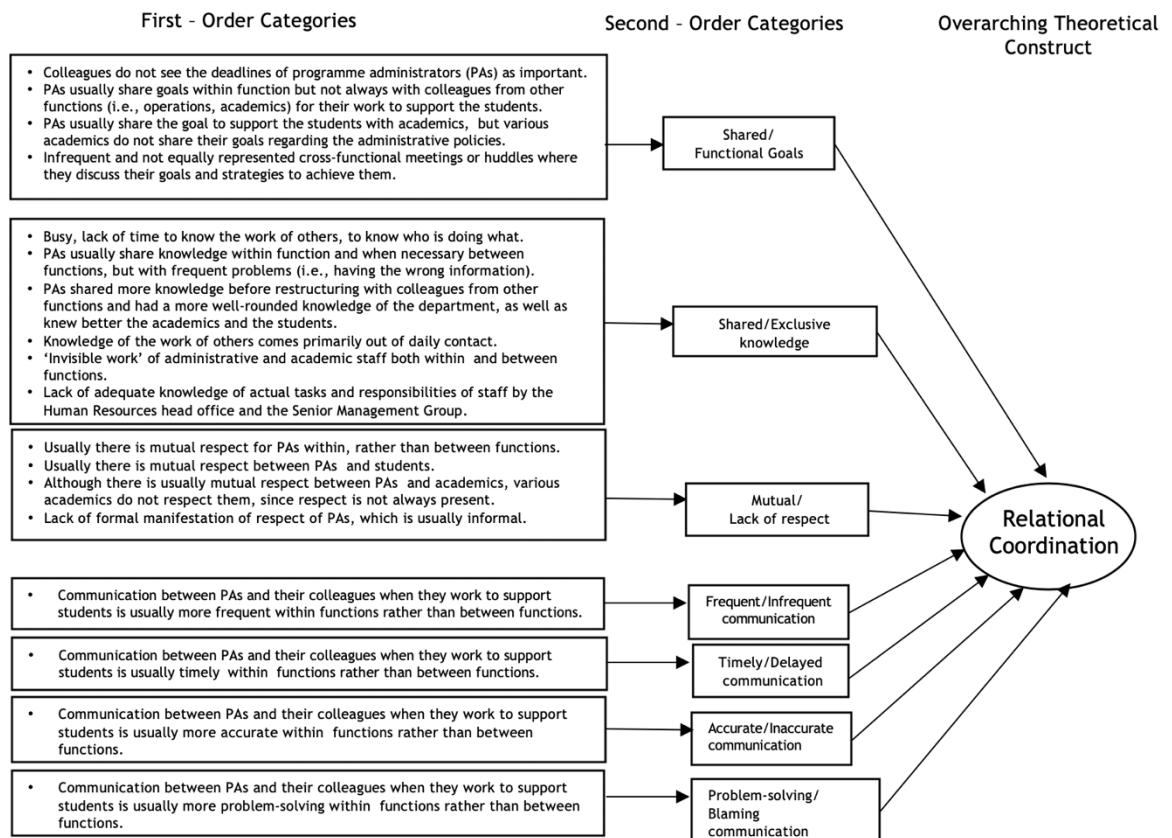
In conclusion, based on the above stated analysis, the level of human sustainability in the University is low. Moreover, it is interesting to observe in the findings that the most important coping mechanisms of staff with the challenges in the University are relationships with people in and out of the workplace. People, as relational and social beings, highly value relationships and, in the case of challenges, as shown in this study, they also serve as coping mechanisms. Relationships between roles and their coordination in organisations are discussed in the next chapter.



## Chapter 5 Relational Coordination

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relational coordination (RC) between the programme administrators and their colleagues when they undertake their work to support students in the University. The chapter is structured along the key themes related to the theoretical concept of relational coordination and includes the following: Shared/functional goals; shared/exclusive knowledge; mutual/lack of respect; frequent/infrequent communication; timely/delayed communication; accurate/inaccurate communication; problem-solving/blaming communication (Figure 5-1). This analysis is of the data collected from the interviews, across the four Schools and focuses on programme administrators. More specifically, it considers the relationships with their colleagues within and between functions when they work to support the students. The programme administrators are the focal group in this analysis and their work to support the students is the focal work process. Each dimension of relational coordination is assessed from the point of view of the recipient and as they perceive it to be necessary (Gittell, 2016).

**Figure 5-1 Data structure - Overarching Theoretical Construct - Relational Coordination**



Relational coordination (RC), the core construct of relational coordination theory (RCT), is defined as “a mutually reinforcing process of communicating and relating for the purpose of task integration” (Gittell 2002a, p.301). This definition of relational coordination is used in this study. Relational coordination can be viewed as a mutually reinforcing process of interaction, between relationships and communication that is frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving. It is necessary for the purpose of “task integration” (Gittell, 2012). Relational coordination theory focuses on relationships between roles and not individuals (Gittell, 2016). It provides important insight into human sustainability, since it not only focuses on relationships but, also, on the coordination and the quality of these relationships, all of which is deemed fundamental to the success of an organisation.

Relational coordination theory states that relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect promote frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication, and vice versa, enabling stakeholders to successfully coordinate their work. Conversely, when negative, these same relationships serve as barriers (Gittell, 2006). Relational coordination theory creates a validated measurement to assess the state of relational coordination in organisations, called the “RC survey” which comprises seven questions, one for each of its dimensions, and is used for all workgroups involved in the work process (Gittell, 2016).

A high level of relational coordination leads to successful collaboration between and among the various stakeholders in the University (i.e., administrative and academic staff). Successful collaboration is based on relationships that are well coordinated, based on high-quality communication (frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving), shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect. The affluence and sustainability of an organisation depends on the quality of coordination among its participants. Effective coordination depends upon persons having a high level of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect, as well as frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving communication (Gittell, 2003).

Relational coordination is a multilevel concept (Gittell et al., 2008). It is an unbounded construct, that can be utilised within and above the range of well-

defined groups and functions, at multiple levels of an organisation, in this case the University (i.e., individual, group, department, School, College) and across inter-organisational boundaries (Gittell et al., 2015). Relational coordination between the programme administrators and their colleagues (i.e., academics) is analysed based on the level of shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and high quality (frequent, timely, accurate, and problem-solving) communication.

“[We are] dealing primarily with the academics [who are] running the courses, the programme’s convenor, the other administrators, the programme [administrators’] assistants, and any other administrators.” (A1, programme administrator)

Relational coordination between the programme administrators and their colleagues is analysed based on its key themes which represent the two extreme ends since it operates on a continuum from very low to very high. Therefore, the level of relational coordination in the University, as in most organisations, would fall somewhere between those two extremes. The analysis of relational coordination begins with the key theme of shared/functional goals, which is discussed in the following section.

## 5.1 Shared/Functional goals

Shared goals signify “the degree to which participants perceive that other workgroups share their goals for the focal work process” (Gittell, 2016, p.236). Shared goals are fundamental for achieving high levels of relational coordination in the organisation, because they drive people to go further than “sub-goal optimization” and to proceed with the overall work process (Gittell, 2003). Shared goals expand a person’s motivation to participate in high quality communication and increase the possibility that they will engage in problem-solving communication rather than apportion blame when there is a problem, or when things do not go as expected (Gittell, 2012). Although programme administrators are the focal group in this study, the analysis also refers to the other roles and their relationships with the programme administrators, in order to identify the levels of relational coordination between them.

### 5.1.1 Shared/functional goals between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function

The interview material suggests that there is a high level of shared goals between the programme administrators and their colleagues within functions, (i.e., with the other programme administrators). The vast majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, share the same goals with their colleagues in their function (i.e., other programme administrators). This is because their tasks and responsibilities are directly interrelated, and their common goal is to excel in their work to support the students. Frontline employees are the first point of reference for students (i.e., various inquiries, pastoral care) (Table 5-1).

**Table 5-1 Higher level of shared goals between the programme administrators and colleagues in their function in the University**

“We are all very student focused. For example, we have students who are maybe suffering [i.e., mental, personal, housing, childcare issues] during dissertation, and [help] them [to] graduate...Probably workload, is the most common problem students encounter, and a lot of them get quite stressed with it.” (A5, programme administrator)  
 “My job is just to help them [the programme administrators] achieve their goal.” (A9, programme administrators’ assistant)  
 “We [programme administrators] would always be helpful and supportive to the students...we all share the same goals.” (C2, programme administrator)  
 “All the programme administrators have got a very clear vision of what we are trying to do, which is be accurate, [give] a good service, and [help the students to have a] good student experience.” (A3, programme administrators’ manager)  
 “Certainly, in our office we try to have a meeting every two weeks, to share [all the] priorities that are coming up. [So], our goals are shared [all the time].” (B4, administrative assistant)  
 “I think it [the sharing of goals] very much depends on your immediate workspace. In my immediate workspace [we] work together very well...we do communicate a lot...and talk through issues.” (D5, administrators’ manager)

The highly bureaucratic nature of the University system, facilitates the high level of shared goals between the programme administrators and their colleagues within functions, emphasising “sub-goal optimization” (Gittell, 2003). This encourages relational coordination in functions, but it discourages relational coordination between functions. The level of shared goals between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is discussed in the following section.

### 5.1.2 Shared/functional goals between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions

The interview material suggests that various programme administrators, across all four Schools, share the same goals with their colleagues in other functions (i.e., operations). They collaborate well to support students, understanding the importance of the others' goals, tasks and responsibilities (i.e., respecting deadlines, providing feedback on time) (Table 5-2).

**Table 5-2 Higher levels of shared goals between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

"Yes, I do [share the same goals with the programme administrators]. Absolutely. [We] want to keep the students happy, [and] engaged and we work together to achieve that. [So], I try to keep deadlines when the information needs to be with the programme administrators." **(B8, academic)**

"The administrative team and academic staff are all aiming for the same thing. We might not always get there in quite the same way, but we are definitely [getting there]. [For example], making sure that the students get feedback." **(C7, academic)**

"Yes, [I share goals with colleagues], and I find it very helpful that we have regular meetings with the students and the student representatives in all subjects, [where they] give feedback in new courses that they are going to be implemented and that they can talk to everyone involved, formally or informally. I think [each one] of us is engaged in caring for the students, and in creating an environment that is supportive for them." **(C11, academic)**

"Yes, we do [share goals]. A sort of mission statement, [that] we all agree to...The students are our main focus, ensuring that they have a good experience. But also making sure that the students do not abuse the administrative staff as well, because [they] can be very demanding...For example, handing work late. I am not talking about major things, but small things. Certainly [we] do not want to encourage the administrators to be unhelpful to students, but [we] also do not want the students to take advantage of the administrators. So, I think [it] is getting that balance." **(D2, academic)**

"We certainly have a missions' statement...and I know how hard the administrative staff worked [during the year], so they are very student centric, and very goal oriented." **(D7, academic)**

Additionally, the analysis indicates that the level of shared goals between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is not always as high as it is within functions. Ties that are closer within functions which encourage the sharing of goals are not that close between functions. Rather, it is a condition not facilitated by the University's highly administrative and bureaucratic structure. Hence, "silos thinking" is reinforced between functions which limits shared and enhances functional goals (Gittell, 2000; Gittell, et al., 2010; Gittell & Douglas, 2012). The cross-functional meetings, which could improve the sharing of goals, are infrequent, not equally represented (i.e., not



all roles present) and have a low attendance (i.e., time constraints, high workload, limited voice which discourages people from attending).

The analysis of the interviews also suggests additional obstacles to the sharing of goals between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions due to time constraints, and the bureaucratic procedures imposed on all staff in the University. The majority of academics need to prioritise research for promotion and evaluation purposes, and do not have the time to properly respond to all the necessary administrative procedures the programme administrators ask them to follow. Various academic and non-academic staff (i.e., operations), simply do not agree with the programme administrators' goals, either because they do not understand them, since they do not have time to talk about them, or because they consider them unnecessary. Some academics also disagree with the University's emphasis on quantity, rather than quality, in admissions resulting in a large number of students who do not have good knowledge of the English language. Although, programme administrators are not responsible for admissions, they still indirectly receive the frustration academics have with administration, who are even less eager to share goals with them, despite the fact that it is not their fault (Table 5-3).

**Table 5-3 Lower level of shared goals between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

"I cannot speak for them all [the academics]...but the ones that I deal with, are not interested in the students, in teaching, in the marking, they are all about [their] research, and conferences and putting themselves out in a research context. This is [a] huge [issue] in this University, because there is so much pressure put on academics to produce good research, [so] sometimes the teaching suffers." (A4, programme administrator)

"No [I do not share their goals]. They [the programme administrators] have too many administrative goals that they should not do. There are too many procedures, that are not necessary. For example, all these forms and all these procedures that we have to fill out, if we do not fill them out nothing happens. [We] do not need them, [since] nobody looks at them, nobody does anything with them." (A8, academic)

"I do not think they [academics] realise how many people we have to deal with." (C3, programme administrator)

"[Regarding] formal goals to provide a good experience for the students, we are on the same page. We might have issues where we see the goals of effective frontline education, effective engagement in the classroom, effective assessment, [which] has been undermined by the admissions policies of the School and the University. Numbers have been prioritised over qualifications, i.e., English language skills. So, we regularly have problems, [especially with] post-graduate students [who are] not able to engage [in the courses]." (A15, academic)

The analysis further indicates that the “unrealistic goals” (C8, academic) imposed on all staff by the Senior Management Group after restructuring in 2010 often create additional obstacles in the sharing of goals between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions. They cannot easily identify with these goals, since they did not co-decide them with the Senior Management Group; consequently, they perceive them as not always being representative of their everyday working lives. Although they try hard to achieve these goals, primarily for personal pride as various persons say, they cannot easily share them with colleagues.

The low level of shared goals, between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions, implies a lower level of shared values and a lower degree of belonging in the University. The analysis of the data collected from the interviews in this section focuses on programme administrators. However, the University staff survey includes all staff from all roles (i.e., administrative, academic). The results of the staff survey, used as secondary data in the study, are relevant to the relational coordination analysis in more general terms as an indicator of how staff perceive these matters in the University. Much less than half (39%) of respondents in the staff survey in 2018 believe that all staff with whom they come into contact uphold the University’s values, contrary to the 2016 survey, where more than half (61%) of respondents believed so. Furthermore, slightly more than half (55%) of respondents in the survey in 2018, feel a strong sense of belonging to the University (University Website). There is a sharp decline in the sharing of values between the two surveys, which could imply a decline in the sharing of goals between functions.

The second key theme of relational coordination is shared/exclusive knowledge and is discussed in the following section.

## **5.2 Shared/Exclusive knowledge**

Shared knowledge signifies “the degree to which participants perceive that their work in the focal work process is understood by other workgroups” (Gittell, 2016, p.235). Shared knowledge tells people how their own job, tasks and responsibilities, and the job, tasks and responsibilities of others, contribute to the overall work process, permitting them to act properly regarding this process

(Gittell, 2003). It allows persons to communicate with each other with greater precision because not only are they familiar with their own tasks and responsibilities, they also know how their tasks are connected to the tasks of individuals in other roles and functions (Gittell, 2012). Shared knowledge takes place to different degrees in the University, within and between functions, between the programme administrators and their colleagues. Shared knowledge within functions is discussed in the following section.

### 5.2.1 Shared/exclusive knowledge between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function

The analysis of the interview material suggests that there is a high level of shared knowledge between the programme administrators and their colleagues within functions, (i.e., with other programme administrators). Programme administrators, across all four Schools, have a very good knowledge of what their immediate colleagues are doing, so they appreciate their work, respect it, understand its deadlines, difficulties, and problems, and discuss work issues on a daily basis (D3, programme administrator) (Table 5-4).

**Table 5-4 Higher level of shared knowledge between the programme administrators and colleagues in their function in the University**

“We all have quite a clear idea of what the other programme administrators and assistants [are doing]. [For example], myself and X [programme administrator]...are doing the same thing.” (A5, programme administrator)

“I think, the other postgraduate administrators know what goes on.” (C1, programme administrator)

“Within my team, for example, we have regular meetings and sit down and have a shared spreadsheet we are working on tracking what has been done, and where we [are] at with everything...Whatever we know about the work of others is based on our everyday experience.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)

“I get together with the [other] programme administrators, and we discuss [about] certain students and what issues they have, so we can work together and figure out what to do to help them.” (A4, programme administrator)

“We are all pretty aware of what each other is doing.” (C5, programme administrator)

However, the analysis indicates that the level of shared knowledge, even within functions is not always high. For example, administrative staff of different roles and grades do not always understand the work of others and the time needed for tasks to be completed (i.e., programme administrators and their line managers).



This is primarily due to different tasks and the limited time available to better understand the work of others. For example, the programme administrators' line managers sometimes do not understand and, as such, do not appreciate the work of the programme administrators and the time needed to complete specific tasks. The primary reason for this is that line managers do not know the details of programme administrators' job and they do not ask them due to time constraints and their own high workload (i.e., uploading can take more time due to interruptions, technology problems, change of priorities). Also, the programme administrators typically do not know a lot about the tasks of their line managers. This lower level of shared knowledge creates "invisible work" that is neither seen nor appreciated by colleagues within functions. This can sometimes act to further complicate the everyday working life of programme administrators (Table 5-5).

**Table 5-5 Lower level of shared knowledge between programme administrators and colleagues in their function in the University**

"Within the team [administration office], there is a difference between undergraduate and postgraduate [programme administrators]. We have different time scales, different time length, so there is maybe [sharing of knowledge] on a superficial level, but maybe not a full understanding [of the work]." (C2, programme administrator)

"They [line managers] can be a bit harsh, [because they] do not understand why things are complicated...Sometimes I struggle with new procedures, and there are a lot [of comments from my line manager like that], 'Why don't you know that yet?' I have only done this once, and we do it twice a year, [which means that] it is hard to [remember], especially [because they] change it every time, and I am learning it from a piece of paper. So, there is frustration, and sometimes a lack of understanding." (A4, programme administrator)

"We are less aware of what more senior colleagues are doing, including our line manager, we don't really have a lot of knowledge about what they are doing. Mostly we just learn [what the others are doing] because we work with them. (C5, programme administrator)

"I know part of what my line manager does, but, not everything." (A1, programme administrator)

Consequently, if the level of shared knowledge between the programme administrators and their colleagues within functions increases then invisible work will become visible. Moreover, working life will improve as well as the level of relational coordination. The level of shared knowledge between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is not as high as it is in their functions; this is discussed in the following section.

### 5.2.2 Shared/exclusive knowledge between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions

The analysis of the interview material suggests that the level of shared knowledge between programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is not always high. There is a differentiation between the level of shared knowledge before and after restructuring. The level before restructuring was higher. The majority of employees from different workgroups in all four Schools, who worked before restructuring, perceive that a higher level of shared knowledge existed which allowed them to have a better knowledge of what everyone else was doing. Proximity with other roles and broader tasks and responsibilities, among other issues, permitted them to share a greater amount of knowledge on a daily basis (i.e., they knew a lot more about the work of academics beyond teaching) (D3, programme administrator). After restructuring, when the programme administrators moved to a centralised hub for each School, their knowledge increasingly became more exclusive. They were dealing with less issues (i.e. support students) than previously (i.e., taking care of the department, of the building). Their work in the hubs also involved more “tick box” replies, as mentioned, which obliged them to think more in boxes rather than in broader terms.

“The only side they [the programme administrators] see about our work is the teaching side and the administration associated with that. The administrators who have been here longer, before restructuring, understand better than others the totality of our workloads, the research side of things, the grant applications, and the post graduate supervision. I am not sure that we all understand what they do, quite as well as we might. I think there is a sense, particularly with staff who were here before restructuring, [that we] would understand what our administrator did in here to support the students. We could see on a daily basis what [they were] doing, and [how] well they knew our students and their problems. Because, now we are not in the same building, I do not think we always know everything that they are doing for [the] students. We can see that, when we are copied into emails, and from the conversations [that] we hear [about] what they are doing, but, sometimes, in terms of the actual role we do not always fully appreciate the extent to which they are supporting students.”  
(C7, academic)

Structures matter, and in the case of a highly bureaucratic structure which exists in the University, people are more likely to have an exclusive and specialised knowledge rather than a shared one, which is often inadequate,

limited and unsustainable. For example, Human Resources do not always search for all necessary knowledge to undertake their tasks (i.e., understand what the staff is doing in their everyday lives) since they are isolated in their own silos. Nor do they encourage participative decision-making with staff, other than with the Senior Management Team. Consequently, they encounter problems by issuing ineffective policies and procedures (i.e., hiring and evaluation forms that are too complicated, administrative procedures that are very bureaucratic involving the programme administrators and others regarding the contracts, job descriptions that do not reflect what staff are doing). Various participants in all four Schools are frustrated by such issues. Moreover, they wonder “who is doing what” in the University, since staff do not have a clear idea of their colleagues’ tasks, even in broad terms (Table 5-6).

**Table 5-6 Lower level of shared knowledge between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

“Probably on a superficial level maybe [academics know about the work of programme administrators]. I do not think that all the professors know the pressures that we are under. For example, I am responsible for three different areas, and they [do not] always understand that I am not just dealing only with one subject matter, but I am dealing with three.” (C2, programme administrator)

“They [colleagues] know that I have the largest group of students in the School...They probably do not know how much it is actually involved in my role.” (C3, programme administrator)

“I do not think that there is a lot of clarity about what each office does...so I do not think people [understand well] what we do.” (B4, administrative assistant)

“I have found that there is no clear guidance on who does what, so...I get an application, [and I find out] that [the] application is not for me.” (D4, programme administrator)

“There is a process going on at the moment [which] heavily involves Human Resources [and has] to do with contracts for graduate teaching associates, and for research assistants...[But] the problem is that [Human Resources] are not working with humans, [but] with a procedure. They have put a procedure in place and say, ‘You should do this, and you have to do this,’ without actually see if it works in practice...It is a bit of an issue University wide. [Also] people need to be more aware of other people’s roles [in other departments] in order just to help things move a little bit more smoothly.” (A7, finance assistant)

“I am not sure [about the programme administrators]. I think they have some pastoral role for students, and I know that I can rely for certain issues like, if a student is sick and so on...They might have a general idea about the teaching stuff, but research and academic stuff is quite homogeneous and quite vague.” (A11, academic)

There is a low degree of shared knowledge between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions in the University. The analysis suggests that there are no informative meetings or sessions that would help people share their knowledge and understand the roles of others in the University, although some exceptions exist. For example, the Head of

Administration in School B, organised meetings to facilitate the sharing of knowledge of staff's roles between functions. Although the programme administrators perceive that to be a great initiative it was not based on equity, since not all workgroups were equally asked to explain their roles (i.e., only academics were asked to do so). The programme administrators viewed that incident as disrespect for their job, since it implied that their role is so simple it does not need explanation.

This difference in treatment illustrates disrespect for the work of some staff not recognising that all work is important, all roles should be equally respected and that people should always be treated as ends in themselves. The work of programme administrators can be very challenging, it is extremely important and should be respected. Not only because they deal with the students, who are significant stakeholders of the University, not only because it is essential for the good functioning of the University, but primarily because of respect for their dignity and humanity as persons (Kant, [1785] 1990); Bowie, 1999; Bowie, 2017). The analysis suggests that this initiative in School B, did not last long since the Head of Administration of the School decided to stop it. Staff from Schools A, C, and D did not mention that any similar informative sessions took place in their Schools and insisted that the level of shared knowledge between functions is low. Furthermore, orientation of programme administrators does not always take place, which complicates the lives of newcomers.

“I know about their [colleagues in other silos] work to a degree, and they know about my work to a degree. I was never really formally announced to the school [so]...this was never made clear to everybody. The people in one subject area, knew [about me starting], but the other people did not.” (D4, programme administrator)

The analysis indicates that there is a higher level of invisible work between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions. Like in the case of invisible work within functions, invisible work between functions is hidden and reinforced by the highly bureaucratic structures. Many people perceive the existence of invisible work as disrespectful and claim that it should not exist because it creates high levels of frustration and anxiety (i.e., people do not get adequate pay and recognition for their work) (Table 5-7).

**Table 5-7 “Invisible” work between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

“I think a lot of my work is probably unseen. There is a common phrase, [in the University], ‘What did they even do?’ and I [also] wonder what everybody else is doing [in this School]. People are doing what is in front of them, and they do not appreciate what other people are doing [because they do not know their work].” (B5, programme administrator)

“The [administrative] staff are really excellent...and [we] do not even know half of what they do. But [we] know that for the smooth running of a department [we need good people]. Because if [we] have someone who is not good, not efficient, or they take too long [to do a job], or [the job they are doing] is not accurate, [we] are ending up in just doing it ourselves, because it is easier.” (D2, academic)

Sometimes such critical dynamics on the frontline, and in other areas, remain invisible to line managers, other colleagues, and further up the hierarchy (i.e., Senior Management Group). It could be helpful for line managers and the Senior Management Group to be aware of how significant the invisible activities are, in order to better support the programme administrators.

The third key theme of relational coordination is mutual/lack of mutual respect and is discussed in the following section.

### **5.3 Mutual/Lack of Respect**

Mutual respect signifies “the degree to which participants perceive their work in the focal work process is respected by other workgroups” (Gittell, 2016, p.238). Mutual respect between the programme administrators and their colleagues inspires and motivates them to appreciate the worth of the contributions of others and to reflect on the effect of their acts on others, additionally strengthening the tendency to act regarding the overall work process (Gittell, 2003). Mutual respect is respect toward their roles in the University, which goes beyond individual relationships, as is the case in all dimensions of relational coordination. All roles are important and should be equally respected.

“If I take more than a couple of days to get back to someone, I will always say, ‘Sorry for the delay.’ And also, say hello to people in the corridor. It is important, because, no matter what your role is, it is always nice to show people recognition, even if you do not know them that well.” (B4, administrative assistant)



Mutual respect between the programme administrators and their immediate colleagues is discussed in the following section.

### 5.3.1 Mutual/lack of respect between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function

The analysis of the interview material suggests a high level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and their colleagues within functions, (i.e., with the other programme administrators). The majority of frontline staff, across all four Schools, perceive mutual respect between themselves and their immediate colleagues. This is primarily due to the higher level of shared goals and knowledge people have within functions. Mutual respect is often shown through supporting colleagues (i.e., annual leave), and effectively communicating (i.e., timely reply to their emails) (Table 5-8).

**Table 5-8 Higher level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and colleagues in their function in the University**

“I have sent a person [in my team] an email to thank them for their work, and they were very touched by that. We should respect each other, and, that comes with building up the working relationships.” (A12, programme administrators assistants’ manager)

“When the other people [the other programme administrators] are busy, I will always help...We...always check on each other [for help], and this is a sign of respect.” (C2, programme administrator)

“Certainly [there is respect with] the programme administrators, because we all do the same thing, and we all know how much effort goes into [our] jobs, [which] compared to the [ones] we were doing even five years ago, [they] have grown arms and legs, and are huge now. I feel that I [also] get respect from my peers, from the other programme administrators.” (A4, programme administrator)

“The convenor for the higher degrees’ committee has been very complementary to me, so I know the work that I do for them is respected, and supervisors are pleased. I have been told that since my arrival, proper numbers are provided, whereas before they only received approximate numbers...I have made a little bit of a difference.” (D4, programme administrator)

“They [line managers] know when we are coming up to busy times, and they say, ‘Thank you very much, we know you are working really hard.’” (C5, programme administrator)

“[I am treated within my team] with respect and politeness.” (A6-programme administrators’ assistant)

“People in my team treat me well. I feel respected.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)

“My office is a very friendly place. We all know about each other’s personal lives.” (D5, administrators’ manager)

The analysis suggests that the programme administrators, across all four Schools, engage in pastoral care for students. This enhances the level of mutual respect with their colleagues. Some Schools are more organised for pastoral care than

others (i.e., School A provides individual rooms for pastoral care whereas Schools B, C, and D do not). Staff do not perceive any difference of respect (i.e., all programme administrators are equally respected for doing pastoral care). Various employees mention that pastoral care is not part of their job description, but they usually do it because they respect students and want to help them in as many different ways as they can. Pastoral care increases the level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and their immediate colleagues (Table 5-9).

**Table 5-9 Higher level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and colleagues in their function in the University due to pastoral care**

“Yes, there is respect...A part of the job the administrators do is that, they do student advising, mostly with face-to-face meetings, [and also] by emails. The programme administrators [are] sitting in an office with a student who [could be] very distressed about something (i.e., students who may even have been suicidal). [So], I have a lot of respect for my administrators and the way they deal with this, knowing when to appropriately pass them on to other counselling services or other services within the University...Also, at the beginning of the year, the administrators are going to induction meetings [with the students], and they [explain] that they are responsible [for them], and, if they have a problem, [they could] tell them about it.” (A3, programme administrators’ manager)

“Students have their adviser of studies, but a lot of the time, they come to the office for support and so, we do provide a lot of pastoral care. They can be in tears. They are maybe having a bad day, or they are not getting on well with their course, and they need some extra support. If a student, needs counselling, we [will] refer them to counselling. If it is very serious, we would get the crisis team involved, or if it is more academic help that they need, we could point them in the direction of either their adviser, a course coordinator, or the University support (i.e. maths).” (B1, programme administrator)

“There is an academic adviser of studies, who [has] a pastoral role [for students]. [But], we could [be] a bit more involved with the students and their issues [pastoral care], [also] with the subject areas. I think [that], would result to a better student experience.” (C1, programme administrator)

“It is difficult because [many students] are also coming from foreign countries [and a lot of them need pastoral care]. And if they want to speak to you in private, there is no space. Sometimes I would take them in the kitchen area to speak.” (C3, programme administrator)

“Not officially [doing pastoral care], but some of the students come to me upset and, I will listen to them, offer them advice, and point them in the right direction. I will probably direct them to the convenor.” (D4, programme administrator)

“I had a student, [who] really struggled with [their] coursework, and when [they were] anxious, [they] would not [go to take] exams. [So,] I asked them to speak to me about it, [and] I understood that [they] needed [help so I tried] to [reinforce their] confidence. Finally, [they] passed the course. And [they were] very grateful. [So], I think that [my pastoral care helped] them. [What I did] was over and above, because, I have 900 students pass my desk in a year. [The student] said ‘thank you,’ and then [they emailed me saying], ‘I have managed to do it this time.’” (A4, programme administrator)



The analysis indicates that although, generally, there is a higher level of mutual respect within functions, there are occasions when this is not the case, primarily due to invisible work. Invisible work is a recurring issue which people perceive at

various degrees. The majority of programme administrators view invisible work to take place primarily between themselves and a colleague with a different grade, either lower, or higher for different reasons. They mentioned various circumstances where their work was invisible, despite their high effort. This situation created considerable frustration to them. For example, their line managers sometimes respect their work less due to lower shared knowledge, as mentioned above, but they themselves might also respect less the work of their assistants for the same reason.

“I have spent a long time printing out personalised packs for all the attendees, for the exam board meeting, and I had to come in very early one day, [in order to] finish. Nobody used them [during the meeting so], I had to collect and put them in the recycling. Afterwards, when I [asked] one of the programme administrators, ‘Why nobody used these papers that I have spent hours printing?’ [they] said ‘Yes, it is like that every year.’ And I [thought], ‘Why did you ask me to do that then?’ So, I felt like they do not necessarily respect [me, my job, and] the time that it takes, or, [even] the fact that I am [trying hard], and I want my work to be valued.” (A9, programme administrators’ assistant)

The level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is not as high as it is in their function; this is discussed in the following section.

### **5.3.2 Mutual/lack of respect between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions**

The analysis of the data collected from the interviews indicates that the level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is medium, (i.e., with operations), and medium to low (i.e., with academics, Human Resources). Various programme administrators, across all four Schools, say that their colleagues in other functions treat them generally well, in a polite and respectful manner, and they do the same, which builds mutual respect. Common ways of showing respect to colleagues include thanking people, (i.e., in person or in writing), greeting them in corridors and apologising for delays (i.e., delayed reply to an email). Some programme administrators view various academics to be more understanding than others, especially when things go wrong, since they comprehend the diverse issues the Schools face (i.e., understaffed departments, less space than needed, problems with timetabling)



and justify their occasional ineffective work, which differs from the support they used to provide in the past (D3, programme administrator) (Table 5-10).

**Table 5-10 Higher level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

“Most of the staff, students, and colleagues that you work with, are appreciative of what we do and the support we offer, and they are professional [and respectful].” (B1, programme administrator)

“I usually thank them [the programme administrators].” (C10, academic)

“There is mutual respect...I hope we fully appreciate the work of the administrative staff who are supporting our students. I certainly try as often as possible, [to] say ‘thank you’ in every email.” (C7, academic)

“The majority of academics [are] very good, they are polite, they are respectful...[they] are lovely, and they know much of the work we are doing, because they have taken the time to figure that out.” (A4, programme administrator)

“They [programme administrators] are very good...it makes such a difference to how you do your job, if you have good administrative [people], everything else is easy.” (D2, academic)

“The work [of the programme administrators] is important. Without them we would not run. They fix a tremendous amount of issues, that if we were to do, it would take our lives. So, we are very grateful for this. The best way that we can sort of repay or show our respect for this, is whenever they ask for something, we do it, no questions asked, even if we think maybe it should not be [our] job to do it.” (B9, academic)

“I have actually had academics saying really well done, at the exam board. [For example], thanking me in front of everyone, because I was just brand new to the job and I had put a lot of extra hours to bring everything together. So, there is the recognition for what you do and...it is nice if [it] happens, because you think, Yes, I am actually doing something right.” (A5, programme administrator)

“I respect their [the programme administrators’] work. I work with them, I treat them as equals, I discuss with them, [and], I ask advice when I need something.” (A8, academic)

“I am ready to say to some good academic colleagues, ‘Thank you very much for your help over the past few weeks’ busy time’.” (C5, programme administrator)

“It is a matter of how we communicate and say to the administrators or to other colleagues that you appreciate their work saying, ‘Thank you.’ That is part of what I call respect, showing that you appreciate their contribution, [the fact] that you can rely on them.” (C11, academic)

The analysis of the interview material suggests that the level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is often lower, especially with certain workgroups (i.e., the Senior Management Group, Human Resources, academics). For example, the fact that they are not involved in the decision-making process of organisational policies shows limited mutual respect. The limited promotion for programme administrators and the need to change not only job but also tasks and responsibilities in order to gain promotion is another demonstration of a lower level of mutual respect. The limited consideration by Human Resources to include all relevant information in order to design job descriptions that reflect the tasks and responsibilities of employees is another demonstration of limited respect. Another example is that

there have been many recent changes of staff in School D (i.e., teaching rooms), which forced people to leave, and Human Resources never replaced them, nor did they collaborate with the programme administrators to resolve some of these issues (D3, programme administrator). Similarly, some academics show limited respect for programme administrators (i.e., shouting at them), which decreases the level of mutual respect (Table 5-11).

**Table 5-11 Lower level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

“There is a lack of understanding of how much work goes into things. Most people feel like this. [For example, they say], ‘Oh, I do not understand why this is so difficult,’ and [I think], ‘That is because you do not understand the process.’ Academics are more like that. The [other administrative colleagues] not so much.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)  
 “Different academics treat you in a different way. Some are lovely, some are not as understanding as they could be. Sometimes I feel appreciated [and respected], not very often to be honest. A lot of them think it is just their work that I should be doing, and it is not like that at all. It could be better.” (C1, programme administrator)

Consequently, there is mutual respect between functions, but the levels are lower than those within functions, with more numerous cases of disrespect. There is a “dignity at work policy” which is officially stated on the University’s website, but this focuses primarily on bullying and sexual abuse. However, the dignity and respect that this thesis and the analysis indicates, is the one that treats people always as ends in themselves, and never as means only, in the everyday working life and not only in extreme situations (i.e., bullying). This type of dignity, in Kantian terms, is at the heart of the human sustainability definition proposed in this study. Various academics perceive the lack of an official and formal system, based on which all Colleges and Schools in the University could show respect to the programme administrators. Furthermore, they discuss some interesting practices they have implemented, regarding this matter. For example, inviting programme administrators to participate in academic meetings when they design a new course (School C), officially recognising them with their names included in the minutes of the exam board (School A), recognising them publicly with prizes (School D) (Table 5-12).

**Table 5-12 Lack of a “formal respect policy” showing respect to programme administrators in the University**

“There is no formal way [of showing respect to the frontline staff as far as] I am aware, there is not [a] kind of a formal respect policy, or clear in set out [concrete] ways of expressing this.” (A15, academic)

“I made a conscious decision to say, when I was reporting back about that course, that I would like to thank the programme administrator and mentioned the name, saying ‘Can we put that in the minutes [of the exam boards] please?’” (A14, academic)

“There is no formal recognition.” (C1, programme administrator)

“I invite a course administrator to a meeting about the programme, which is centrally academic meeting, [because I] value their opinion, [since they] have been very supportive to us. It is good to have [them] as part of the team, thinking about how we are planning the programme, or if we are thinking about how to make changes, and, I think [they] appreciate being asked to be part of the team.” (C8, academic)

“There is also a staff recognition at the end of the year, where we can nominate staff [once a year and] people [are] given prizes. This is a kind of public recognition [in front of] the other members of staff. They like [and] appreciate it.” (D7, academic)

“I think that administrative staff sometimes do not get the credit that they are due, because the place would fall apart without good administration.” (D2, academic)

The introduction of a “formal respect policy”, as academic (A15) mentioned above, could be an appreciation system introduced throughout the University, which officially recognises and respects not only the administrative and frontline staff, but all staff (i.e., academics). Such a “respect system” could be beneficial for all staff in the University, not only the administrative people, (i.e., academics, Senior Management Group), since it is likely to enhance a climate of respect for each other which will build mutual respect, rather than being linked to financial issues (i.e., bonuses). Furthermore, such a system is likely to discourage people who are now disrespectful to the work and the role of others (i.e., academics shouting on the phone at frontline staff), making it more difficult for them to continue their unsustainable and ineffective behaviour.

“Some people have been really unnecessarily disrespectful, [and these are] more academic staff. There have been occasions, when I really had to speak to my line manager because I got a few phone calls with somebody who was shouting at me about things [that were not related to my work].” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)

The analysis in this section focuses on mutual respect between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions, and not all staff in the

University, whereas, the University staff survey includes all staff from all roles (i.e., administrative, academic). Nevertheless, the results of the staff survey are relevant to the mutual respect analysis in more general terms of what the staff believe, overall, regarding mutual respect. A very low number of participants in the surveys, claim to feel valued by the University, and this number is decreasing even further, going from 52% in the 2016 survey, to 46% in the 2018 one (University website).

The fourth key theme of relational coordination is frequent/infrequent communication and is discussed in the following section.

## **5.4 Frequent/Infrequent communication**

Frequent/infrequent communication means that the roles who are involved in the work process (i.e., programme administrators, academics) should engage in “sufficiently frequent” communication, in order to do their work to support the students (Gittell, 2016). Programme administrators need to communicate with their colleagues, as frequently as they and their colleagues perceive necessary, in order to undertake their work to support the students.

### **5.4.1 Frequent/infrequent communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function**

The analysis of the interview material indicates that the frequency of communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues, both within and between functions, depends on the needs of their work to support the students. The majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, communicate very frequently with their colleagues within functions. For example, they communicate daily with other programme administrators and their assistants, whenever they have assistants, for various issues (i.e., to prepare exam boards, to discuss information requested by the students). They communicate frequently, with their line managers, primarily to seek advice (Table 5-13).



**Table 5-13 Higher level of frequent communication between the programme administrators and colleagues in their function in the University**

“The frequency ranges, [since] we have a number of administrators who are fairly new, and I see them on a weekly basis for a formal meeting. But I also make very clear to them that they can come and see me whenever something comes up...I meet some of [the] more experienced administrators once every fortnight...or they email me...We also have informal meetings where they can come along and [we] all discuss together. (A3, programme administrators’ manager)

“I have one to one meetings with my line manager every week, and when we can, especially during the busy periods, [for example], at [exam periods]...With the programme assistants [we are] making sure that they know, if there are things that we need, for example, exam boards, or things to scan.”(A5, programme administrator)

“When I first started, we had a meeting every week, but now usually with emails, and if I need help, I can always [ask].” (A9-programme administrators’ assistant)

“I do communicate with all the programme administrators on a regular basis.” (B5, programme administrator)

“[In] different times of the year, [communication] is more frequent, [with the other programme administrators], but [usually it is] almost daily.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)

“We do not have any assistants. We communicate continuously [with the other programme administrators], pretty much all day, every day. [With our] line manager [communication] is much less frequent. If we have a problem, we go straight to our line manager.” (C5, programme administrator)

“[I communicate] every day, [with the programme administrators], and I am conscious to go to speak to the administrative team, just to say hello in the morning, [and ask if] everything is ok.” (D1, programme administrators’ manager)

Consequently, the level of frequent communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high. However, the communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is not always as frequent and this is discussed in the following section.

#### **5.4.2 Frequent/infrequent communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions**

The analysis of the interview material suggests that the programme administrators communicate frequently with the academics regarding the courses they teach, since they are responsible for their administration. The frequency varies depending on the needs and changes in different times of the academic year. For example, during exams, or at the beginning of a course, the frequency is higher than in the middle of the course’s duration. Most of this communication now is through emails, and less face-to-face or phone calls, contrary to the greater face-to-face communication that existed before

restructuring, when the programme administrators were in their individual departments.

The face-to-face communication, now, between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions depends also on the School they are at. The issue is that the centralised open space hub for all administrators in each School resides in one building; if the School has more than one building the face-to-face contact is decreased. For example, academics and the administrative staff, who are in School A, which resides in one building, are communicating more frequently in a face-to-face manner than those who are in School C which resides in several buildings. The majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, communicate as frequently as necessary concerning their work with their colleagues in other functions (i.e., finance, operations). Communication with colleagues in other functions (i.e., academics, operations) is usually done through emails, and less face-to-face or phone calls (Table 5-14).

**Table 5-14 Higher level of frequent communication between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

“With the administrators that are responsible for the courses I teach I have a daily contact. [So] during courses I try to talk to [them] quite a bit. [When the courses finish] less so.” (A11, academic)

“[Communication] with the academics is pretty much daily.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)

“[Frequency of communication with the programme administrators] depends on the time of year. It varies. The summer is more research focused and throughout the rest of the year is more teaching focused, but I would say, at least once a week I have some interaction with [them].” (B8, Academic)

“When the course is on, I talk with them [the programme administrators] on a daily basis, [otherwise] we can go on long without talking. Their office is just here, so we communicate both by email and face-to-face.” (B10, academic)

“I have [many] members of staff for my subject area, so I communicate particularly with [some] on a daily basis...If the academics are coming into the office it makes things a lot easier.” (C3, programme administrator)

“I do a lot of stuff by email... [since I], want it in writing, and there are a lot of standard forms that [they need to complete] ... so, [I] can process [the order] quickly.” (C4, finance and operations school administrator)

“[Face-to-face] not as often as I used to...because we had a dedicated administrator in this building, whom I could see many times a day. Now [the administrators] are not in the same building, so you have to make an effort, to communicate with them [face-to-face]. So...it is not face-to-face communication a lot of the time, which I feel the loss of. I might see them once or twice a week. Most communication is by email, occasionally by phone.” (C7, academic)

“I am frequently liaising between all [the] departments and the academics as well [for the work I do to support the students].” (D4, programme administrator)

However, the academics to a greater degree, and colleagues in other functions to a lower degree, do not always communicate as frequently as they should with the programme administrators for various reasons (i.e., prioritise research, high workload). The vast majority of programme administrators perceive those colleagues as the ones who neither understand their goals and work nor appreciate the importance of their deadlines. In this case, the programme administrators need to follow up quite a lot, which creates additional time constraints and obstacles in supporting the students. Consequently, the level of frequent communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is medium to low.

The fifth key theme of relational coordination is timely/delayed communication; this is discussed in the following section.

## **5.5 Timely/Delayed communication**

Timely communication means “the degree to which participants perceive the other workgroups communicate in a timely way about the focal work process” (Gittell, 2016, p.239). Programme administrators, in order to do their work to support the students, need to communicate with their colleagues as timely as they perceive necessary based on their work and deadlines.

### **5.5.1 Timely/delayed communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function**

The analysis of the interview material indicates that the timeliness of communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues depends on the needs of their work to support the students. The majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, communicate in a timely way with their colleagues in their function; for example, they communicate timely with the other programme administrators and their assistants for various issues (i.e., to prepare exam boards, to discuss information requested by the students); and, with their line managers, primarily to seek advice. The higher levels of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect contribute to timely communication. The programme administrators usually communicate in a timely manner with their immediate colleagues (D3, programme administrator) (Table 5-15).

**Table 5-15 Higher level of timely communication between the programme administrators and colleagues in their function in the University**

“[Usually communication is] quite timely, you do get a good response rate.” (A5, programme administrator)

“I work very closely with the [other] programme administrators, and normally we get the information very quickly, because we are aware of deadlines, and timelines. [Also], when students need the information, [we should] be able to do [inform them in] whatever they are asking.” (A4, programme administrator)

“If there is anything that we are struggling, we will communicate that [to each other] right away. We work like a team.” (C2, programme administrator)

“[The programme administrators reply] very timely.” (D1, programme administrators’ manager)

Consequently, the level of timely communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high. However, communication is not always as timely between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions, regarding their work to support the students.

### **5.5.2 Timely/delayed communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions**

The interview material indicates that the majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, communicate in a less timely manner with their colleagues in other functions (i.e., operations, finance, academics). The majority of programme administrators view that some academics prioritise their own goals, focusing on research and publishing, rather than marking.

Additionally, programme administrators view academics to be less interested in getting to know about their work (i.e., academics do not appear interested in being informed about deadlines or when to return marking). Or, even if they know, they do not consider them important, often forgetting them.

Consequently, delayed communication is enhanced. The majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, perceive delayed communication as frustrating. They say it can take weeks before they get a response from colleagues in other functions (i.e., academics, Human Resources). It makes them also wonder what is going on since they do not understand why, for instance, the



Human Resources Head Office is so busy over recent months (D3, programme administrator) (Table 5-16).

**Table 5-16 Lower level of timely communication between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

“If we need to [contact the] other services out of the department, like central services or finance, it can be a bit [long]. It is not unusual to wait days for a response.” (C1, programme administrator)

“The admissions team are very short staffed and under a lot of pressure, so [on average] it is a week to get a response, which is not great. Accounting and Finance, and student support services, are not great either.” (D4, programme administrator)

“With academics it depends on whether they are here, on what they are working on. Sometimes it could be two minutes later, sometimes it could be two weeks later.” (A1, programme administrator)

“If you are asking for something, yes, we can be awaiting a while... quite often we are waiting weeks, unfortunately, for things to come in and it can be just that one person in the chain [who] can hold the whole chain back.” (B1, programme administrator)

“I am waiting on information right now, but I am conscious that the academics are on holiday, or they are trying to work on their research projects.” (C5, programme administrator)

Although, many people in the various functions respond in a delayed manner to programme administrators regarding their work to support the students, some individuals respond on time. The majority of programme administrators perceive the behaviour of colleagues who reply in a timely manner as caring, since they try to share their goals, and understand their tasks and deadlines, despite the constraints all staff have (i.e., time, workload). In doing so, they show respect to the work of programme administrators appreciating its significance.

“We recognise the tremendous help and by answering their [programme administrators’] demands or requests, as quickly as possible, in the best way possible, that is how we repay them.” (B9, academic)

Consequently, the level of timely communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is medium to low. The sixth key theme of relational coordination is accurate/inaccurate communication and is discussed in the following section.

## 5.6 Accurate/Inaccurate communication

Accurate communication means “the degree to which participants perceive that other workgroups communicate in an accurate way about the focal work process” (Gittell, 2016, p.239). Programme administrators need to communicate accurately with their colleagues in the University in order to do their work to support the students.

### 5.6.1 Accurate/inaccurate communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function

The analysis of the interview material suggests that communication between programme administrators and their immediate colleagues in their functions is usually accurate. The majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, communicate accurately with their colleagues in their function (Table 5-17).

**Table 5-17 Higher level of accurate communication between the programme administrators and colleagues in their function in the University**

“[The communication with other programme administrators and immediate colleagues is] normally fairly accurate.” (A1, programme administrator)  
 “[Communication] is accurate [within the team].” (A12, programme administrators assistants’ manager)  
 “Overall, it is very accurate. We deal with things like exam results, [which] must be accurate, because it is the student’s degree that we are calculating at the end of [the] course grade.” (B1, programme administrator)  
 “[Communication] from the programme administrators is usually very accurate.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)  
 “It depends on the nature [of communication]. If it is a common thing [it is accurate].” (C2, programme administrator)  
 “[Communication with the programme administrators] is very accurate.” (D1, programme administrators’ manager)

Consequently, the level of accurate communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high. However, communication is not always as accurate between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions, regarding their work to support the students.

### **5.6.2 Accurate/inaccurate communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions**

The analysis suggests that the majority of programme administrators are satisfied with the accuracy of information academics give them regarding their courses as they know their subject matter. However, they are not always satisfied with the accuracy of communication academics provide regarding the information that is relevant to other administrative matters necessary to complete their work (i.e., to make an order, to fill out a form). Similarly, other colleagues (i.e., finance, Human Resources) do not always comprehend the reasons the frontline staff need to receive accurate information, due to limited knowledge of their work (i.e., their tasks, their deadlines) or, even if they know, they do not consider them significant enough (i.e., limited respect). For example, a new line manager received incorrect information about casual and permanent workers; however, when they emailed Human Resources to ask for the correct information, they heard an automated message saying that they [Human Resources] cannot answer because they are busy (D3, programme administrator).

The analysis suggests that all staff have great difficulty in finding the correct information in the University. They say people are not aware of “who knows what” and who can provide a trustworthy reply. This issue creates inaccuracy in communication and considerable time constraints among persons in the University. For example, staff cannot easily decipher what is the right answer to a question, since they receive contradictory information (Table 5-18).

**Table 5-18 Lower level of accurate communication between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

“[Communication from] academics is less [accurate], because...a lot of the times they are not so organised...So, all the time I have to follow up.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)

“[It] is difficult to get accurate information [and] the difficulty is trying to explain to an academic member of staff what is that you are working on, so there is not that confusion. They are so busy, [and] they are not reading the whole thing, and therefore, [they are] coming back with something that is not [correct]. But, if they have taken the time to read what you have tried very clearly to [explain], then it would have saved everyone a bit of time.” (B4, administrative assistant)

“Sometimes it is hard to know where to go and clarify, whether this is the right thing to do. [If] you can ask three different people the same question [often you] get three different answers. That tends to happen a lot here. For example, many students come in and say, ‘Can you stamp this form for me?’ [The form is] for the railcard, something basic, [and] sometimes you cannot even figure out what student services really do.” (C1, programme administrator)

“Some will tell you one thing, and then actually when you do it, somebody will tell you, ‘That is wrong.’ It usually [happens with] finance, [which] is quite complicated and confusing. There is a sort of a student facing finance, and then there is the University finance, [and] there is [not] a good explanation about the [distinction] of the two programmes.” (D4, programme administrator)

Consequently, the level of accurate communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is medium to low. The seventh key theme of relational coordination is problem-solving/blaming communication and is discussed in the following section.

## 5.7 Problem-solving/Blaming communication

Problem-solving communication means “the degree to which participants perceive that other workgroups communicate in a problem-solving rather than a blaming way about the focal work process” (Gittell, 2016, p.239). Programme administrators, in order to do their work to support the students, need to communicate in a problem-solving manner with their colleagues in the University.

### 5.7.1 Problem-solving/blaming communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function

The analysis suggests that communication between the programme administrators and their immediate colleagues in their functions, when they

work to support the students, is usually problem-solving. The majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, view their communication with immediate colleagues (i.e., the other programme administrators) as problem-solving. This is generally the case although, occasionally, programme administrators encounter situations where their line managers blame them, even indirectly. The primary reason for this finger-pointing is because the line managers do not appreciate some of the work the programme administrators do because it is invisible. Line managers do not always share a high level of knowledge regarding the tasks of programme administrators (i.e., how much time a task necessitates to be completed, lack of adequate training of technological systems that often create delays). Usually, because they share the same goals and there is a high level of shared knowledge and mutual respect, they all understand that problem-solving is the best way to confront a problem and proceed with their work. Normally, they accept their mistakes, apologise, and try to resolve any issue (D3, programme administrator) (Table 5-19).

**Table 5-19 Higher level of problem-solving communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function in the University**

“I try not to blame. If there is a problem, I would rather hear about it now, because it is easier to sort [it]. I do not want them [programme administrators] to be frightened about telling me that they have done something wrong and to hide it...It is [important] to learn from mistakes, [which helps] to ensure that there are no mistakes in the future.” (A3, programme administrators’ manager)

“We are big on problem-solving. Definitely not blaming...If there are issues with students most of the times, we [resolve them between] ourselves. If things are maybe a bit more [difficult] we talk to the line manager.” (A5, programme administrator)

“If a problem occurs in the administration...the attitude is, ‘Let us resolve it.’” (A6-programme administrators’ assistant)

“We do not tend to blame other people, because I do not think that creates a good working environment. [For example], [when] students’ grades are posted incorrectly, we have to get to the bottom of why it happened and how. If there has been a mistake, we let the appropriate people know whether that is the student or the staff member, inform the Head of School [if it is serious], fix it and then just make sure that it does not happen again.” (B1, programme administrator)

“Within my team it is more problem-solving.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)

“The emphasis is always on what the problem is and how we can rectify it. People are quite quick to say, ‘This is what I have done,’ and then we see how to deal with it and move forward.” (B5, programme administrator)

“It is problem-solving. For example, if there is a problem with the University system, [which] is quite detrimental (i.e., for enrolment), then we would work together, [and engage in] problem-solving.” (C2, programme administrator)

“Definitely problem-solving in the first instance. My line manager has that attitude too, which is very good.” (C5, programme administrator)

“We just try to fix the problem and sort it out with the administrative team. Everyone works together.” (D1, programme administrators’ manager)



Consequently, the level of problem-solving communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high. However, communication is not always as problem-solving between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions, regarding their work to support the students.

### **5.7.2 Problem-solving/blaming communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions**

The analysis of the interview material indicates that the majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, engage in a less cooperative way than when they are engaged within functions. This involves more blaming communication with their colleagues in other functions (i.e., operations, finance, academics). For example, when academics and programme administrators are facing a problem, there is more likely to be finger-pointing and blaming on behalf of the academics towards the programme administrators, as if the problem was their fault. Some frontline staff, across all four Schools, view problem-solving with academics as very challenging since the latter are very quick in blaming them when things go wrong (i.e., wrong uploading of grades even due to confusion caused by academics, an email they did not receive).

The same, although to a lesser degree, happens with colleagues in other roles. This is due to lack of collaborative and cooperative working. The lower level of relational coordination between and among those workgroups does not allow colleagues to know the work of programme administrators. This results in a lower understanding of their tasks which, in turn, results in administrators being blamed when something goes wrong (Table 5-20).

**Table 5-20 Lower level of problem-solving communication between the programme administrators and colleagues between functions in the University**

“The front that we give to the students is problem-solving. If there has been an issue with the assignments and did not come back on time, I would not go into the web system and say, ‘Such and such has not given me back the exams.’ It is not professional, and we do not do that. We just say, ‘Here is the new date that we expect to have grades. Apologies for the delay. We understand that, that can cause upset but that happens, and here is the new date that you will get your stuff back.’ But then internally, when I speak to my line manager and we have a one to one [conversation] and they know if deadlines have been missed, they will say [to me], ‘What had happened?’ Then I should be honest and say, ‘Such and such went to a conference when they knew they have marking to do.’ And that is not even blaming, that is just a fact.” (A4, programme administrator)

“There are certain senior members of staff [who] are very much into blaming. I have had calls, from upset people, demanding to know why something happened. And if something is simply a human error, [I said], it is a human error.” (B3, programme administrators’ assistant)

“Blames are strong words, but academics are very quick to assume and say, ‘Oh something must have gone wrong administratively.’ [For example], when they do not receive an email. [But]...it could be that the person has just missed it, and certainly that was the case.” (B4, administrative assistant)

On another matter, the analysis of the interviews suggests that “a difficulty within the University structure” is that, in a case of a problem between programme administrators and academics, it cannot be dealt with, officially, directly between themselves. Therefore, in this case academics need to discuss the issue with the line manager of the interested programme administrator who, in turn, will talk to the programme administrator for a solution (A15, academic). This is based on the hierarchical system of the University, which requires line managers to provide solutions for programme administrators’ issues, even if these issues are simply an ordinary argument with academics. This further complicates communication and conflict resolution between academics and programme administrators. Thus, if the issue under question is minor, academics and frontline staff try to resolve it between themselves, if at all possible.

Colleagues from other functions (i.e., Human Resources) occasionally have the same blaming attitude towards the programme administrators, primarily for similar reasons (i.e., limited knowledge, high workload).

“It is problem-solving; I would not say it is blaming. But after the problem-solving you have to find out why things went wrong and sometimes that does come down to the individual. If there is a problem [with the programme administrators], I have to speak to the administrators’ line manager.” (C7, academic)

Although, some people in the various functions engage in blaming programme administrators regarding their work to support students, some staff do engage in problem-solving. The majority of frontline staff perceive the behaviour of colleagues who problem-solve with them as people who care and try to understand and solve the issue constructively (Table 5-21).

**Table 5-21 Higher level of problem-solving communication between the programme administrators and colleagues in other functions in the University**

“We prioritise the frontline activities. So, if there is an issue, with say a student feedback in class, or student concerns, that, is dealt with immediately. For example, with a particular class of a master programme, when students are expressing particular concerns with what they saw as an overly complicated assessment process...we immediately scheduled a meeting [with] myself and the administrator, [and we] sat down with the students, a representative group of the class, heard their concerns, talked about and made through out promises. [Afterwards] the two lecturers came in, talked through the arrangements, rehearsed the views of the students, [and] then one lecturer worked directly with the administrator, to change the deadlines for assessment, [and] to introduce one new session where there would be feedback before the final submission of the end piece of work. And so, we fixed the situation.” (A15, academic)

“We went through an absolute nightmare of a problem, when we have identified evidence of [a problem] among students in a subject area. And then we [had] to decide in a short space of time. That required the entire team to convene and to work together to identify the correct strategy to remedy the situation. [We had] to work extremely hard to put that plan into place and redo a whole set of exams. These exams required a lot of administrative input and a lot of effort from the administrative staff. [There] was no blame to be assigned, [but] to identify the problem with students and then work together [to] fix it.” (D6, academic)

Consequently, the level of problem-solving communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in other functions is medium to low.

## 5.8 Summary of relational coordination

This chapter has examined relational coordination between the programme administrators and their colleagues, when undertaking work to support the students. The programme administrators are the focal group in this analysis and their work to support the students is the focal work process. Relational coordination is “straightforward” and signifies the coordination of work through relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect. These three relational dimensions “foster communication that is sufficiently frequent, timely, accurate and focused on problem solving rather than blaming” (Gittell,



2016, p.13). Relational coordination is defined as “a mutually reinforcing process of communicating and relating for the purpose of task integration” (Gittell, 2002a, p.301).

Relational coordination focuses on relationships and their coordination.

Relational coordination theory states that relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect promote frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, and vice versa, enabling stakeholders to successfully and effectively coordinate their work. In contrast, when negative, these same relationships serve as barriers (Gittell, 2006). Therefore, organisations design for relational coordination when they follow these principles proposed by relational coordination theory. Consequently, if the University designs for relational coordination practices, it should adopt these principles and put them into practice in order to enhance its level. The seven key themes related to the theoretical concept of relational coordination are examined. The analysis of the data collected from the interviews, across the four Schools, both within functions (i.e., with other programme administrators, line managers and programme assistants) and between functions (i.e., with academics, operations, finance, Human Resources) suggests the below stated findings.

Shared/functional goals signify “the degree to which participants perceive that other workgroups share their goals for the focal work process” (Gittell, 2016, p.236). The level of shared goals between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is usually high, whereas with their colleagues in other functions this varies from medium to low. Shared knowledge signifies “the degree to which participants perceive that their work in the focal work process is understood by other workgroups” (Gittell, 2016, p.235). The level of shared knowledge between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high, and with their colleagues in other functions is low. Mutual respect signifies “the degree to which participants perceive that their work in the focal work process is respected by other workgroups” (Gittell, 2016, p.238). Overall, the level of mutual respect between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high and with their colleagues in other functions is medium to low.

Frequent/infrequent communication means the degree to which participants perceive the other workgroups communicate in a “sufficiently frequent” way about the focal work process (Gittell, 2016). The level of frequent communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high, whereas between their colleagues in other functions this is medium to low. Timely communication means “the degree to which participants perceive the other workgroups communicate in a timely way about the focal work process” (Gittell, 2016, p.239). The level of timely communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high and between their colleagues in other functions medium to low. Accurate communication means “the degree to which participants perceive that other workgroups communicate in an accurate way about the focal work process” (Gittell, 2016, p.239). The level of accurate communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high; between their colleagues in other functions this is medium to low. Problem-solving communication means “the degree to which participants perceive that other workgroups communicate in a problem-solving rather than a blaming way about the focal work process” (Gittell, 2016, p.239). The level of problem-solving communication between the programme administrators and their colleagues in their function is high; meanwhile between their colleagues in other functions this is medium to low.

Overall, the level of relational coordination between the programme administrators and their colleagues regarding their work to support the students is medium to low. This means that it is higher within functions and medium to low between functions. Usually, in other functions, it is medium with other administrative and support colleagues and lower with academics and Human Resources. When the level of shared goals is high it expands the person’s motivation to participate in high quality communication, as well as expanding the possibility that they will engage in problem-solving communication rather than blame in cases where problems or things do not go as expected (Gittell, 2012). When the level of shared knowledge is high it enables participants to communicate with each other with greater precision because not only are they familiar with their own tasks and responsibilities, they also know how their tasks are connected to the tasks of participators in other roles and functions (Gittell,

2012). When the level of mutual respect is high it inspires and motivates individuals to appreciate the value of contributions of others and to reflect on the effect of their acts on others, thereby additionally strengthening the tendency to act regarding the overall work process (Gittell, 2003).

Consequently, when there is a high level of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect, the relationships between the programme administrators and their colleagues strengthen and are strengthened by the high frequency, timeliness, accuracy, and problem-solving nature of their communication. Low-quality relationships, as is the case in the University, have the opposed outcome, reducing communication and sabotaging participants' ability to effectively coordinate their work (Gittell, 2003). For example, when persons do not respect or feel respected by others who are involved in the same work process, they are more likely to refrain from communication, even eye contact, with each other. In addition, individuals who do not distribute among them common goals and objectives regarding the work processes, are more likely to blame others rather than trying to solve the problem with them. Also, participants who do not share knowledge between and among each other lose the relative kind of connection, they do not communicate in a well-timed way and, also, do not have a good comprehension of what other people are doing in order to realise the imperativeness of communicating specific information to them (Gittell, 2003).

Therefore, the findings in this study are consistent with the outcomes of the lower quality relationships suggested by relational coordination theory and research. This is particularly true for relationships between functions, where relational coordination is mostly needed since, according to the theory of relational coordination, relational coordination usually already exists to a certain level within functions in organisations, but it exists to a lower level between functions (i.e., Ahmad et al., 2019). One of the great aspects of relational coordination is not to bring together people who are the same, (i.e., in their functions and silos), because that already happens, and that is what we see in the analysis of the interviews, but to bring together people who are different, between silos, and create something between them that is shared (i.e., shared goals, shared knowledge). Staff do not all need to be the same, since a university with low diversity, as any organisation nowadays, would not be an interesting and dynamic workplace; additionally, it would be unrealistic.

Diversity exists and all organisations and institutions could embrace it and make the best of it.

Relational coordination can help individuals in the University see that all roles bring a different perspective, which helps people face that challenges. Hence, a high level of relational coordination assists persons to see, understand and respect their differences (i.e., in roles, tasks, and responsibilities) rather than simply being able to work with people that are like themselves (i.e., in their silos and functions). Relational coordination can assist staff work better with their colleagues in other functions rather than only with colleagues within their functions. The analysis of the interview material suggests that this is not happening in the University. The question that comes to mind, now, is “What are the elements, the methods to produce the necessary actions, that are missing resulting in a low level of relational coordination in the University?”

The answer to this question is in the following examples which represent part of the diverse methods and actions suggested by relational coordination theory. These methods and actions, which underline a high level of human sustainability as defined in this study, are missing in the University. In order to reach a higher level of shared goals, programme administrators could be able to have, among other issues, a “dedicated time as team” with their colleagues in other functions in order to build those goals (Gittell, 2016). In order to achieve a higher level of shared knowledge, programme administrators could be able to understand, among other issues, what their colleagues in other functions are doing (i.e., cross-functional meetings, limited time for discussion on these issues) including invisible work (Gittell, 2016). In order to reach a higher level of mutual respect, programme administrators could establish with their colleagues in other functions, among other issues, “a system of behavioural accountability” and “team norms” (i.e., how to speak up when there is violation of the team norms) (Gittell, 2016). In order to achieve a higher level of frequency in communication, programme administrators could establish with their colleagues in other functions, among other issues, what is “sufficiently frequent” (Gittell, 2016). In order to reach a higher level of timely communication, programme administrators could establish with their colleagues in other functions, among other issues, a “conversation of interdependence” (i.e., what is timely) (Gittell, 2016). In order to achieve a higher level of accurate communication, programme

administrators could establish with their colleagues in other functions, among other issues, a “templated documentation” of what accurate means (Gittell, 2016). Finally, in order to attain a higher level of problem-solving communication, programme administrators could establish, among other issues, “a method of delivering feedback” (Gittell, 2016, p.239).

It is apparent from the above stated examples that the missing methods and actions highly depend upon the low level of human sustainability, which is a consequence of restructuring. Another consequence of restructuring is the enhancement of “silos thinking” which results in “sub-goal optimization” emphasising the sub-cultures represented by the various functions in the University (i.e., frontline staff, academics) (Gittell, 2000; Gittell et al., 2010; Gittell & Douglas, 2012). Prior research in higher education suggests that senior managers of universities are necessitated to clarify the significance of the benefaction of all relative stakeholders building a “culture of co-operation, mutual respect and trust. Problems associated with course administration seem to come from strong subcultures that reinforce misunderstandings, confusion about roles, and an inability to see issues from each other’s perspectives” (Child et al., 2010, p.115).

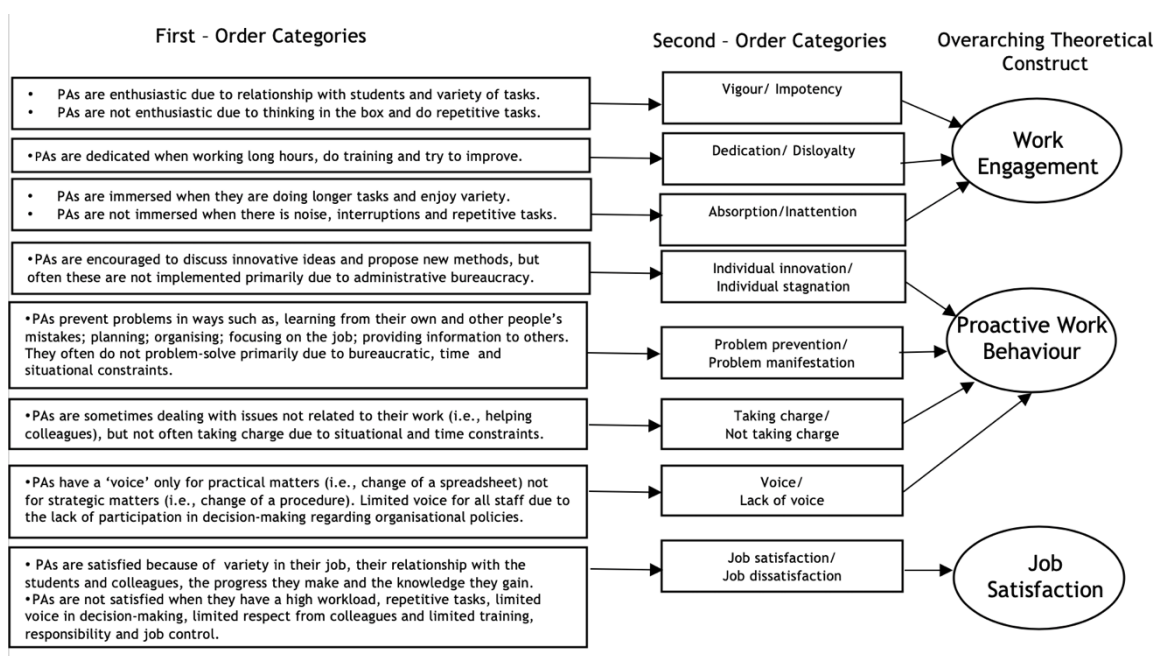
Consequently, restructuring created a limited consideration for the design for human sustainability, as defined in this study (i.e., people are not always respected as ends in themselves), which enhances a low level of relational coordination perceived to exist primarily between the programme administrators and their colleagues between functions in the University. Thus, low consideration for design for human sustainability (i.e., limited information on significant matters such as financial, limited provision of meaningful work), establishes a low level of human sustainability, which encourages a low level of relational coordination. Furthermore, the human being is relational, with the capacity to establish relationships with others and enrich their character and personhood through such relations (Mele, 2012). Consequently, both human sustainability and relational coordination can influence the employee’s individual traits which, in turn, modifies their personality and behaviour at work. Thus, personal transformation takes place that influences their worker outcomes (i.e., work engagement).

Scholarly research shows that relational coordination results in beneficial outcomes for multiple stakeholders when it is strong and, conversely, harmful outcomes when it is weak, particularly when work is more interdependent, uncertain and time constrained (Gittell, 2003). Relational coordination can also produce positive outcomes for workers who engage in it and who experience it from others (Gittell et al., 2008). Prior research demonstrates that this can improve various worker outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction, professional efficacy, reduced burnout, work engagement, proactive work behaviour). Three of these outcomes, in connection with the programme administrators' work to support students, are examined in this thesis and are discussed in the next chapter. Hence, work engagement (Havens et al., 2013; Warshawsky et al., 2012; Naruse et al., 2017); proactive work behaviour (McDermott et al., 2017); and, job satisfaction (Gittell et al., 2008; Havens et al., 2013).

## Chapter 6 Worker Outcomes

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the worker outcomes of frontline staff, regarding their work to support the students. The chapter is structured along the key themes related to the concepts of the three worker outcomes examined in this study and includes the following: Work engagement (vigour/impotency, dedication/disloyalty, absorption/inattention); proactive work behaviour (individual innovation/individual stagnation, problem prevention/problem manifestation, taking charge/not taking charge, voice/lack of voice); job satisfaction (job satisfaction/job dissatisfaction) (Figure 6-1). This analysis is of the data collected from the interviews, across the four Schools and focuses on programme administrators. More specifically, it considers their level of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction when they work to support the students. The programme administrators are the focal group in this analysis and their work to support the students is the focal work process. Each dimension of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction is assessed from the point of view of the programme administrators.

**Figure 6-1 Data structure – Overarching Theoretical Construct – Worker Outcomes**



### 6.1 Work engagement

Work engagement (WE) has become one of the main “challenges/activities” that necessitates proper management in order to attain organisational objectives

(Hanaysha, 2016). Scholarly work suggests that engaged workers perform better than those who are non-engaged. For example, they may have frequent experience of positive feelings like enthusiasm, joy and being healthier (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The harmful consequences of employees' low work engagement are not only related to the economy and productivity but, most importantly, they are related to the person and their health (psychological, social and mental). A meta-analysis discovered that work engagement was positively related to advantageous outcomes such as commitment and performance, meanwhile it was negatively related to turnover intention (Halbesleben, 2010).

Work engagement “translates into performance” in numerous sectors through the interplay of staff members with customers, clients, students or patients. “It is in these interactions that the energy, dedication, absorption or efficacy that lie in the heart of work engagement turn into action” (Leiter & Bakker, 2010, p.5). Various researchers have drawn attention to the importance of employee work engagement in increasing performance and positive organisational outcomes. Saks (2006) argues that there was only little empirical evidence to reinforce these claims. However, research on the association between work engagement and diverse performance categories (financial performance like profit, nonfinancial performance like customer satisfaction) has been increasing in recent years, in various geographical regions and industries (i.e., finance, education, hospitality, construction) (Motyka, 2018). Work engagement research in higher education institutions internationally remains limited (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017; Daniels, 2016). Scholarly literature suggests that high-quality interpersonal relationships (IPRs) with high levels of shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, enhance work engagement (Warshawsky et al., 2012; Naruse et al., 2017).

Work engagement is related to the “attitudinal” and “behavioural” outcomes of frontline employees. Engaged staff are “emotionally attached” to their institution and enhance customer satisfaction by doing more than their work and by having “lower turnover intentions” (Karatepe, 2013). It is relative to the relationship between an employee and their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). Work engagement, in this thesis, is defined as a “positive, fulfilling, work-



related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). Consequently, work engagement focuses on the relationships between an employee and their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). It is a more “persistent” and “pervasive” state of mind, rather than a “momentary” and “specific” state not centred on any specific thing, incident, person, or way of behaving (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigour, dedication and absorption are central to the way work engagement is defined in this study.

Work engagement is analysed based on its key themes (Figure 6-1). These themes represent the two extreme ends since it operates on a continuum from very low to very high. Therefore, the level of work engagement of programme administrators, as of most workgroups in organisations, would fall somewhere between those two extremes. The analysis of work engagement begins with the key theme of vigour/impotency which is discussed in the following section.

### **6.1.1 Vigour/Impotency**

Employees who have a high level of vigour at the workplace are very motivated by their work and more likely to act tenaciously when experience strains (Takawira et al., 2014). The following definition of vigour is utilised in this study. “Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). Vigour is also related to “meaningfulness in work” which is an important factor of work engagement. Pratt & Ashforth (2003) distinguish between “meaningfulness in work” and “meaningfulness at work.” Meaningfulness in work results from the kind of work a person is doing and focuses on making the work and one’s responsibilities intrinsically motivating. Meanwhile, meaningfulness at work results from a person’s membership in an organisation and focuses on “whom one surrounds oneself with as part of organisational membership, and/or the goals, values, and beliefs that the organization espouses” (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003, p.314).

Meaningfulness in work can be made smoother by organisational procedures that enhance the tasks, roles and work that a person accomplishes (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). For this reason, Saks & Gruman (2014) claim that meaningfulness in work

is especially significant for work engagement. Prior research has centred on issues that are significant for meaningfulness in work (i.e., “job control,” “task variety,” “feedback”). On the other hand, Saks & Gruman (2014) claim that meaningfulness at work, is usually affected by issues related to the organisation as a whole and not to a person’s particular tasks and responsibilities. For instance, scholarly research indicates that job traits forecast “job engagement” whereas “procedural justice” forecast organisation engagement (Saks, 2006). Being able to obtain meaningful work is central to work engagement (Bogeskov et al., 2017). Employees are more likely to be engaged when they perceive their job to be meaningful (Bogeskov et al., 2017; Wei & Watson, 2019). Enriched jobs also enhance individuals’ sense of the impact and meaningfulness of their work (Grant, 2007).

The analysis of the interview material, consistent with this research, indicates that “task variety” provides meaning to the work the programme administrators do to support the students. The vast majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, consider their work meaningful, primarily for two reasons: their relationship with the students and the opportunity it provides them to advance their knowledge. The analysis shows that the relationship frontline staff have with the students is of a high quality because it is based on shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect enhanced by high quality communication. Thus, the level of relational coordination between programme administrators and students is high. Consequently, this rewarding and crucial type of relationship makes them view their work as meaningful. As the first point of reference for students, programme administrators highly contribute to the student experience. They claim that the more they get involved in various issues regarding the students, the more meaning they attribute to their work and the more responsible they become with it. This finding is also consistent with prior research in work engagement which suggests that high-quality interpersonal relationships (IPRs), with a high level of shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, have a high level of relational coordination which enhances work engagement (Warshawsky et al., 2012; Naruse et al., 2017).

Furthermore, gaining knowledge through learning is a significant factor of meaningfulness for the majority of programme administrators. This is due to the

fact that, through learning, they recognise that they are making progress. This finding is consistent with prior research which indicates that employees frequently look into their work for the capability to evolve, grasp new skills and competencies and learn novel things, becoming more proficient and perceiving their full possibilities (Pfeffer, 2010b) (Table 6-1).

**Table 6-1 Vigour of programme administrators in their work in the University**

“When a student who has had issues comes to me and says, ‘Thank you very much’ I feel fulfilled. That is all I want. My students to be happy, [and] my work to be done correctly, [so] I can go home at night and say, ‘I have done a good job.’” (A4, programme administrator).

“I am here to help them [the students] with that journey, [and] for me that is probably the most meaningful thing about all.” (A5, programme administrator)  
I like it [my work], because I learn new skills regularly...So I find that really rewarding.” (B5, programme administrator)

“I enjoy working with the students...No, [I do not consider my job meaningful]. I am looking for much more responsibility.” (C3, programme administrator)

However, the analysis of the interview material suggests that various programme administrators believe their job could be more meaningful, primarily through being more involved with the students. A growing body of research suggests that interpersonal relationships play a key role in enabling employees to experience their work as important and meaningful (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000; Gersick et al., 2000; Kahn, 1990; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Although all programme administrators are involved in pastoral care, the level of involvement is not the same across the four Schools. For example, in School A, programme administrators are more intensively involved in pastoral care than in Schools B, C, and D since they are more supported by the School in doing so. Therefore, they dedicate more time and effort to that activity as part of their tasks and responsibilities. They even have private spaces available to meet students who need to talk to them. Such differentiation results in a diverse working relationship regarding pastoral care between the programme administrators and their line managers in the four Schools. In School A, the working relationship which encourages involvement with students through pastoral care enhances the perceived meaning to their work, whereas in Schools B, C, and D this is less encouraged. This finding is consistent with previous research which indicates

that “supervisory” and “co-worker relationships” are influential in strengthening work engagement (Warshawsky et al., 2012).

Another way the analysis suggests the work of programme administrators can become more meaningful is to have tasks that would allow them to reach a greater level of responsibility. Hackman & Oldham (1976) suggest that “task significance,” a significant trait of jobs, contributes to work motivation by permitting employees to perceive their work as meaningful (i.e., Fried & Ferris, 1987; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Katz, 1978). Almost all the programme administrators (with the exception of two persons) are educated to a degree level, and some to a postgraduate level. Consequently, the majority of staff perceive themselves as being able to deal with more responsibility than that which they are given. Frontline staff would feel more supported by the University if they were given more responsibility, which would enhance the level of vigour and, consequently, their work engagement. This is based on prior research which indicates that “perceived organizational support” forecasts job engagement (Saks, 2006).

The analysis further suggests that the degree of variety in the work of frontline staff is gradually decreasing. Prior research suggests that task variety enhances work engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Therefore, the decrease of task variety is more likely to diminish work engagement. The decrease in variety of responsibilities may primarily be due to the specialisation of tasks, intensified after restructuring in 2010 when programme administrators were transferred to large open space hubs. Employees who worked in the University before restructuring state that they had a greater variety of tasks, as they were fully involved in their departments dealing with many diverse issues (i.e., maintenance, more issues to deal with regarding the students, the academics). Variety in the job is continuously decreasing since 2010 and their work to support the students more specialised. The levels of vigour are gradually and steadily decreasing. The majority of programme administrators recognise that their tasks are becoming more and more repetitive which makes them view their work as less interesting and intellectually stimulating. They comprehend that their job will become increasingly specialised in the future, to the point that they will eventually deal with only one task, every day, all day (i.e., one person will only collect the grades, the other person will only upload the grades). This

specialisation trend means that there will be less variety in their work, unlike at present.

“Every day you deal with something different. Obviously, we have an academic calendar, [which] repeats itself, [and the] same processes that we have to go through. But every day is different, and every day you are dealing with such a wide variety of people. It is [intellectually] stimulating.” (B1, programme administrator)

Consequently, the analysis of the interview material suggests that the level of vigour of programme administrators in their job is medium to low. Although their work now is usually meaningful, interesting and intellectually stimulating, there is an increasing trend during recent years which prioritises repetitive tasks over variety, thereby diminishing the level of vigour in their work. The second key theme of work engagement is dedication/disloyalty and is discussed below.

### 6.1.2 Dedication/Disloyalty

Employees who have a high level of dedication at the workplace are enthusiastic and proud of their work and try to be involved in it (Takawira et al., 2014). The following definition of “dedication” is utilised in this study. “Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). Dedication is not simply involvement, it is more than that, both quantitatively and qualitatively (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Prior research indicates that engaged employees are more dedicated and do more than what is expected of them based on their tasks and responsibilities. They work this way voluntarily in order to assist the organisation (Bergstedt & Wei, 2020). Scholarly research suggests that dedication is a very significant element of work engagement and is positively influenced by higher qualifications (Bergstedt & Wei, 2020). The analysis consistent with this research suggests that the vast majority of programme administrators are very dedicated to their work and all of them have university degrees.

Shuck et al. (2011) claim that relationships play a fundamental role in enhancing the work engagement of employees. Relationships and “connections” people evolve at their workplace are fundamentally significant to their overall working experience, thereby enhancing work engagement. Woznyj et al. (2017) show that supervisors with higher performance results encourage greater dedication

from staff. This is often expressed in the form of “extra hours worked”. Thus, when supervisors perform well it is more likely to have, as a consequence, “subordinate dedication” regarding longer working hours. The analysis of the interview material, consistent with this research, indicates that the majority of programme administrators perceive their line managers’ work to be successful and their level of relational coordination is high (see chapter five). Thus, one way of showing their dedication is working extra (i.e., working long hours), hence, consistent with these research findings (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996).

Scholarly research further suggests that “enjoyment of” and “commitment to” work, are beneficial for one’s health, success and progress at work (Kelloway et al., 2010). However, “overcommitment” is likely to increase stress (Avanzi et al., 2012). Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) claim that “role pressures” from both work and family can be conflicting to a certain extent. This takes place because employees view that they have limited time to undertake their tasks and responsibilities at home and work and, consequently, they could experience stress, exhaustion and “fatigue” which could harm their “psychological” and “physical” well-being.

Shuck et al. (2011) argue that learning is crucial in enhancing the work engagement of employees. Learning plays a significant role in engaged employees’ “interpretation” of their job because it encourages their work engagement and enhances their enthusiasm, thereby keeping them elevated. The analysis, constant with this finding, suggests that programme administrators aim to learn new things through training. They consider learning as a way to express their dedication, primarily because they find time to do it, despite their high workload. The vast majority of programme administrators perceive themselves as dedicated, also, due to the high-quality relationship they have with the students. Therefore, they are doing their best despite obstacles at the workplace (i.e., time constraints, high workload) (Table 6-2).

Table 6-2 Dedication of programme administrators in their work in the University

“In whatever I have done I have always been dedicated. I am the first person if something needs extra hours done, [and] I will try and help. It is not even the money it is trying to help people. [For example], I have a student in particular to whom I have been dedicated helping or consulting. We are exchanging emails and they always come to see me. My door is always open [for them]. I could easily say [to the student], ‘You are a grown up, go with it,’ but I don’t feel like [doing] that. I want to look after [the students] and make sure that everything is ok, and [that] they can graduate, and go home, and be proud of what they have achieved.” (A5, programme administrator)

“Even going on with [training], like the disability conference and mental health first training course, [means that I am dedicated]. If I were not dedicated, and did not want to help the students, then I would not have [done] additional learning [and training].” (B1, programme administrator)

Consequently, the analysis of the interview data suggests that the level of dedication of programme administrators in their job is high. This finding is consistent with prior research that indicates that the dedication of frontline staff gives them the power and strength to persist and finish their work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The third key theme of work engagement is absorption/inattention and is discussed below.

### 6.1.3 Absorption/Inattention

Absorption is not the same as “flow” despite the fact that it is similar, since it is a more “pervasive” and “persistent” state of mind, rather than a specific “short-term” experience (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The definition of “absorption” utilised in this study is: “Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.75).

The analysis of the interview data suggests that the vast majority of programme administrators, across the four Schools, appear absorbed in their work to support students. This is especially the case when there is variety and when they focus on longer tasks (i.e., the investigation of a complicated issue, or uploading grades in the system). Focusing is also easier when the work includes variety which makes it more interesting. Nevertheless, frontline staff are trying to focus in order to do a good job, something they usually manage to achieve due to their

dedication. However, there are challenges primarily due to frequent interruptions and a high level of noise in their working environment.

Positive influences of job and personal resources can be decreased by job demands (i.e., unfavourable work environment, role overload and ambivalence, role conflicts and time constraints), which can lead to unfavourable physical and/or psychological stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Frontline staff work in large open space hubs since restructuring which are crowded and noisy. Students and academics further increase noise with their visits. Prior research indicates that employees who are happy with their working environment, achieve better outcomes and are more productive. Poor work-place design is a fundamental reason for low productivity, low degree of commitment and negative influence on health (i.e., headaches, tiredness, difficulty in concentration) (Bangwal et al., 2017). Modern workplaces are open spaces, with various documented problems (i.e., noise, distractions, lack of privacy) (Lee & Brand, 2005).

Scholarly work suggests diverse findings regarding relationships between the physical environment and the persons living in it. Open space offices are directly related to a greater level of noise than enclosed offices (Barnes, 2007; Vischer, 2007). A principle objection of workers in open space offices is the “discomfort” generated by the high level of noise (Vischer, 2007). One of the major consequences of noise is frequent distraction, due to the conversations of others, often not related to the distracted person. Noise also results in cognitive overload and stress leading to lower levels of concentration and motivation as well as lack of psychological privacy. Noise is described as the factor employees would most like to control (Nikolaeva & Dello Russo, 2017).

Scholarly literature suggests that open space offices have additional disadvantages. For example, personalisation of one’s office space is more difficult in open space plans (i.e., personal decoration like photos, objects) as well as lighting and climate (Carnevale & Rios, 1995). Embellishing or personalising the workspace could be a way of transforming an “unnatural environment” to a more amicable one which helps persons manage stress (Barnes, 2007). Open space offices are also related to lower privacy than enclosed offices (Barnes, 2007). “Visual” and “acoustic” privacy is also hindered in open spaces which could have a negative influence on a person’s emotions



and behaviours directed towards others (i.e., making people less open-minded to the actions of others) (Barnes, 2007). People, and whatever takes place in open space offices, are more noticeable to others. Thus, staff are more likely to have “emotional reactions” that could comprise “frustration” and “anger” (Ashkanasy et al., 2014). Open space offices often create feelings of overcrowding, making people feel that their restricted personal space is invaded, which increases problems (i.e., higher stress, reduced wellbeing) (De Croon et al., 2005).

The analysis, consistent with this research, indicates that the vast majority of programme administrators, across the four Schools, experience a number of the negative consequences of open space offices. They have difficulty focusing and being immersed in their work; it requires more effort to complete their work and respect deadlines; they need less interruptions and less noise to work more effectively and efficiently. Workplace conditions in such hubs (i.e., higher workload), make it more difficult for people to be absorbed in their work. Moreover, work is often less interesting and intellectually stimulating, owing to the various repetitive tasks, which are boring and discourage full immersion in the job. Repetitive tasks require primarily a “tick box” mentality, since frontline staff are increasingly given work that asks them to “tick the boxes” for completion (i.e., check boxes on whether one or another task is done). Hence, the level of absorption is more likely to diminish in the near future (Table 6-3).

**Table 6-3 Absorption of programme administrators in their work in the University**

“When I am here, I am focused at work. And when I am out of work, I do extra things.”

**(A1, programme administrator)**

“I am immersed in my work. I like to try and focus on what I need to do.” **(A5, programme administrator)**

“Sometimes I can [be immersed], but I am so easily distracted, [because] there is a lot going on...there are people coming in and out [who also] want to chat.” **(B5, programme administrator)**

“It depends on what I am doing, since some of the tasks can be really boring and repetitive. So not all of the time [I can be immersed], but sometimes [only].” **(C1, programme administrator)**

“Sometimes it is difficult to concentrate in our office...students are coming in, the phones are ringing, the academics are coming in.” **(C3, programme administrator)**

“Yes, [I am immersed in my job]. [For example], when I am trying to resolve a finance [or another long] issue, it could take me up to two days. [For example], to figure out why the student has been charged three thousand pounds more, I need to look back through all the records and then liaise with all the different departments.” **(D4, programme administrator)**

Nikolaeva & Dello Russo (2017) argue that there is a lack of employee effective voice regarding office design in organisations. Thus, staff have to adapt to an open space working environment which does not accommodate their needs regarding their work and their psychological and physical health. The findings based on the analysis of the interviews are consistent with this research since programme administrators did not have a voice regarding the design of the open space hubs in the University. Scholarly literature suggests that managers ought to make sure of the participation of the actual users of workplaces. “Top-down domination” of work settings issues ought to be substituted by a more “inclusive” procedure that permits everybody to propose their thoughts and necessities (Carnevale & Rios, 1995). This is in accordance with the human sustainability definition which states that effective participation of employees is necessary in the decision-making process regarding various issues in the University. However, the level of human sustainability is low in the University, and this reflects the design of office spaces as well which, among other issues, mirrors the existing hierarchy (see chapter four).

Buildings and offices of an organisation indicate that their design, decoration, furniture and appliances compose “cues on hierarchy, status and appropriate behaviour” and peoples’ position in it (Baldry, 1999, p.535). Prior research in higher education examines the introduction of open plan spaces due to the growing managerialism in the field. For example, research in higher education in the United Kingdom and Australia, despite the fact that it focuses on academics, gives valuable insights regarding open space offices and hierarchy. These findings are associated with the degree of personal space and the introduction of academic open plan which is usually “paradoxically hierarchical”. For example, associate lecturers were given offices with six to eight positions, lecturers were given offices with two to four positions, and the only ones with their own private office were senior academics and managers (Baldry & Barnes, 2012). This research concluded that despite the “rhetoric of synergy” the presiding logic for open plan is one of cost cutting and that the experience for numerous academics is showing deleterious to both “scholarship” and “professional identity” (Baldry & Barnes, 2012).

The analysis consistent with these findings indicates that the lower grades (i.e., programme administrators) were moved from their enclosed offices, from one to

several persons, to open space hubs that include many colleagues. Some other administrative and support staff (i.e., finance) share offices with three to five people, junior academics share offices with others depending on their grade, usually one or two others, and more senior academics and managers often have their own private office. These differences reflect, once more, the increased hierarchical structure of the University, emphasising issues of inequality and limited respect for dignity and humanity. Knight & Haslam (2010) argue that, given the harmful outcomes of open space offices, their continued design and implementation in organisations is additionally unfounded when considering the empirical proof that enclosure does not diminish the interplay that is crucial for achieving group tasks (i.e., information sharing).

The results of the University staff survey, which include all roles in the University, are used as a secondary form of data in this study when relevant issues are examined. Just over half (59%) of respondents in the University's staff survey in 2018 are satisfied with their physical environment and have the resources they need to complete their work effectively. Only half (51%) of respondents are able to handle the conflicting demands on their time at work (University website).

Consequently, the analysis of the interview material indicates that the level of absorption of programme administrators in their job is medium to low with a possibility to decrease in the near future. Absorption/inattention is the last key theme of work engagement. The following section discusses proactive work behaviour, which is the second concept of worker outcomes examined in this study.

## **6.2 Proactive Work Behaviour**

Proactivity is significant in the workplace nowadays, where there is more competition and greater pressure for innovation (Crant, 2000; Fay & Frese, 2001; Parker, 2000; Sonnentag, 2003). People who are proactive execute their main tasks and responsibilities better (Thompson, 2005). Proactivity is also significant for individual career success (Seibert et al., 1999). Although there has been a substantial growth in proactive concepts, there is very little known about how diverse behaviours connect to one another or about more general procedures

and antecedents of proactive behaviour (Crant, 2000). This maybe the case because research on proactivity has not come out “as an integrated research stream in the organizational behaviour literature. There is no single definition, theory, or measure driving this body of work; rather, researchers have adopted a number of different approaches...and they have examined them in a number of seemingly disconnected literatures” (Crant, 2000, p.435). Instead there is a worry that there is a possibility of diverse constructs that might double without being combined (Parker & Collins, 2010).

Recent research focuses on clarifying the meaning of proactivity in the workplace and shows its value for encouraging “job performance,” “career success,” “socialization” and other significant outcomes (Parker et al., 2010). Whether proactive behaviour is extra-role, in-role, task performance or citizenship is another issue to be clarified. However, no matter what the case, all kinds of performance can be implemented in a proactive manner to differing degrees (Crant, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Griffin et al., 2007; Parker & Collins, 2010). Proactive work behaviour is diverse from “task performance,” “adaptive performance” and citizenship (Parker & Collins, 2010). For instance, in adaptive performance persons alter their behaviour to adjust to new circumstances (Pulakos et al., 2000). Adaptivity necessitates adapting to change whereas proactive behaviour comprises starting change (Frese & Fay, 2001; Griffin et al., 2007).

Research in higher education remains limited, especially regarding employees. The majority of studies focus on students and their ability to proactively cope with various situations (i.e., depression, college transition, communication with academics and other issues) (Bagana et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2013; Zhou, 2014; Brown et al., 2006; Islam et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2014; Cho & Lee, 2016; Clements & Kamau, 2018). Other studies, for instance, focus on academics and the way their proactive personality is related to various issues (Bergeron et al., 2014; Wahat, 2009; Zhu et al., 2017; Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016). Scholarly literature suggests that high-quality interpersonal relationships (IPRs) with a high level of shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, which have a high level of relational coordination, may promote proactive work behaviour. This, in turn, is

linked to advanced organisational performance and enhances the creative and innovative attitudes of employees (Warshawsky et al., 2012; Gittell, 2016).

Scholarly work has identified both “constructive” and “destructive” proactive work behaviours (Moss et al., 2003). This study focuses only on the constructive proactive work behaviour of employees in the University. Other types of proactive behaviour are also identified. For example, Parker & Collins (2010, p.636) specify three wide “targets of impact” such behaviours could be administered: “the internal organization environment (proactive work behavior), the organization’s fit with the external environment (proactive strategic behavior), and the individual’s fit within the organizational environment (proactive person-environment [P-E] fit behavior)”. This thesis focuses on the first type and defines proactive work behaviour as “taking control of, and, bringing about change within, the internal organizational environment” (Parker & Collins, 2010, p.637).

Proactive work behaviour is analysed based on its key themes (Figure 6.1). These themes represent the two extreme ends since it operates on a continuum from very low to very high. Therefore, the level of proactive work behaviour of programme administrators, as of most workgroups in organisations, would fall somewhere in between those two extremes. The analysis of proactive work behaviour begins with the key theme of individual innovation/individual stagnation which is discussed in the following section.

### **6.2.1 Individual innovation/Individual stagnation**

The key role of innovation in the long-term survival of organisations creates ongoing interest equally among social scientists and practitioners. The reason for this is that the basis of innovation is ideas, and it is people who “develop, carry, react to, and modify ideas” (Van de Ven, 1986, p.592). One of the main issues in the management of innovation is the management of attention. Managing attention is hard because individuals slowly adjust to their environments in such a manner that their recognition of necessity worsens, making them act only in case of a crisis (Van de Ven, 1986). Innovation and creativity are similar but not identical. Creativity refers to the construction of new and useful notions (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988); innovation refers to the construction or adoption

of useful notions and notion implementation (Van de Ven, 1986). This thesis utilises the following definition of individual innovation which starts with a “problem recognition and the generation of ideas or solutions, either novel or adopted” (Scott & Bruce, 1994, p.581). Then, the person,

“...seeks sponsorship for an idea...[and] finally completes the idea by producing a prototype or model of the innovation...that can be touched or experienced, that can now be diffused, mass-produced, turned to productive use, or institutionalized...Thus, innovation is viewed here as a multistage process, with different activities and different individual behaviours necessary at each stage” (Scott & Bruce, 1994, p.582).

An exemplifying behaviour of individual innovation is trying to find novel methods, technologies and/or ideas about products, issues (Parker & Collins, 2010). Persons involved in individual innovation could be expected to be involved in any mix of these conducts at any one time, because innovation in this sense is depicted by “discontinuous activities” rather than separate, consecutive stages (Scott & Bruce, 1994). The analysis of the interviews reflects the issue of discontinuous activities since programme administrators are not involved in all of them when they engage in individual innovation. Thus, although the vast majority of programme administrators recognise the problem and produce ideas, and even solutions, they rarely implement these ideas. When implementation happens, it is primarily regarding practical issues (i.e., change of a spreadsheet) rather than strategic matters (i.e., change of a procedure).

Subsequently, although persons are encouraged to propose new and alternative ideas regarding an issue, these ideas are not always implemented. This is primarily due to the highly inflexible bureaucratic structure in the University which resists change derived from staff. Prior research indicates that this type of proactive work behaviour encounters implementation issues, despite its benefits, because it comprises instability for the future and initiates change which is not always accepted by others in organisations (i.e., managers, supervisors) who favour the “status quo” (Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Parker et al., 2010; Wu & Parker, 2017).

Prior research suggests that when staff are supported to undertake their work differently without agonising about possible barriers, it is likely to enhance

proactive work behaviour (Wu & Parker, 2017). Principals can highly contribute in creating this type of supportive environment by showing, for example, “general support for the efforts of followers, and by encouraging their autonomy and empowering them to take on more responsibility in line with their growing expertise and interest” (Avolio & Bass, 1995, p.202). There are contradictory findings regarding the role of leader support for encouraging proactive work behaviour since some have reported a positive relationship between the two and some a negative one (Axtell & Parker, 2003; Madjar et al., 2002; Ramus & Steger, 2000; Parker et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, a key reasoning for this discussion is that support from leaders advances a higher perception of “self-determination” (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). This encourages staff members’ perceptions of competence and readiness to start change regarding the future (Wu & Parker, 2017). The support of principals positively forecasts idea implementation (Axtell et al., 2000) and creative performance (Madjar et al., 2002). There is no agreement of what results in “effective support” from a principal regarding proactive work behaviour (Wu & Parker, 2017). Despite those disagreements, “leaders’ support in the form of availability, encouragement of growth, and non-interference” can highly enhance the proactive work behaviour of employees (Wu & Parker, 2017, p.1043). It is significant for leaders to undertake training in order to comprehend the meaning of being “supportive”. Diverse understandings might exist, some of which could discourage proactive work behaviour, such as individual innovation (Wu & Parker, 2017).

The analysis is consistent with these research findings. For example, the leaders of the University, the Senior Management Group, often do not provide the type of support that may enhance proactive work behaviour in general and, particularly, individual innovation. They decide on their own about the policies and procedures without listening to employees or allowing their participation. Therefore, leaders are not aware of how to support their staff by being available, are not encouraging their staff’s growth (i.e., limited training, limited promotion possibilities) and they are interfering in the way the programme administrators are doing their work (i.e., imposed procedures and policies that need to be followed) (see chapter four). Consequently, leaders’ support is limited in the University. This does not assist frontline staff to fully reach

individual innovation and implement their ideas on strategic issues. For example, they cannot change a policy which they consider complicated and dysfunctional (i.e., procedure related to the contract of graduate teaching assistants).

The analysis indicates that there is more support for programme administrators within functions. Programme administrators' managers are more supportive of their staff by being available, encouraging and not interfering with their responsibilities. This supportive behaviour encourages individual innovation to a certain extent. Consequently, frontline staff are encouraged to recognise the problem and discuss their innovative ideas and implementation methods. However, line managers' support is not sufficient to allow programme administrators to implement these ideas due to the highly bureaucratic system and centralised decision-making system of the University which provides less support from the Senior Management Group.

The analysis suggests that the University's hierarchical system also discourages other aspects of frontline staff's work, such as "job control," "autonomy" and "complexity" of their tasks which, based on prior research, could further discourage individual innovation. Circumstances that limit job control discourage persons to affect behaviour (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Scholarly research shows that "on days when being highly recovered, an individual with high job control showed a higher level of task performance...whereas on days when being poorly recovered, an individual with high job control showed a lower level of task performance" (Binnewies et al., 2009, p.87). The analysis indicates that programme administrators have limited job control since other colleagues (i.e., line managers) can interfere and change their scheduled work plan, even at the last moment changing their priorities (i.e., asking to do something else than what they are doing). In this case their individual innovation is discouraged.

Prior research indicates that "enriched jobs" with "autonomy" and "complexity" of tasks also contribute in affecting perceptions of control over the workplace. Thus, they could forecast idea implementation (Parker et al., 2006) and propose advancements (Axtell et al., 2000). Additionally, the hierarchical position of staff, with higher level roles and higher change expectations related to their roles can greatly encourage individual innovation (Fuller et al., 2006). The



analysis indicates that these findings reflect the fact that limited job autonomy, complexity of tasks and job control of programme administrators further discourages their individual innovation levels. Other studies demonstrate that a “high-quality leader-member exchange” predicts individual innovation (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004).

Prior research evidence suggests that positive relationships within functions facilitate “issue selling” between people (Ashford et al., 1998). Moreover, high levels of relational coordination can potentially lower the “status boundaries” that separate workers, taking away status hierarchy and resolving an obstacle to innovation, thereby enhancing higher levels of performance. Thus, workers “are more likely to innovate...learn from each other and from their failures, and...feel sufficient psychological safety to do so, when they have high levels of relational coordination with each other” (Gittell, 2016, p.27). The analysis, consistent with these findings, suggests that the vast majority of programme administrators who also have a high level of relational coordination with their immediate colleagues (i.e., line managers), are encouraged to discuss their novel ideas. This could be compared to “issue selling” even though their ideas are not implemented due to a top-down hierarchical structure (Table 6-4).

**Table 6-4 Individual innovation of programme administrators in their work in the University**

“[For] example, [when] I approached the administrator of one subject area, because we were dealing with the same academic staff when it came to time tabling [and talked about new and innovative ideas]. [Consequently,] we created a spreadsheet together.”

**(C2, programme administrator)**

“I brought in a new system where you share all of the information, of all the students, that are registered with the disability service, [as well as] what their exam provisions and their non-exam provisions are. [That system] is very easy for an academic to go in and just filter by the courses that they teach. [So,] they then say, ‘Ok, I am teaching first year maths, I have twenty students, and they are registered with the disability services.’ This was accepted by the School.”

**(B1, programme administrator)**

“For example, we [myself and the other programme administrators], might talk about the shared folders [that exist on] the shelf, and on how we save things. These are the things we might [discuss and] change.”

**(C1, programme administrator)**

“I am continuously looking for new methods and/or better ways to do things.”

**(C5, programme administrator)**

“So rather than have the academics do it for honours [undergraduate programmes], and then do the same thing for post graduate taught programmes that they are teaching, we put it all in the same document and sent it out, so they had one place to go [and look for this issue]. That happened, [and] it was quite good.”

**(C2, programme administrator)**

Consequently, the interview material suggests that the level of individual innovation of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is low. The second key theme of proactive work behaviour is problem prevention/problem manifestation and is discussed below.

### **6.2.2 Problem prevention/Problem manifestation**

Research in problem prevention remains limited despite the fact that it is identified as a significant element of proactive work behaviour (Parker & Collins, 2010). Problem prevention, in this study, is defined, “The long-term focus on work enables the individual to consider things to come (new demands, new or reoccurring problems, emerging opportunities) and to do something proactively about them. Thus, problems and opportunities are anticipated, and the person prepares to deal with them immediately” (Frese & Fay, 2001, p.140). An example of exemplifying behaviour of problem prevention is aiming to discover the real cause of issues that are mistaken (Parker & Collins, 2010).

The analysis of the interview material suggests that the primary ways the majority of programme administrators consider significant for preventing problems comprise: learning from their own and other people’s mistakes (i.e., exchanging ideas with colleagues and observing how they have resolved similar problems); planning well in advance; organising their work (i.e., identifying their priorities); issuing guidelines; focusing on the job (i.e., being focused and staying focused); knowing the job; providing knowledge to colleagues and students (i.e., updates on room changes, times, or other information); knowing and managing technology (i.e., the new systems that are frequently introduced); and collaborating with colleagues and students (i.e., helping colleagues to undertake a task and explaining all relevant information) (Table 6-5).

Table 6-5 Problem prevention of programme administrators in their work in the University

“If someone from the programme administrators needs help, I help them, and I also [try to] be focused, [which are] ways of preventing problems. Knowing what you are doing, [is another way of preventing problems].” (A1, programme administrator)

“[We have to] make sure that they [students] have all the information they need, so they know where the people that can support them are. For example, the study advice. [We should make] sure they have that, [and] that would prevent anxiety attacks or [other issues].” (B1, programme administrator)

“When there were delays due to strikes of academics, the University was asking the programme administrators to take all papers to the registry. [This means] that I should go to the hall 38 times and my colleague, who is administering 50 courses, 50 times. I said to [the line manager] that this is impossible, and they discussed with the College, [and the people responsible] understood our point of view. So that is an example of a problem that we saw coming and we were able to prevent it to happen.” (C5, programme administrator)

“I am trying to create the guidelines that will help the people in the future, [to find out who is doing what], so [they will not search] around in the dark, or waste time sending an email to someone who does not know how to deal with it [an issue]. All the programme administrators have the same problems.” (D4, programme administrator)

Although programme administrators try to prevent problems in many diverse ways they often do not manage to do so. For example, although they plan ahead and organise their work, sometimes they cannot do it because the work demands change, priorities change. This is dependent on what line managers or the School and University request. There is an inadequate amount of job control. Although programme administrators control some parts of their job (i.e., uploading the grades) they cannot always control other colleagues (i.e., unpredictable changes and requests by academics and line managers) or the University (i.e., changes in the policies and procedures). Focusing on the job is frequently viewed as a challenge, more so since they are now working in open space hubs where they cannot easily concentrate (i.e., frequent interruptions, noise).

Consequently, the analysis of the interview material suggests that the level of problem prevention of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is low. The third key theme of proactive work behaviour is taking charge/not taking charge and is discussed below.

### 6.2.3 Taking charge/Not taking charge

Proactive individuals are more likely to perceive their tasks and responsibilities in a broader manner (Parker et al., 1997). Therefore, they “redefine” their roles

to include novel tasks and objectives (Frese & Fay, 2001). Taking charge is defined in this study as, “Taking charge entails voluntary and constructive efforts, by individual employees, to effect organizationally functional change with respect to how work is executed within the contexts of their jobs, work units, or organizations. It...is inherently change oriented and aimed at improvement” (Morrison & Phelps, 1999, p.403). An example of exemplifying behaviour of taking charge is trying to create ameliorated processes in the work context (Parker & Collins, 2010).

Prior research indicates that staff are more likely to take charge when they recognise that senior management are willing to listen to their suggestions and to their started actions of change (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). This finding emphasises the significance of a “context” that assures staff that taking charge, will not be dealt with as opposition or necessitate “high political risks”. When staff view that top management assists positive attempts to create development, they might be more self-assured that taking charge will be effectual and are less likely to worry about possible costs (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Thus, despite the fact that supervisors have the greatest direct connection with employees, it is the top management who “set the tone and context” for the organisation (McDermott et al., 2013). The analysis of the interview data, consistent with these findings, suggests that the vast majority of programme administrators, across all four Schools, are less likely to take charge and initiate change for improvement in the workplace. This is the case primarily because they do not recognise the Senior Management Group as being willing to listen to their suggestions and to their started actions of change. There is a centralised decision-making process in the University which takes limited consideration of the views of frontline staff (see chapter four).

Staff are also more likely to take charge to the degree that they have a “high level of self-efficacy” and an “internalized sense of responsibility” for encouraging change at work (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Self-efficacy is a significant predecessor of taking charge and similar behaviours (Axtell & Parker, 2003; Speier & Frese, 1997). Procedural justice is another factor, according to research, that influences the level of taking charge. Employees are more likely to take charge when they perceive their organisation to be high in procedural justice. It seems that having fair policies and regulations makes certain that

persons view themselves as being in a safe enough position to be proactive. In contrast, the absence of procedural justice might make them perceive their taking charge as “overly risky” (McAllister et al., 2007). Additionally, the decision regarding taking or not taking charge is influenced by both context and personal traits. Thus, even within the same institution, some persons may be more likely to take charge than others, particularly the persons with “high self-efficacy” and “felt responsibility” (Morrison & Phelps, 1999).

The analysis, consistent with this research, suggests that the vast majority of programme administrators have an internalised sense of responsibility which is also demonstrated through their high levels of dedication. However, frequently, they do not have a “high level of self-efficacy” and they often view the University as having a low level of procedural justice. Limited design for human sustainability is highly responsible for these perceptions. Hence, employees who do not have the trait of self-efficacy as an individual characteristic are less likely to take charge and consider the University to have a low level of procedural justice (see chapters four and five).

Consequently, the high level of felt responsibility, although necessary for taking charge, it is not sufficient since perceptions of a high level of self-efficacy and procedural justice remain limited in this study. The analysis indicates that the vast majority of programme administrators do not engage in taking charge, as a behaviour of initiating action for improvement in the workplace. This could be the case because they consider it to be risky behaviour. Common ways of taking charge and dealing with issues that are not directly related to their work, are through helping others in the University. For example, they help colleagues deal with personal and professional matters (i.e., when they are sick, when they do not comprehend a procedure or technology). They help students with various requests that are not necessarily part of their job (i.e., finding some information regarding medical or other issues); and their School and University in general (i.e., things they need to do for the School, like carrying furniture from one room to another) (Table 6-6).

Table 6-6 Taking charge of programme administrators in their work in the University

“I had an academic say that they no longer wanted to deal with a certain query, [although] it was an academic issue. [So, I had to deal with it, even if], I should not be dealing with [it since] I am not an academic. Fortunately, I knew the answer, and where to [direct] the student.” (A5, programme administrator)

“Sometimes if...students know you, and you have a good relationship with them, they might come to you and ask you to do something, which really is not your job to do, and so I think it is up to you then to [decide]. [I thought], ‘Ok. Should I do this, or should I pass this to the appropriate person?’ So, it is an individual [decision] based on the situation.” (B1, programme administrator)

“This is confidential stuff [things in one office that need to be removed to the first floor], and nobody will come to take it up here, but only from the first floor. [So] sometimes it involves us physically [carrying stuff], just to get it done.” (C3, programme administrator)

These ways of behaving do not increase the level of taking charge because they are not change oriented for improvement in the workplace. They are more related to organisational citizenship behaviour rather than the taking charge one (Morrison & Phelps, 1999). Although these extra-role behaviours are very significant and necessary, they are not aimed at bringing change and, as such, “not sufficient for ensuring the continued viability of an organization” (Morrison & Phelps, 1999, p.403). Moreover, because they engage in these behaviours on top of their high workload and time constraints, they run the risk, according to research, of being more tired and “exhausted”. This will further decrease the human sustainability level in the University. Staff who “go the extra mile” might undergo “citizenship fatigue” which can influence the future manifestation of “organizational citizenship behavior” (Bolino et al., 2015). The results of several empirical studies on this potential “dark side” of proactive work behaviour support that it is related to elevated levels of strain and exhaustion (Fay & Huttges, 2017; Pingel et al., 2019; Strauss et al., 2017; Zacher et al., 2019).

Consequently, the analysis of the interview material suggests that the level of taking charge of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is low. Taking charge and voice are different from individual innovation because they do not foreground newness as individual innovation does, despite the fact that all three behaviours focus on influencing one’s internal environment (Parker & Collins, 2010). Felt accountability for change, mentioned in relation to taking charge, also forecasts voice (Fuller et al., 2006). Voice/lack

of voice is the last key theme of proactive work behaviour and is discussed below.

#### 6.2.4 Voice/Lack of voice

“Voice” is significant when an organisation’s context is dynamic and new ideas assist continuous amelioration (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Voice, in this study, is defined as, “Voice” is “[a] promotive behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than merely criticize. Voice is making innovative suggestions for change and recommending modifications to standard procedures even when others disagree” (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p.109). An example of exemplifying behaviour of voice is communicating your points of view related to issues at work to colleagues despite the fact that your perceptions vary, and others do not agree (Parker & Collins, 2010).

The emphasis is on voice behaviours that question the status quo in a constructive manner (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Voice is related to discussing issues that influence an employee’s workgroup, searching details regarding those matters and presenting “innovative suggestions” even if others disagree (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Prior research demonstrates that “high-quality leader-member exchange” forecasts voice in the organisation (Burriss et al., 2008). The analysis, consistent with this research, suggests that the vast majority of programme administrators perceive themselves as having a low-quality relationship with the Senior Management Group due to the low level of human sustainability in the University. Moreover, there is a low level of relational coordination between themselves and top management (see chapters four and five). Hence, especially after restructuring in 2010, persons have lost their voice since the Senior Management Group is making all the major decisions on policies.

“I do discuss [and say my views], but all has been decided by the time we hear about it, [so, the result is], ‘This is what we are going to do now’, ‘This is how we are going to do this’, ‘This is how it is going to work. So, go and learn it.’ There is [no] input from us at all.” (A4, programme administrator)

Although the majority of programme administrators have a lower level of relational coordination with their colleagues between functions, they have a higher level within functions. This influences their voice within their



workgroups. Scholarly work indicates that positive relationships within the workgroup forecast voice. The analysis, consistent with this finding, suggests that the vast majority of the programme administrators have voice in their functions, they are usually included in meetings and discuss all issues relevant to their work with their line managers and other immediate colleagues. However, this voice does not include strategic issues but only practical, everyday matters (i.e., change of a spreadsheet). The primary reason is the centralised decision-making process that does not allow staff to decide on strategic matters.

Moreover, scholarly research shows that employees are more likely to behave consistently with their individual traits if the circumstances activate facets of these characteristics. This finding influences the level of voice (Parker et al., 2010). For example, Fuller et al. (2006) claim that “access to resources” forecast voice by means of perceived responsibility for change only for persons with certain proactive traits and not for those who do not possess such characteristics. However, the analysis suggests that the vast majority of programme administrators, across the four Schools, despite their individual characteristics, have limited access to resources (i.e., information on finances) and a limited voice in the University. Thus, although prior research suggests that in certain organisations employees with proactive personalities could have a higher level of voice this is not the case in the University.

Consequently, the analysis of the interview material suggests that the level of voice of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is low. The following section discusses the theoretical construct of job satisfaction which is the last worker outcome examined in this study.

### **6.3 Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction (JS) is one of the most frequently studied aspects in organisational behaviour research and a subject of broad interest for people in organisations (Erro-Garces & Ferreira, 2019). Job satisfaction has become a matter of great interest during the last decades worldwide, due to utilitarian (i.e., decreased absenteeism and turnover, and increased productivity in the context of work) and humanitarian reasons (i.e., workers’ improved health and wellbeing) (Westover & Taylor, 2010). Job satisfaction is positively related to



various issues such as “leader empowering behaviours,” and “shared leadership,” (Mehra et al., 2006). Job and organisational factors are good “predictors” of job satisfaction. Both intrinsic (i.e., “career development through opportunities to update one’s skills”) and extrinsic (i.e., “pay and promotional opportunities”) rewards, as well as work relations with co-workers and management, are positively related to job satisfaction (Westover & Taylor, 2010).

Research in higher education has focused on the job satisfaction of academics (Rhodes et al., 2007). Research that focuses on administrators remains limited in the field and it “cumulatively” indicates that there is “little unity” in understanding job satisfaction in a college or university context (Smerek & Peterson, 2007). Scholarly work suggests that high-quality interpersonal relationships (IPRs) with a high level of shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, enhance job satisfaction (Gittell et al., 2008; Cramm et al., 2014; Albertsen et al., 2014; Gittell, 2016).

Job satisfaction, in this study, is defined as “the degree of positive affect towards a job or its components. This is determined by characteristics both of the individual and of the job, and particularly how work is organized within the corporate work environment” (Adams & Bond, 2000, p.538). Hence, it is viewed as a positive concept reporting, especially, work attitudes (Utrianinen & Kyngas, 2009). Job satisfaction is analysed based on one key theme job satisfaction/job dissatisfaction (Figure 6.1). The theme represents the two extreme ends since it operates on a continuum from very low to very high. Therefore, the level of job satisfaction of programme administrators, as of most workgroups in organisations, would fall somewhere between those two extremes. This key theme is discussed below.

### **6.3.1 Job satisfaction/Job dissatisfaction**

The analysis of the interview material suggests that the majority of programme administrators are satisfied with their work to support the students primarily because of the variety in their work. Variety makes work more interesting, since they are dealing with various topics instead of only one or two (i.e., pastoral

care, uploading grades, timetabling, induction). Although there is less variety in relation to the past, it still exists to a certain degree in their work. This is what makes their job interesting. Job traits like “interesting work” “achieving something” are demonstrated to be invaluable to staff (Pacheco & Webber, 2016). International research on job satisfaction in six European countries including Great Britain, utilising non-panel longitudinal data for 1989, 1997, 2005, confirms earlier findings that job and organisational factors, are good “predictors” of job satisfaction. Rewards, especially intrinsic (i.e., “interesting job”), according to the study findings, are “major drivers” of job satisfaction for the majority of countries for all periods (Westover & Taylor, 2010).

The analysis of the interview data indicates that a second important reason that the majority of programme administrators are satisfied with their job is their relationships with colleagues and students. Job traits like “working with pleasant people” are demonstrated to be invaluable to staff (Pacheco & Webber, 2016). A cooperative environment at work has a positive influence on job satisfaction as research undertaken in 32 European countries (18 Western, including Great Britain, and 14 Eastern countries) demonstrates. Thus, people at work are “most satisfied” when the quality of their employment situation is elevated due to a “non-competitive” and “co-operative” work context (Borooah, 2009). Employees who emphasise more internal aspects of the job (i.e., responsibility, usefulness, social interaction) are more likely to be satisfied than those who emphasise the external aspects (i.e., pay, holidays, promotion chances). One reason could be that external aspects are “competitive,” whereas, internal aspects are “co-operative” (Borooah, 2009). Prior research demonstrates that positive “co-worker” relationships directly affect job satisfaction, which is successively related to ameliorated “emotional” and “physical” well-being (Kelloway et al., 2010).

More powerful workplace relationships like friendships have a positive effect on the work experience. Perceived chances for friendship at work have been directly related to job satisfaction (Riordan & Griffeth, 1995). The quality of these friendship relationships could be mirrored in being sociable outside of the workplace. In this way, employees feel that they can confess to a co-worker and trust them (Nielsen et al., 2000). For instance, higher education research explored the relationship between the quality of a person’s best friendship at

work and job satisfaction based on a large sample of academic and non-academic staff in a university context. Focusing on two kinds of jobs (“faculty” and “staff”) and “work friendships” with colleagues from diverse status (“peer,” “supervisor” and “subordinate”), the outcomes of the study suggest that the “quality of friendship” at the job for both academic and non-academic staff, is related to job satisfaction (Winstead et al., 1995). The analysis, consistent with this research, indicates that the majority of programme administrators view their relationships as good, especially with their immediate colleagues within functions. Various people consider some colleagues to be best friends with whom they socialise out of work, while others socialise with people without considering them best friends.

A third important reason where the majority of programme administrators are satisfied with their work to support the students, is learning and making progress. Learning primarily comes through training and frontline staff try to attend as much training as possible. The Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) states that there is proof of a positive association, between training and job satisfaction (Jones et al., 2009). Scholarly work shows that investing in the development of staff from worldwide organisations affected international job satisfaction (Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). Investment in staff by increasing training, in research study of employment relations, is positively related with the enhancement of job satisfaction (Kalleberg & Rognes, 2000). “Learning opportunities” and “skills development” regarding staff in organisations enhance job satisfaction (Dorasamy & Letoane, 2015). Further research, on both academic and administrative staff at a public university, indicates that training can significantly enhance job satisfaction (Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016) (Table 6-7).

**Table 6-7 Higher level of job satisfaction of programme administrators in their work in the University**

“I use my brain and talk to people. I learn new skills. I find it [my job] intellectually stimulating, because it keeps me thinking about new things.” (A4, programme administrator).

“I am satisfied. I enjoy the variety. It is hard work, there is a lot involved, and you are always incredibly busy. But the reason I enjoy it is, because, I enjoy working with the students.” (A5, programme administrator)

“I am satisfied with my job, [because], they [people here], are understanding. If you cannot come in [because you are sick], and if you are not well, they say, ‘Oh, please go home.’ It is nice to have that.” (B5, programme administrator)

“I enjoy my job. I enjoy with whom I work.” (C3, programme administrator)

“I [am satisfied with my work, especially], because of [the relationships I have with] colleagues in the office, and our line manager. They are very supportive.” (C5, programme administrator)

“People that I would consider as friends maybe two or three...I would see about ten to twenty people outside of work, but they are more work colleagues.” (B1, programme administrator)

The majority of programme administrators are in some way satisfied with their job. However, considering all the reasons put forth, the degree of satisfaction is medium. It is viewed, here, as increasingly becoming low for various reasons. Although the analysis shows that training and learning encourage job satisfaction it also indicates that this enhancement is not high. The primary reason for this is that training in the University is inadequate, short and specific. Prior research suggests that organisations should concentrate on the quantity and quality of training. Hence, if they “increase the volume of training” of staff they could enhance employees’ job satisfaction (Jones et al., 2009). Training of less than two days does not suggest any positive effect on productivity, whereas training that is between one and two days suggests decreasing “quit” and “absent” rates (Jones et al., 2009). Prior research in higher education also shows that academic and administrative staff are not satisfied with their training (Dorasamy & Letoane, 2015).

High workload can also decrease job satisfaction. For example, in a study with 142 participants (55.8% administrative, 21.8% academic support and 25.4% academic) results show that the factors which negatively influence job satisfaction were “work overload” and “pressure” (Dorasamy & Letoane, 2015). The analysis of the interviews, consistent with these findings, indicates that programme administrators are overwhelmed with many procedures that are continuously imposed on them by the University (i.e., new technological systems

that are frequently introduced, forms to be completed). Therefore, increasing overload, which takes place under difficult circumstances in the hubs could, shortly, further decrease the level of their job satisfaction (see chapter four).

Scholarly work shows that the limited or no control regarding lighting and climate is negatively associated with employee satisfaction (Carnevale & Rios, 1995). It also demonstrates with strong proof that working in open space offices diminishes employees' "psychological privacy" and job satisfaction (De Croon et al., 2005). The dense "physical" and "technological surveillance" of the contemporary workplace is a key contributor to "employee disenchantment". Prior research concerning 130 administrative staff suggests a powerful relationship between the low-level of privacy provided in open space offices and major elements of job satisfaction (Knight & Haslam, 2010).

The voice of programme administrators in decision-making is limited in the University and this could further diminish their level of job satisfaction. The leadership role adopted by the Senior Management Group decreases a "shared leadership" and the "structural empowerment" in the University (Mehra et al., 2006). "Shared leadership" could involve various leaders, either arranged officially or in an unofficial, emergent manner (Mehra et al., 2006). Delegation or "decentralization" of formal power in the organisation should take place for thriving change (Wagner et al., 2010). A "decentralization" of formal power suggests participation of employees in the decision-making process, which is associated with job satisfaction. Past research may have underestimated the influence of participative decision making (PDM) on job satisfaction. Diverse organisations are trying to ameliorate the degree of job satisfaction for their staff by permitting them to participate in "job-related decisions" (Pacheco & Webber, 2016). Research in higher education demonstrates that a bureaucratic hierarchy, where the decision-making takes place at the higher positions where the lower roles are more likely to be excluded, demotivates employees of lower positions (Jung & Schin, 2015).

The analysis indicates that hiring, evaluation and promotion processes, and the limited responsibility of programme administrators could discourage job satisfaction. The University's staff reward system has an important influence on job satisfaction (Jung & Schin, 2015). The majority of programme administrators

perceive the hiring, promotion and evaluation systems as unfair and ineffective for diverse reasons (see chapter four). Frontline staff also want further responsibility in their work primarily because they are well educated, with almost all having earned at least one university degree. Prior research in higher education, involving both frontline and academic staff, demonstrates that employee empowerment can significantly enhance job satisfaction. A “nurturing environment” that ameliorates the recognition of empowerment, has a positive influence on staff and, eventually, it can improve organisational effectiveness. Thus, inspiring staff to be responsible, and enabling them to take decisions they are capable of, could be taken into consideration and included in the organisational culture and policies (Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016).

The analysis further suggests that limited job control and workplace flexibility could further decrease the level of the programme administrators’ job satisfaction. The demands imposed on them can take place even at the last moment and change their schedule. Persons have to deal with “last-minute notice” for overtime work (Rhee et al., 2019). Scholarly literature suggests that workplace flexibility, which permits people to better control their work schedule, could decrease turnover intention (Rhee et al., 2019). Turnover has significant costs to organisations (i.e., opportunity costs, costs necessitated for reselection and training costs, diminished level of morale of those who remain). These costs are even more important in cases where the organisation misses people who are difficult to substitute (Lee & Bruvold, 2003).

This is the case with frontline employees in the University. Hence, the analysis indicates that even people from other roles (i.e., academics) argue that the University loses capable programme administrators, due to the high turnover in those key frontline positions (A15, academic). Prior research suggests that the influence of workplace flexibility on turnover intention is not always straightforward. It is likely to be manifested indirectly through the decrease of work-family conflicts and the enhancement of job satisfaction. Consequently, low-wage staff, who consider they have more workplace flexibility, have less work-family conflicts, which increases their job satisfaction. As such, it decreases their intent to leave the organisation (Rhee et al., 2019). Therefore, limited job control, and work flexibility, increases turnover intention, further diminishing job satisfaction (see chapter four).

Consequently, the above stated analysis on job satisfaction suggests that the University shows a limited level of respect for the frontline staff. The majority of programme administrators perceive that their colleagues in other roles and functions (i.e., academics, finance, operations, Human Resources, Senior Management Group) do not always respect them. Limited respect, not always adequate and consistent, can further decrease job satisfaction. Past research suggests “respectful treatment” of staff at all levels, is associated with job satisfaction. The Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement survey (SHRM) of 600 US employees found that 67% of employees rated it as “very important” positioning it at the top of the list together with “culture,” “connection,” and “feeling appreciated” by the organisation for doing a good job. Results indicate that appreciation could develop a “bond” between and among the various roles and functions (i.e., managers, employees) (SHRM, 2016).

The increasingly specialised tasks undertaken by the programme administrators, is also a form of limited respect which can further decrease job satisfaction, since variety is fundamental and positively associated with it. This specialisation trend makes programme administrators focus on a few, or even one task, further discouraging their relationships with colleagues, since they will not need to collaborate, as much as in the past. This further decreases job satisfaction since collaborative and cooperative relationships, according to the majority of programme administrators are significant. Relational coordination theory focuses on role relationships and their coordination for the purpose of task integration and claims to influence employee job satisfaction, due to both its “instrumental” benefits for successfully completing work and to its “intrinsic benefits” for enhancing positive connections with other persons (Gittell, 2002a; Gittell et al., 2008) (Table 6-8).

**Table 6-8 Limited level of job satisfaction of programme administrators in their work in the University**

“At the moment [I am] not satisfied [with my job]. I find it very frustrating...because things continue to go wrong, and I see my colleagues and friends struggling as well. [So], I think [that] these new things that have been brought in, these new systems, and new ways of doing things, new processes are [not] helping us. A lot of us are very unhappy in our jobs...The reason I am still here is, because I have been here for so long, my pension is very good, and my working hours suit me. And probably my confidence has been eaten away so much, that I am not sure I could get another job somewhere else, so I stay. But possibly I have to rethink that, if things do not get better, because they have not been good here for a long time, and nothing seems to change. It is just one [technological] system after another, that is introduced that just does not talk to any of the other systems and that makes everybody’s life more complicated instead of easier, [which] is not good.” (A4, programme administrator)

“[I am not satisfied when I do many] boring, [and] repetitive stuff, like setting up the courses in the computer systems, [or] the students’ feedback surveys [about course evaluations, which can cover the content of the course and other issues].” (C1, programme administrator)

“I would like to be challenged more. Maybe [I do] not [feel respected] by the others all the time. [There is] a lack of understanding, that we are really busy. Nobody [asks] me, if I am struggling or anything.” (C2, programme administrator)

The results of the University staff survey, which include all roles in the University, are used as a secondary form of data in this study when relevant issues are examined. Slightly more than half (57%) of respondents in the survey in 2018, would recommend the University as a great place to work, in comparison to the much higher number (91%) of respondents, who would do so, in the survey of 2016. Furthermore, a very low number (39%) of respondents in 2018 are optimistic about their future opportunities for career development (University website). This also implies that the medium to low degree of job satisfaction will hardly improve in the future under the current circumstances.

Consequently, the analysis of the interview data indicates that the level of job satisfaction of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is medium to low with a possible decrease in the short run.

## 6.4 Summary of worker outcomes

This chapter has examined the level of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students. The programme administrators are the focal group in this analysis and their work to support the students, is the focal work process. The key themes related to the theoretical concepts of work engagement,



proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction are examined. The analysis of the data collected from the interviews, across the four Schools, suggests the below stated findings.

Work engagement is defined as a, “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). It focuses on the relationships between employees and their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). Work engagement is examined along three key themes. First, vigour/impotency: The level of vigour of programme administrators regarding their work is medium to low. Although their work, now, is usually meaningful, interesting and intellectually stimulating, there has been an increasing trend over recent years, which prioritises repetitive tasks over variety, diminishing the level of vigour in their work. Second, dedication/disloyalty: The level of dedication of programme administrators in their job is high primarily because they work longer hours, attend training and do their best to support the students. This indicates the pride frontline staff have for their work despite the various constraints they encounter in the workplace. Third, absorption/inattention: The level of absorption of programme administrators in their job is medium to low with a possibility of decreasing in the near future. They are absorbed due to variety and a focus on longer tasks (i.e., the investigation of a complicated issue, or uploading grades in the system). However, the circumstances in the workplace (i.e., frequent interruptions, noise) indicate that they will be increasingly less absorbed in the future. Prior research indicates that not all three dimensions of work engagement, dedication, absorption and vigour, are always equally high (Havens et al., 2013). The analysis is consistent with this finding since the level of vigour and absorption is medium to low, whereas, the level of dedication is high.

Proactive work behaviour is defined as “taking control of, and, bringing about change within the internal organizational environment” (Parker & Collins, 2010, p.637). Proactive work behaviour is examined along four key themes. First, individual innovation/individual stagnation: The level of individual innovation of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is low. Although they are encouraged to discuss their ideas and, as such, get involved in the first two stages of individual innovation, especially within functions, these ideas are sometimes implemented only for practical (i.e., changing a

spreadsheet) and not strategic (i.e., changing a procedure) reasons. Second, problem prevention/problem manifestation: The level of problem prevention of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is low. Although they try to prevent problems in many ways (i.e., planning in advance, issuing guidelines) they often do not manage to do so, primarily due to limited job control (i.e., priorities change, demands change) and limited focusing on the job (i.e., frequent interruptions). Third, taking charge/not taking charge: The level of taking charge of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is low, primarily because the ways of taking charge (i.e., helping others) are not aimed at bringing change, as they are supposed to when taking charge. Fourth, voice/lack of voice: The level of voice of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is low. Although they are encouraged to discuss their views, primarily within functions rather than between functions, these ideas are only implemented when they refer to practical matters (i.e., change of a spreadsheet) rather than strategic issues (i.e., change of a procedure).

Job satisfaction is defined as “the degree of positive affect towards a job or its components. This is determined by characteristics both of the individual and of the job, and particularly how work is organized within the corporate work environment” (Adams & Bond, 2000, p.538). It is examined along one key theme, that of job satisfaction/job dissatisfaction. The level of job satisfaction of programme administrators regarding their work to support the students is medium to low with a possible decrease in the short run. Although they are satisfied primarily, because of the variety in their work and their relationships in the workplace, variety is constantly decreasing, and more specialised repetitive tasks are increasing. Consequently, the level of job satisfaction is more likely to decrease in the short run.

Overall, the level of work engagement, proactive behaviour and job satisfaction of programme administrators in their work is medium to low with the exception of dedication which is high. Restructuring that took place in the University in 2010 greatly influenced the work outcomes of frontline staff. The analysis indicates that leaders’ support is fundamental for the encouragement of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction. Although middle managers and supervisors are closer to employees, the top managers are the

people who set the scene and highly influence worker outcomes. Prior research suggests that in comprehending how to enhance frontline staff engagement levels top managers should first comprehend their own level of engagement. Top managers must give priority to being “visible” and “accessible” since they are a “resource” for employees. Limited leadership leads to a detrimental workplace that has limited “access to resources” (Bergstedt & Wei, 2020).

Hakanen & Roodt (2010) have observed, in their research, that the degree of work engagement is not decided upon based on employee rank or role at work, and that irrespective of function, work or occupation, it is feasible to feel vigorous, be dedicated and become absorbed at work. Therefore, they counsel organisations centre on ameliorating job resources, which “by definition” assist staff to reach their work objectives and “stimulate personal growth, learning and development” (Hakanen & Roodt, 2010, p.98). “Authentic leadership” is related to an increased level of work engagement and job satisfaction. These senior managers are capable of cultivating work environments that advance shared decision-making. They can succeed by “participating in self-reflection, seeking regular feedback and listening to others’ perspectives” (Bergstedt & Wei, 2020, p.52).

The analysis indicates that the Senior Management Group is not adequately supportive and visible to employees and does not encourage shared decision-making in the University (see chapter four). This highly top-down bureaucratic structure could limit the enhancement of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction. Prior research suggests that employees who do not have a say and voice, do not make decisions and are not provided with related information, are not very committed in their work. Allowing persons to grasp more about the organisation and allowing them to utilise that comprehension to make actual decisions, enhances much more commitment and undertaking of responsibility (O’Reilly III & Pfeffer, 2000). The organisation, in this case the University, could include employees in the decision-making process. Inclusion does not signify only conversation, it signifies providing people with actual authority and accountability to act (O’Reilly III & Pfeffer, 2000). The University could empower rather than demotivate its frontline staff. Through providing a greater amount of accountability to the programme administrators,

it enables them to give the service that they “wanted to provide all along but could not because of an inflexible hierarchical structure” (Carlzon, 1987, p.63).

Participative management encourages the involvement of all stakeholders, including employees, in the decision-making process in diverse degrees. The highest of these degrees “is taking part in the decision, that is, co-deciding what to do” (Mele, 2012, p.94). “Co-decisions” between senior management and employees are infrequent because senior managers usually want to make the last decision (Mele, 2012). This is exactly the case in the University, nowadays. The lack of voice afforded to programme administrators also discourages a positive work environment.

The analysis suggests that frontline staff are also not involved in the design of the workplace. Programme administrators were not asked about their thoughts when they were moved to the open space hubs. The design of the workplace highly contributes to the level of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction. Prior research shows that this limited participation regarding the design of office space demotivates employees. Research evidence from various studies demonstrates that “involving end-users is a win-win solution” both regarding design and staff’s embrace and possession of the alterations in their physical workplace (Nikolaeva & Dello Russo, 2017, p.212). According to scholarly literature, the fact that employees are almost never asked regarding their predilections for office design and that there is no acknowledgement for the necessity for diverse solutions for diverse kinds of persons and contexts is a very significant point. This situation reveals the issue of “employee dignity” at the workplace. The structure of the workplace and its spaces includes various issues that are related to people in organisations (i.e., routine everyday issues, more significant events, interruptions), which could generate negative emotions (Nikolaeva & Dello Russo, 2017). All these considerations, regarding every person, could be related to the issue of dignity at work (Bolton, 2010).

Dignity is central in this study and fundamental to job control and job autonomy which could also influence the employees’ work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction. The analysis indicates that the limited level of job control, job autonomy and respect regarding the dignity and humanity of

frontline staff limits their level of these three worker outcomes. The majority of persons, across the four Schools from all roles, view that this is increasingly the case since restructuring in 2010 (see chapter four). The University's restructuring resulted in a low level of human sustainability which, in turn, resulted in a limited level of relational coordination (see chapters four and five). Consequently, both human sustainability and relational coordination can influence the employee's individual traits which, in turn, modifies their personality which further alters their behaviour at work. Thus, personal transformation takes place that could influence their worker outcomes (i.e., work engagement). However, due to the low levels of both human sustainability and relational coordination, positive personal transformation is limited resulting in low levels of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction. The way human sustainability, relational coordination and worker outcomes relate to each other is discussed in the next and last chapter of this thesis.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

The purpose of this final chapter is to draw major conclusions regarding the theoretical concepts of the research and how they relate to each other. The chapter is structured along these lines and includes three main sections: 7.1 discussion of the key findings and theoretical contribution to knowledge; 7.2 limitations of the study; 7.3 implications of the study.

### **7.1 Discussion of the key findings and theoretical contribution to knowledge**

This section includes a critical analysis of the key findings regarding the three main constructs of the thesis (human sustainability, relational coordination, and worker outcomes) and their associations with each other. The purpose of this analysis is to answer the two research questions of the study. It discusses the key findings in relation to the field of higher education, as well as the organisational field in general. Finally, it states the twofold theoretical contribution to knowledge. This analysis starts with the aims and objectives of the study and the two research questions.

#### **7.1.1 Aims, objectives and research questions of the study**

The aims of the study are twofold: First, to examine how human sustainability, as it is defined in this study, influences relational coordination in the University; and, second, how both human sustainability and relational coordination influence worker outcomes (work engagement, proactive work behaviour, and job satisfaction). The research questions are the following:

Research question 1: “How does design for human sustainability affect relational coordination?”

Research question 2: “How do human sustainability and relational coordination affect worker outcomes?”

The objectives to answer the above stated research questions, are framed from an interpretive perspective, the research strategy is a case study research strategy, and the context of the research, is a large, world-known university in

the United Kingdom. The research is cross-sectional, and studies the associations, not causal relationships, between the constructs of human sustainability, relational coordination and worker outcomes (Gittell et al., 2008).

The focus of the study is on frontline employees and explores the work they do to support students. Despite the fact that research on relational coordination indicates that frontline staff are crucial for the effectiveness of the organisation, research into this topic remains limited. Frontline employees play a critical role but, in many industries, the front-line role is ignored (Gittell et al., 2008). Thus, the unit of analysis is the frontline employees and their relationships with other professional roles, within a particular unit/School in the University. It is therefore a multi-level analysis.

### **7.1.2 Human sustainability in the University**

Sustainability is a broad concept which continues to develop. It has been defined, as well as measured, in diverse ways (Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). The growing interest in sustainability is oriented more towards physical (i.e., environmental and ecological sustainability) than human resources (Pfeffer, 2010a; Pfeffer, 2018). Research in human sustainability remains limited, since “we have not begun to scratch the surface when it comes to reporting on and promoting human sustainability” (Pfeffer, 2018, p.22).

This thesis focuses on human sustainability in order to advance research in the field and argues that human sustainability needs to take a more central position in research, education, business and public policy. In doing so, it supports the following two significant initiatives: The Academy of Management division on the natural environment has, as one of its goals, to deal with people in organisations for sustainability (Pfeffer, 2010a); and, the United Nations “Agenda for 2030” and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (i.e., promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all) created in 2015 (United Nations, 2015). The United Nations adopts the Kantian view, among others, as a conceptual basis for its protection of human rights (i.e., freedom to decent work, to advance one’s human potential). It suggests that all worldwide players “have a moral obligation to respect basic human rights” (Arnold & Bowie, 2004,

p.593). Consequently, this thesis argues that organisations focused on human sustainability and adopting principles of relational coordination, are primarily focusing, among other issues, on the 17 SDGs of the United Nations (see chapter two).

Human sustainability (HS) is viewed here as a way that organisations treat human beings, and a way that they treat each other through their relationships and communication with others, within and beyond their own organisations. I define human sustainability in this study, based on Kant's "Formula of Humanity as an End" and the "Formula of the Realm of Ends" (Kant, [1785] 1990) as follows: "Human sustainability is when organisations respect human beings as free, rational and responsible, include them in policy formulation and decision-making and encourage them to build mutual respect with all persons within and beyond their organisations."

As people are rational, autonomous, and responsible beings, with dignity, organisations should respect them, and not use them for their own purposes and goals as a means only but always, at the same time, as an end in themselves. Moreover, all persons in an organisation should respect themselves and each other, out of self-esteem and duty, and participate in the creation and maintenance of rules and regulations that focus on supporting shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect. Furthermore, if organisations design for human sustainability practices based on the above stated definition, they can facilitate and support the positive "personal transformation" of their employees.

This definition is the basis for designing for human sustainability practices in this study and, whenever human sustainability is mentioned in this thesis, in all chapters, it refers to the above stated definition. The implementation of design for human sustainability based on this definition, focuses on providing significant information to employees (i.e., regarding financial issues), providing meaningful work, encouraging them to respect each other, together with including them in the decision-making of organisational policies.

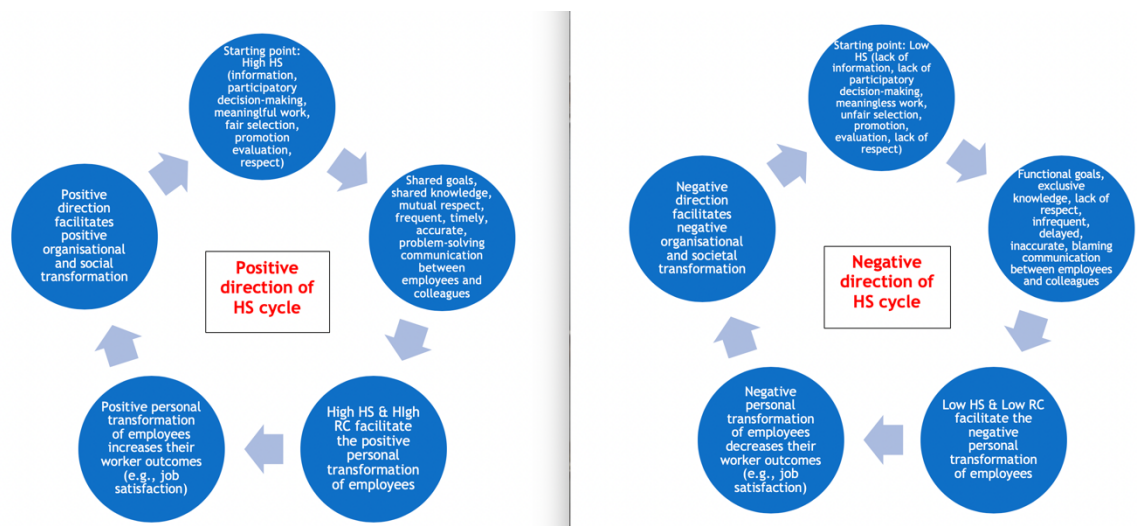
In addition to defining human sustainability (HS) in this study, based on my analysis of the data collected from the interviews, I put forward a conceptual framework called "The Cycle of Human Sustainability". This conceptual



framework aims to answer the two research questions, to show the associations between the three constructs and to explain how an organisation or institution, the University in this study, can facilitate the personal transformation of its employees.

The starting point of the cycle is for an organisation like a University to design its practices for human sustainability, which indicates its level in the University. The level of human sustainability in the University activates either the positive or the negative direction of the cycle of human sustainability (i.e., if there is design for human sustainability the positive direction is activated, if there is no design for human sustainability the negative direction is activated). The positive and negative directions of the cycle of human sustainability represent the two extreme ends of the cycle, since it operates on a continuum, from very high (i.e., when there is a high level of human sustainability) to very low (i.e., when there is a low level of human sustainability). Most organisations would fall somewhere between these two extremes (Figure 7-1).

**Figure 7-1 The Cycle of Human Sustainability**



The cycle of human sustainability works as follows. When there is design for human sustainability (HS) in the University, then all roles (i.e., frontline staff, academics, Senior Management Group) are involved in decision-making. They co-design and implement organisational policies and procedures. Therefore, managers (i.e., the Senior Management Group) and other high status roles (i.e., academics), are more likely to respect other workgroups in the University (i.e., managers are more likely to respect academics or frontline staff and vice versa)

and treat them based on the above stated definition of human sustainability (i.e., always as ends in themselves and never as means only). Consequently, a positive direction of the cycle of human sustainability is active and operates to increase the levels of relational coordination (RC) (i.e., shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and effective communication), between workgroups and functions (i.e., between frontline staff and academics), facilitating the positive personal transformation (PT) of employees (i.e., frontline staff). Moreover, increasing their work engagement (WE), proactive work behaviour (PWB), and job satisfaction (JS). Improved worker outcomes can enhance positive organisational transformation (i.e., the University becomes more viable and sustainable in the short and long run) and positive social transformation (i.e., the University inspires other institutions in the higher education sector, and beyond, to design their organisational practices and policies for human sustainability).

Conversely, if there is limited consideration for the design of human sustainability (HS) in the University, then not all roles (i.e., frontline staff, academics, Senior Management Group) are involved in decision-making. They do not co-design and implement organisational policies and procedures. As a result, managers (i.e., the Senior Management Group) and other high status roles (i.e., academics), are less likely to respect other workgroups in the University (i.e., managers are less likely to respect academics or frontline staff and vice versa) and treat them based on the above stated definition of human sustainability (i.e., always as ends in themselves and never as means only). Consequently, a negative direction of the cycle of human sustainability is active and operates to decrease the levels of relational coordination (RC) (i.e., functional goals, exclusive knowledge, lack of mutual respect and ineffective communication), between workgroups and functions (i.e., between frontline staff and academics), discouraging the positive personal transformation (PT) of employees (i.e., frontline staff). This further decreases their work engagement (WE), proactive work behaviour (PWB) and job satisfaction (JS). Weakened worker outcomes can discourage positive organisational transformation (i.e., the University becomes less viable and sustainable in the short and long run) and positive social transformation (i.e., the University is less likely to inspire other

institutions in the higher education sector and beyond to design their organisational practices and policies for human sustainability).

My analysis of the data collected from the interviews of all roles (i.e., academic, administrative staff), across all four Schools suggests there is a limited design for human sustainability in the University. There is limited provision of information to the staff (i.e., staff are not informed regarding investment plans), which makes people less involved and, as such, less responsible. Allowing people to learn more about the organisation produces a greater undertaking of responsibility and commitment (O'Reilly III & Pfeffer, 2000). Prior research suggests that when employees are given financial information regarding their organisation, they view themselves as "partners in the business," they become "empowered," they want to do a better job and they have more appropriate information, which increases their knowledge and understanding of how the business operates (Case, 1995). Having access to financial information available, and understanding finances in a better way, people become more responsible and, overall, do their job in a more effective manner, without too much supervision and orders from their managers (Case, 1995). Providing staff with financial information (i.e., regarding investment plans, the way expenses are distributed in the School and University) is a sign of treating them as responsible and rational human beings, and having dignity and humanity, which is fundamental for designing for human sustainability. Very little evidence is found of these practices in the University.

The analysis further suggests that workload is very high for all staff (i.e., understaffed departments, high levels of bureaucracy, growth of student numbers). There is also an increasing specialisation of tasks (i.e., "tick box" work processes). Such specialisation makes the job of the programme administrators less meaningful. Prior research indicates that "task variety" is important for "meaningfulness in work" (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Many academics perceive their job to be less meaningful at times because of the complex administrative procedures, which are usually not related to their work (i.e., administrative work that is not related to their teaching but related to the administrative procedures imposed by the Senior Management Group and Human Resources). Interviewees perceived their salaries to be average to low in comparison to other universities in the United Kingdom. A "living wage" is

obligatory but not enough (Bowie, 1998a). Past research suggests that organisations which increase the minimum wage, like Costco, remain competitive (Bowie, 2017).

The analysis of the interviews further indicates that there is limited participation in decision-making of organisational policies. People are not involved and do not “co-design” regulations and procedures with the Senior Management Group. Involving staff in the decision-making process is of primary importance in the University because people cannot be sufficiently involved in something which is not theirs, in which they have limited voice and where they cannot make decisions (O’Reilly III & Pfeffer, 2000). Involvement signifies not only conversations but, also, providing staff with actual responsibility to act (O’Reilly III & Pfeffer, 2000). Decision-making by agreement has been the focus of research worldwide and indicates that the unanimity approach creates more ingenious decisions and more successful execution in relation to single decision-making (Ouchi, 1981).

The analysis of the interview material suggests that there is a perception of an unfair selection, promotion and evaluation process for all staff, for various reasons. For example, for the frontline staff the promotion comes only when they apply for another job in the University, which means they have to change tasks and responsibilities in order to gain promotion. Regarding the academic staff, the official criteria which could be equally considered, often are not (i.e., grant capture is usually prioritised over teaching). Consequently, the vast majority of academics are frustrated with the promotion process since it is very difficult to get promoted in the University, due to the high emphasis of certain criteria over others (i.e., grant capture over teaching). Therefore, many academics are “demotivated” which means they are not going to work as hard and will feel “alienated” from the University.

The analysis indicates that the vast majority of academic and administrative staff are frustrated with the evaluation system, the performance appraisal system, and perceive it to be “ineffective” and “disrespectful” (i.e., the grades staff are assigned during the performance appraisal). People would prefer the evaluation process to be more constructive and helpful (i.e., emphasising a constructive discussion), so they can be facilitated to be more engaged in their

work, improve it and derive more satisfaction. This means that the interviewees perceive the evaluation process to be unfair, not only because of the change in prioritisation of the criteria which, although implemented, has not been officially announced but, also, because it does not respect their dignity, as human beings being evaluated, as people who are always treated as ends in themselves (i.e., the grading system instead treats them as immature school children who must receive a grade in order to do their work properly). Assessments of the workers should be implemented in such a manner that the humanity of all persons involved is judged (Bowie, 2017). For example, the analysis suggests that a constructive discussion in evaluating a person's work could be a sufficient and respectful way of treating employees respecting their dignity and humanity as responsible rational adults.

The analysis of the interview material suggests that respect is not always present; furthermore, disrespect is not always dealt with appropriately (i.e., academics shouting at frontline staff are not always stopped). The "dignity at work" policy, documented on the University's website, primarily focuses on bullying and sexual harassment. However, it does not deal with the other daily matters of disrespect such as the previous examples. Even the unions do not deal with relevant issues of disrespect in the everyday life, despite the fact that they deal with other issues such as salaries and pensions. This happens because the top-down bureaucratic model of management found in this University is not conducive to human sustainability, nor is it conducive to respecting employees and treating them always as ends in themselves (Bowie, 2017).

The analysis indicates that the University's structure has become more hierarchical, with an increased administrative bureaucracy and top-down decision making, especially after restructuring in 2010. This means that the academic, administrative and support staff do not have an "effective voice". The only decision-makers for organisational policies are the Senior Management Group of the University. This often results, in "unrealistic" organisational goals, and policies, as they do not reflect what people do in their everyday working life. This creates a "mismatch" between the goals of the Senior Management Group and what the job requires, a perception shared by the vast majority of staff that were interviewed for this study, including administrative, support and academic.

The analysis of the interviews indicates two significant overall consequences of the organisational restructuring that was carried out in 2010. First, there is a greater presence of “invisible work” in the sense that people do not always understand how time-consuming tasks in administration can be, like room booking, or how much time academics spend talking to students after class. Invisible work can take place both within and between functions and this highly depends on the limited shared knowledge in the University. Invisible work is hidden and not officially recognised, thus creating additional frustration for people. Second, fear, both visible and invisible, is present including fear of honest expression, fear of taking initiative, fear of innovating and fear of making a mistake. As Pfeffer & Sutton (2000) argue, fear begins and ends at the higher layer of the organisation. A complex hierarchy allows top management to either encourage or discourage the careers of persons at the lower levels. The analysis of the interview material suggests that the coping mechanisms of people in hard times are primarily directed towards trustworthy relationships with colleagues (i.e., for individually strenuous working conditions), with the unions (i.e., for issues related to pensions, salaries), as well as with friends and family members (i.e., partner, a good friend) due to the fear of expression.

People rely on relationships to cope with challenges faced whilst working in the University. Such reliable relationships are of primary importance in tough situations. These reliable relationships serve as peoples’ most significant coping mechanisms in the University. Relationships and their coordination are central to the concept of relational coordination and are directly related to human sustainability. The coordination of relationships is discussed in the following section.

### **7.1.3 Relational coordination between frontline employees and their colleagues in the University**

Relationships are of primary importance for sustainable organisations because they help people to coordinate their work in a way that increases respect for themselves and the clients they serve. Human sustainability therefore includes relational coordination (RC), the coordination of work through relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect, based on effective communication. Hence, treating people as ends in themselves is itself not only a

moral but, also, a relational choice, a relational action, and a relational response. In short, human sustainability is not simply about how the organisation treats people; it is also about how all people involved with the organisation treat each other and how this influences key organisational performance outcomes, under both normal and critical conditions.

Relational coordination theory (RCT) provides important insight into human sustainability. Relational coordination is a multilevel and unbounded construct (Gittell et al., 2008). It can be used to understand coordination within and between groups and functions across multiple levels of the organisation (i.e., in higher education, we have the individual, group, department, school, college, university levels), and across inter-organisational boundaries (Gittell et al., 2015). Thus, relational coordination is different from all the traditional “coordinating mechanisms” recognised in organisational design theory because it deals with “the interactions among participants rather than the mechanisms for supporting or replacing those interactions” (Gittell, 2002b, p.1410).

As Gittell (2016) argues, prior studies have methodically examined the impact of relational coordination on workers, covering diverse sectors (i.e., accounting, airlines, banking, criminal justice, education, finance, healthcare) in different countries and continents (i.e., Australia, Canada, United States, Japan, South Korea, Israel, Pakistan, various European countries including the United Kingdom). The results across the studies suggest that employees, in diverse roles, functions, power and status levels, who encounter higher relational coordination experience better outcomes (i.e., “increased job satisfaction”; “stronger shared mental models”; “increased proactive work behaviors”; “increased engagement in work”; “reduced burnout/emotional exhaustion”; “increased confidence and collaboration”; “increased sense of social support”; “increased motivation, productivity, identification with organizational values”; “reduced information asymmetry”; “increased equity”).

Relational coordination, the core construct of relational coordination theory, is defined as “a mutually reinforcing process of communicating and relating for the purpose of task integration” (Gittell, 2002a, p.301). Relational coordination is viewed as a mutually reinforcing process of interaction, between relationships and communication, that is frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving,

which is necessary for the purpose of “task integration” (Gittell, 2012). According to relational coordination theory, high-quality relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect, support high-quality communication, and vice versa (Gittell, 2003). Together, they enable participants to coordinate highly interdependent work. Low-quality relationships have the opposite effect, undermining communication and hindering participants’ ability to effectively coordinate their work (Gittell, 2003).

The limited role of design for human sustainability in the University discourages relational coordination especially between functions, where it is most difficult to foster in the first place. Bureaucratic structures discourage relational coordination across functional boundaries; consequently, it tends to be particularly weak. Bureaucratic structures can create divisions between employees whose relationships are very significant for the effective coordination of work (Gittell et al., 2008).

Prior research states that it is more common, when an organisation does not have high levels of relational coordination, to have stronger ties within functions than between them. For example, relational coordination was higher between nurse managers and their colleagues in the same function and lower with their colleagues from other functions (i.e., physicians) (Warshawsky et al., 2012). Hence, the level of relational coordination within functions is medium to high (i.e., invisible work between the frontline employees and their line managers), and between functions (i.e., between the frontline employees and academics) it is medium to low. Organisations can foster relational coordination through the design of their organisational structures, including their practices and procedures, such as selecting employees both for functional and relational competence (Gittell, 2008).

Restructuring in 2010 changed the University’s organisational structures further away from design for human sustainability, thus weakening relational coordination between functions. Most academics perceive the current highly bureaucratic post-restructuring system as having a negative impact on their relationships with colleagues, primarily because it introduced a School level to the reporting structure and, thus, replicated procedures in the University. Consequently, the analysis suggests that there are often functional goals,



exclusive knowledge and limited respect, between frontline employees and their colleagues in other functions (i.e., academics). The respect that exists is more often a hierarchical respect, rather than mutual respect, due to the inflexible hierarchical structure, and the limited design for human sustainability. Many academics perceive that the functional goals have been enhanced since restructuring between the two workgroups and say that there is a sense that the administrators are a group, and the academics are a group.

Another aspect of restructuring - the movement of frontline staff to centralised hubs - enhanced the functional goals between them and their colleagues. This, in turn, increased “sub-goal optimization” and decreased “systems thinking,” thereby discouraging relational coordination (Gittell, 2003). Now siloed thinking is predominant, and relational coordination means is weak, meaning that teamwork is less emphasised and communication between the frontline employees and their colleagues in other functions is less effective; for example, a tendency toward blaming rather than problem-solving communication (Gittell, 2000; Gittell et al., 2010; Gittell & Douglas, 2012).

Prior research on relational coordination suggests various consequences regarding ineffective communication between workgroups in the organisation, which resemble the way the vast majority of frontline employees perceive their communication with academics. For example, when participants do not respect or feel respected by others who are engaged in the same work process, they tend to avoid communication with each other (Gittell, 2003). When participants do not share a set of superordinate goals for the work processes, they are more likely to engage in blaming rather than problem solving with each other when problems occur (Gittell, 2003). Finally, when participants are not connected to each other through shared knowledge of the work process, they are less able to engage in timely communication with each other since they do not understand what others are doing well enough to anticipate the urgency of communicating particular information to them (Gittell, 2003).

The limited design for human sustainability in the University, was found to discourage relational coordination, thus preventing the University from reaching its true goal, which is to bring people together who are different to create

something between them that is shared, thereby enhancing the understanding across different workgroups in the University.

The discussion, at this point, has answered research question 1, “How does design for human sustainability affect relational coordination?” In order to answer research question 2, “How do human sustainability and relational coordination affect worker outcomes?” there is a need to explain the level of personal transformation of employees in the University. Personal transformation of frontline staff is discussed in the following section.

#### **7.1.4 Personal transformation of frontline employees in the University**

I argue that if there is consideration for design for human sustainability, a higher level of human sustainability is more likely to exist in the organisation, thus strengthening all dimensions of relational coordination and resulting in a higher level of relational coordination. These higher levels of both human sustainability and relational coordination in the organisation are more likely to facilitate a positive personal transformation (PT) of employees by bringing out the best version of themselves which assists them to act in a more positive and constructive way in their professional lives. Therefore, they are more likely to be engaged, proactive and satisfied with their work. Alternatively, if there is limited design for human sustainability, a lower level of human sustainability is more likely to be found in the organisation, which weakens all dimensions of relational coordination. Thus, there is a lower level of both human sustainability and relational coordination in the organisation, which is less likely to facilitate the positive personal transformation (PT) of employees.

Consequently, the personal transformation of employees in organisations can be either positive or negative; this will depend on the direction the cycle of human sustainability takes. If the cycle takes the positive direction then the positive personal transformation of employees is more likely to occur, whereas, if the cycle of human sustainability takes the negative direction a less positive personal transformation of employees is more likely to occur. Furthermore, personal transformation, like all elements of the cycle of human sustainability, operates on a continuum with positive and negative as the two extremes, which

means that the personal transformation of employees in most organisations will fall somewhere in between (i.e., employees are more or less positively transformed).

The analysis of the interview material suggests that the limited consideration for design for human sustainability in the University has created a low level of human sustainability and a low level of relational coordination that, together, discourage the positive personal transformation of the frontline employees. Moreover, the analysis indicates that the principles of human sustainability and relational coordination together (i.e., treating people as ends in themselves, mutual respect, effective communication), are also the aspects generally viewed by the programme administrators as some of the most desirable traits a collaborator could have. The common traits frontline employees highly value are respect, honesty, and good communication; they also expected to be treated based on these values.

In conclusion, the low levels of human sustainability and relational coordination found in the University are consistent with the finding that the University treats the frontline employees with principles that are not only opposite to those supported by human sustainability and relational coordination, they are also the very same principles that frontline staff do not value. This suggests that the University has facilitated the less positive personal transformation of persons, with a limited positive impact on their worker outcomes. Worker outcomes of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction are discussed in the following section.

### **7.1.5 Worker outcomes of frontline staff in the University**

The worker outcomes of frontline staff examined in this study are three: work engagement, proactive work behaviour, and job satisfaction. This section defines these outcomes and considers the way that human sustainability and relational coordination, together, influence them. This influence comes through the personal transformation of frontline employees. This section is structured along these lines: First, a short introduction and a definition of each worker outcome is provided; subsequently, an overall discussion of the three worker outcomes of frontline employees follows.

Work engagement (WE) has progressively gained interest by institutions, organisations, scholars and researchers (Lee et al., 2016). There has been a lot of research on work engagement, throughout the expanse of diverse types of institutions and organisations, for various reasons (i.e., its link to significant business results) (Vance, 2006); its relation to employee well-being and performance (i.e., Christian et al., 2011; Halbesleben, 2010). Prior research on work engagement in the public and higher education sectors is limited, in comparison to the large amount undertaken in the private sector. Most research in the field of education focuses on primary and secondary educational levels (Hakanen et al., 2006; Li et al., 2015; Runhaar et al., 2013; Trepanier et al., 2015). Prior research demonstrates that work engagement has significant positive effects on employee productivity. It suggests that high-quality interpersonal relationships (IPRs), relationships of high levels of shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect together with frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, enhance work engagement (Warshawsky et al., 2012; Naruse et al., 2017).

Work engagement is defined as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74). Consequently, work engagement focuses on the relationships between an employee and their work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). It is a more “persistent” and “pervasive” state of mind, rather than a “momentary” and “specific” state not centred on any specific thing, incident, person, or way of behaving (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigour, dedication and absorption are central to the way work engagement is defined in this study (Schaufeli et al., 2002) (see chapter six).

As initially argued, proactivity is significant in the workplace, nowadays, where there is more competition and greater pressure for innovation (Crant, 2000; Fay & Frese, 2001; Parker, 2000; Sonnentag, 2003). People who are proactive execute their main tasks and responsibilities better (Thompson, 2005). They also tend to redefine their positions to include new tasks, responsibilities and goals (Frese & Fay, 2001). Proactivity is significant for individual career success (Seibert et al., 1999). An uncertainty that exists within the field of proactive behaviour is whether or not it must be extra-role behaviour to qualify as proactive (Morrison, 1994). Research in higher education remains limited,

especially regarding frontline employees. Prior research has focused primarily on students (i.e., Islam et al., 2018; Clements & Kamau, 2018) and academics (i.e., Zhu et al., 2017; Ryazanova & McNamara, 2016). However, the scholarly literature suggests that interpersonal relationships with a high level of shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, may promote proactive work behaviour. This, in turn, is expected to advance organisational performance and enhance the creative and innovative attitudes of employees (Warshawsky et al., 2012; Gittell, 2016).

Scholarly work has identified both “constructive” and “destructive” proactive work behaviours (Moss et al., 2003). However, this study focuses only on the constructive proactive work behaviour of employees in the University. Proactive work behaviour is defined as “taking control of and bringing about change within the internal organizational environment” (Parker & Collins, 2010, p.637). Individual innovation, problem prevention, taking charge and voice are central to the way proactive work behaviour is examined in this study (see chapter six).

Job satisfaction (JS) is one of the most frequently studied aspects in organisational behaviour research, and a subject of broad interest for people in organisations (Erro-Garces & Ferreira, 2019). Prior research suggests that job satisfaction is positively related to the following: “leader empowering behaviours” (Mehra et al., 2006); “structural empowerment” (Wagner et al., 2010); “delegation” or “decentralization” of formal power in the organisation (Wagner et al., 2010); and, workplace flexibility, a cooperative environment, intrinsic rewards (i.e., improvement of a person’s career through relevant training), extrinsic rewards (i.e., remuneration), work relations with co-workers and management, respectful treatment, a well-structured workplace (Rhee et al., 2019; Borooah, 2009; Westover & Taylor, 2010; Diaz-Serrano & Vieira, 2005; Jones et al., 2009; SHRM, 2016; Bangwal et al., 2017; Lee & Brand, 2005; Leather et al., 2003).

Prior research in higher education has focused primarily on academics (i.e., Moloantoa & Dorasamy, 2017; Mamiseishvili & Lee, 2018), whereas some studies include both academics and administrative staff (i.e., Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016) and a few include only administrators (i.e., Inuwa, 2016). Generally, research

indicates that there is “little unity” in comprehending job satisfaction in a college or university environment (Smerek & Peterson, 2007). Scholarly work suggests that interpersonal relationships with a high level of shared goals, shared knowledge, mutual respect and frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication, enhance job satisfaction (Gittell et al., 2008; Cramm et al., 2014; Albertsen et al., 2014; Gittell, 2016). Job satisfaction, in this thesis, is defined as “the degree of positive affect towards a job or its components. This is determined by characteristics both of the individual and of the job, and particularly how work is organized within the corporate work environment” (Adams & Bond, 2000, p.538).

Overall, the level of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction of frontline employees in their work to support the students is medium to low, with the exception of dedication which is high. Restructuring that took place in the University in 2010 enhanced a limited consideration for design for human sustainability, which resulted in a low level of human sustainability that, in turn, discouraged relational coordination in the University. Consequently, as discussed previously, there is a limited positive personal transformation of frontline employees which greatly influenced their work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction.

The analysis indicates that although leaders’ support is fundamental for the encouragement of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction, this is limited in the University. Although middle managers and supervisors are closer to employees, the top managers are the people who, according to prior research, set the scene, suggesting that in comprehending how to enhance frontline staff engagement levels top managers should first comprehend their own level of engagement. Top managers must give priority to being “visible” and “accessible” since they are a “resource” for employees. Limited leadership leads to a detrimental workplace that has limited “access to resources” (Bergstedt & Wei, 2020).

My analysis of the interview material indicates that the Senior Management Group is not adequately supportive and visible to employees, thus discouraging shared decision-making in the University. Prior research suggests that employees who do not have a say and voice, do not make decisions and are not provided

with related information, are not very committed in their work. Allowing persons to grasp more about the organisation, and allowing them to utilise that comprehension to make actual decisions, enhances much more commitment and undertaking of responsibility (O'Reilly III & Pfeffer, 2000). Through providing a greater amount of accountability to the frontline employees, the University enables them to give the service that they “wanted to provide all along but could not because of an inflexible hierarchical structure” (Carlzon, 1987, p.63).

My analysis also suggests that frontline employees are also not involved in the design of the workplace; for example, they were not asked about their thoughts before they were moved to the open space hubs. Prior research shows that this limited participation regarding the design of office space demotivates employees. Research evidence from various studies demonstrates that “involving end-users is a win-win solution” both regarding design and the way in which staff embrace and take possession of the alterations in their physical workplace (Nikolaeva & Dello Russo, 2017, p.212). According to scholarly literature, the fact that employees are almost never asked regarding their predilections for office design and that there is no acknowledgement for the necessity for diverse solutions for diverse kinds of persons and contexts is a very significant point. This situation reveals the issue of “employee dignity” at the workplace. The structure of the workplace and its spaces includes various issues that are related to people in organisations (i.e., routine everyday issues, more significant events, interruptions), which could generate negative emotions (Nikolaeva & Dello Russo, 2017). All these considerations regarding every person, could be related to the issue of dignity at work (Bolton, 2010). Moreover, the analysis indicates that the limited level of job control, job autonomy and respect regarding the dignity and humanity of frontline staff in the University limits their level of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction.

The discussion has now answered research question 2, “How do human sustainability and relational coordination affect worker outcomes?” The analysis of the interview material clearly suggests that the low level of both human sustainability and relational coordination result in a limited positive influence on the frontline employees’ work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction. Hence, their level of work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction is decreased.

### 7.1.6 Key findings in higher education and beyond

This section focuses on the way in which higher education institutions, and organisations in general, operate nowadays in relation to the issues examined in this research. The higher education sector in the United Kingdom, and worldwide, over recent decades, continues to experience significant change (see chapter one). This includes “restructuring,” “use of short-term contracts,” “external scrutiny and accountability” and “major reductions in funding”. Together with these changes, higher education research has increased worldwide and deals with various topics such as “institutionalisation processes,” “management and governance,” “university pedagogy,” and “quality assurance,” “student mobility,” “access to education,” and “retention of students in training,” “policies and agency,” and “content and quality” (Weiler, 2008). Martin (2016) argues that although research in higher education focuses primarily on decentralised organisational structures, this is in sharp contrast with the actual transformation of higher education institutions that are oriented towards a centralised top-down way of operating.

Consequently, during recent decades, both in the United Kingdom and worldwide (i.e., Europe, North America, Australasia, Latin America, Africa and Asia) numerous universities have been building “a more hierarchical, organisational structure, top-down management and decreased local autonomy for departments, and ever more cumbersome and intrusive procedures” (Martin, 2016, p.7). Although many academics are not satisfied with these changes they do not react for diverse reasons (i.e., some are afraid, some want to take senior management positions) (Martin, 2016). A “centralised top-down management” and “bureaucracy” are two major problems that derive from this trend in the higher education sector (Martin, 2016). The analysis of the interview material suggests these issues are also relevant to the University since it also adopts a more hierarchical, top-down structure following its restructure in 2010.

A centralised top-down management is a type of structure that “emerged” in the universities during the last 20 years and served to substitute the previous system. Research in higher education shows that many higher education institutions during the last 10 to 20 years undergone restructuring in order to introduce a new system that would resolve the problems of the old one (i.e.,



“lack of consistency in treating with students” “weak or incoherent research strategies”) (Martin, 2016). This alternative system, which numerous universities adopted, is a more centralised one with a more powerful and hierarchical top-down management and various formal policies and regulations. Numerous vice chancellors, principals and heads are involved. This growing trend was in parallel with another growing trend in research that was focusing on the opposite direction, stating that decentralised structures are the best for effective outcomes (Martin, 2016).

Recent research regarding a detailed review of the literature indicates that “the majority of scholars have agreed that a decentralized organizational structure is conducive to organizational effectiveness” (Zheng et al., 2010, p.765). Prior research also indicates that decentralisation is more significant for “uncertain” contexts, such as the context of higher education. Universities function in “uncertain environments” and are mainly engaged in the “generation, diffusion, and application of knowledge, as well as in nurturing creativity, innovation and problem-solving abilities” (Martin, 2016, p.10). Decentralisation is also associated with and effective to knowledge management. Prior research indicates that organisations involved more in learning and “knowledge sharing” have greater “benefits” from a decentralised organisational structure (Nahm et al., 2003). Pertusa-Ortega et al. (2010) suggest that decentralisation encourages “knowledge creation” because a larger number of persons are involved in decision-making, creating a larger amount of diverse ideas and assisting to make sure that these notions are “implemented”.

Scholarly work remains limited regarding the relationship between organisational structure and performance in the private and public sectors and even less in the field of higher education (Martin, 2016). One of these studies suggests that “participative-decision processes” are more effective than “autocratic” or “centralised” decision processes. The principal reason for this is that in a “post-industrial” context the necessity for various sources of information and diverse points of view is elevated (Cameron & Tschirhart, 1992). Prior research also examines neo-liberalism and its influence in the higher education institutions (Nedeva & Boden, 2006; By et al., 2008). Thus,

“...the current developments triggered by the rise of the audit culture and adoption of managerialism...have created an environment that encourages opportunistic behaviour such as cronyism, rent-seeking and the rise of organizational psychopaths. This development will arguably not only lead to a waste of resources, change for the sake of change, further centralization, formalization and bureaucratization but, also, to a disheartened and exploited workforce, and political and short-term decision-making” (By et al., 2008, p.21)

“New managerialism” and “hard” management are without doubt referring to managers of universities who need to resolve difficult resource issues, that are influencing the higher education sector in general in the United Kingdom. This could happen to a greater or lesser extent (Deem, 1998). Nevertheless, despite the disadvantages of the top-down hierarchical system and the advantages of decentralisation, especially for uncertain environments like universities, the top management “assumes” that the centralised top-down hierarchy is the best system. They want to control the situation, have better rankings at the league tables and deal with competition.

The human sustainability approach in this thesis, is not compatible with the neo-liberalisation and marketisation of higher education institutions in the United Kingdom since, among other issues, it focuses on participatory decision-making where all stakeholders of the University are involved in decision-making (i.e., academics, employees, Senior Management Group). This incompatibility is clear throughout the analysis of the interviews which indicates that the University faces all these challenges other universities in higher education face both in the United Kingdom and worldwide. The low consideration for design for human sustainability is derived from these same factors that exist in other higher education institutions that follow the same hierarchical system which discourages a high level of human sustainability. This system in the University, as well as in other universities has resulted in deteriorating morale and a growing sense of disaffection and even alienation among staff (i.e., By et al., 2008; Burrows, 2012). Prior research indicates that this centralised structure has other consequences that are consistent with the analysis. For example, in the past in various universities there were university “senates” or “congregations” that have lost “authority” to university councils now. Hence, prior to any change or restructuring the managers used to attend meetings in the departments explaining the issue and the reason for the change and listen to what persons

had to say. Ginsberg (2011) mentions various examples of these processes. Conversely, nowadays, senior managers simply announce, either by email or by formal meetings, showing what they have already decided without listening to staff (Martin, 2016). The analysis is consistent with this consequence as well.

Another aspect of a centralised hierarchy is the move of support staff (i.e., secretaries, technicians, finance and operations) to centralised offices in the universities (Martin, 2016). Although the senior managers believe that this is a more efficient manner of working, prior research indicates that employees suffer and must engage in a greater effort to do their job. Hence, what seems likely to be more efficient for senior managers, in fact, signifies a greater effort for employees of lower ranks. Also, the centralisation of administrative and support staff signifies that academics should do more on their own (i.e., photocopying, travel arrangements) thus giving them less time for their major tasks (Martin, 2016). Moreover, it could have a negative impact on student support because “central” employees lack the “local knowledge” needed to deal with the students’ requests (Martin, 2016).

The analysis of my data, consistent with this research, indicates that these decisions, made through top-down hierarchy, increase employees’ struggle to be engaged, proactive and even satisfied with their job, and cause academics and students not to have the assistance they used to have. This is another factor that contributes to a low level of human sustainability in the University. Therefore, despite the rich scholarly literature that suggests all the advantages of decentralisation, especially for uncertain environments like universities and other organisations, vice-chancellors have “assumed” that the solution to all the problems is additional centralisation. However, as Martin (2016) argues, they could not manage to clarify to their employees, “what specifically are the goals of centralisation, why centralisation offers the best means of achieving these goals, and what are the success criteria against which such changes should be judged. In any other organisation, academics would ruthlessly expose such failings” (Martin, 2016, p.11).

Bureaucracy is another major problem in universities given that they operate in “demanding” and “fast-moving” contexts where numerous “pressures,” “expectations” and rules exist (Martin, 2016). There are many examples of

bureaucracy in universities such as the research ethics process, which has often been a process of “bureaucratic overkill” (Martin, 2016). Some bureaucracy could be justified but prior research suggests that some of it is “self-imposed” (Martin, 2016). A major aspect is that of the high workload of employees. A higher bureaucracy increases policies and procedures and tasks of employees, as well as the amount of time necessary to complete them, decreasing human sustainability and increasing workload.

Research in higher education indicates that various academic and non-academic staff struggle with workload and job insecurity and there is a 70% increase in referrals. It claims that higher education has been called an “anxiety machine” with the usual issues being excessive workloads, “invisible tasks” and “precarious” contracts for academic staff (Morrish, 2019). Two academics in two well-known universities in the United Kingdom committed suicide a few years ago, due to high workload, pressures and job insecurity. This incident and all the other matters signify that this is a serious issue to be taken into consideration (Morrish, 2019). Research in higher education in universities in the United Kingdom indicates that the most important source of stress for all university staff (academic and non-academic) is job insecurity (Tytherleigh et al., 2005).

High bureaucracy and workload, as well as a top-down hierarchy, influence the job control and job autonomy of employees in organisations. Job control, job autonomy and social support are fundamental for a positive and healthy work environment, and directly related to shared connections and worker outcomes (Pfeffer, 2018). Job control influences mental and physical health. Prior research indicates that persons who face restructuring and have better job control show increased levels of welfare in relation to those who participate less (Pfeffer, 2018). Prior research indicates that diminishing links between “actions” and their “consequences,” abandoning persons with limited or no control regarding what is happening to their job, discourages motivation. Failing of job control makes persons depressed (Pfeffer, 2018).

The driving force behind all these measures and policies could be the push for ever higher “economic efficiency” (Martin, 2016). This way could be suitable for organisations whose business model is based on “mass production” and “standardisation” rather than customised production. In case universities have

decided that they should pursue policies based on “mass production” and “standardisation” then the aim for greater centralisation and hierarchy could make sense “enabling the production system to be more controllable and predictable. But is that what universities have now descended to?” (Martin, 2016, p.18). Moreover, the excessive increase of “central university administrators” in the last decade is another consequence of the top-down bureaucratic system in universities nowadays.

Prior research indicates that, in universities in the United States, administrative employees’ places increased 10 times more quickly than the places of academics from 1993 to 2009. Similarly, in universities in the United Kingdom, the number of managers and non-academic staff has been increasing a lot faster than the numbers of faculty, particularly in the dominant (Russell Group) universities (Martin, 2016). Ginsberg (2011) argues that many of the problems in universities nowadays are due to this excessive increase of administrators, referring to the senior managers, principals, vice principals, heads, and so on. Ginsberg (2011, p.9) states that “one favorite administrative tactic is the claim that some fiscal or other emergency requires them to act with lightning speed-and without consulting the faculty - to save the university” (i.e., Hurricane Katrina).

Organisations who adopt a top-down bureaucratic hierarchical structure have similar consequences as the analysis in this section indicates, in different sectors. Moreover, the analysis of this study is consistent with these challenges and issues that other organisations within and beyond the higher education sector encounter. There are solutions to these matters and organisational and management scholars undertake research in order to resolve them in diverse ways. For example, research in higher education focuses primarily on decentralised organisational structures (Martin, 2016). I will proceed to the next section and propose one way which is also the theoretical contribution to knowledge of this research.

### **7.1.7 Theoretical contribution to knowledge**

As I argued at the start of the dissertation, all persons interacting with the firm deserve to be treated with dignity (Freeman, 1984). As Immanuel Kant, the father of human dignity, famously claimed “everything has either a price or a

dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits no equivalent, has a dignity” (Kant, [1785]1997, cited in Pirson & Kostera, 2017, p.2). Thus, dignity represents the “apex” of all human “norms” and “values”. The role of dignity has been greatly neglected in the organisational context. The notion of human dignity, as such, having an intrinsic value to humanity, has been fundamental to the progress of society since the Middle Ages. The “quest” for freedom from slavery and other types of social “repression,” the “development of democracy,” the creation of modern governance, and the development of international human rights all have at their centre dignity, which plays a crucial role in our society. It is priceless, as Kant said (Pirson & Kostera, 2017).

Dignity, theorised as such, plays a central role in this thesis. It is central to the definition of human sustainability and the cycle of human sustainability framework proposed in this thesis. Therefore, it aims at the restoration of human dignity in organisations and its protection. One implication of my findings is that human dignity has come to play a less central role in the University and that it could come back to play a more central role. “Human dignity is necessary for a fully realized life” (Hodson 2001, p.3).

Working with dignity is fundamental for persons and the achievement of dignity at work is one of the most significant challenges persons deal with in their lives. It is also important for organisations to make sure that the dignity and humanity of their employees is respected. Furthermore, it is fundamental that the dignity and humanity of all stakeholders, important for the organisations, is equally respected. This thesis, in aiming to advance a theory of human sustainability, supports the United Nations “Agenda for 2030” and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (i.e., promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all) (United Nations, 2015). The United Nations adopts the Kantian view, among others, as a conceptual basis for its protection of human rights (i.e., freedom to decent work, to advance one’s human potential). It suggests that all worldwide players, have a “moral obligation to respect basic human rights” (Arnold & Bowie 2004, p.593).

The United Nations before stating the 17 goals, state the declaration (see chapter two). The essence of the declaration is nothing but “human dignity”

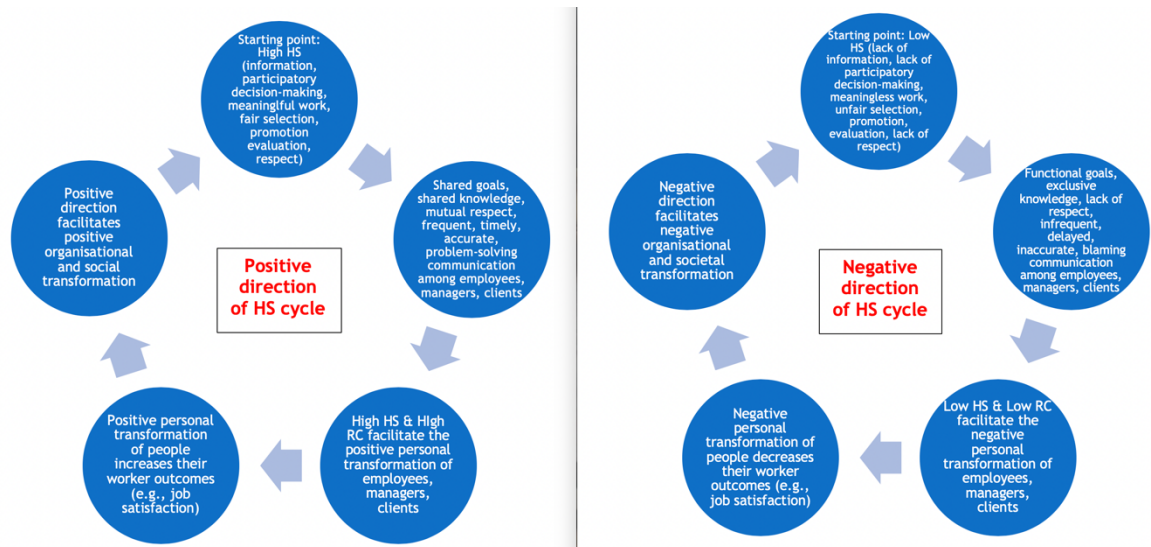
which comes before and above anything else, claiming that the “dignity of the human person is fundamental” (United Nations, 2015, p.4). The agenda is “accepted by all countries and is applicable to all...[it] involve[s] the entire world, developed and developing countries alike” (United Nations, 2015, p.5). All stakeholders alike I would say. The world is like an organisation and all countries stakeholders. All have a say. All have an effective voice. All have dignity and they should be respected, as persons with dignity and humanity. Consequently, dignity is the essence and soul of the human sustainability definition based on Kantian ethics; more specifically, based on two Kantian Formulae, the “Formula of Humanity as an End” and the “Formula of the Realm of Ends” (Kant, [1785] 1990).

Respect for the dignity and the humanity of oneself is the starting point and if a person respects themselves, then they can respect others, the dignity and the humanity of others. Moreover, the organisations who aim to treat their people always as ends in themselves and never only as means, for utilitarian purposes (i.e., because they do their work), can enhance respect in the organisational environment and further support mutual respect among organisational participants (Formula of Humanity as an End). A major way of doing so is involving all persons in the organisation and, indeed, all stakeholders of the organisation in the decision-making process. In doing so, they respect people’s dignity and allow them to be “co-creators” and “co-followers” of the organisational policies and procedures (Formula of the Realm of Ends).

An updated cycle of human sustainability follows that includes main stakeholders due to space limitations. Managers could include in the cycle all relevant stakeholders of an organisation. The cycle of human sustainability either takes a positive or negative direction, depending on whether there is consideration for design for human sustainability or not. This is the first step that activates its’ direction. The positive and negative directions of the cycle of human sustainability represent its two extreme ends, since it operates on a continuum, from very high (i.e., high level of human sustainability) to very low (i.e., low level of human sustainability). Most organisations would fall between these two extremes (Figure 7-2). Figure 7-1 (start of chapter) represents the situation in the study focusing on frontline staff. Figure 7-2 represents the situation of any

organisation that aims to adopt it, design and implement human sustainability (HS) procedures, since it includes examples of more stakeholders.

Figure 7-2 The Cycle of Human Sustainability



This thesis has aimed to make a contribution to the theory of relational coordination, by explaining how the personal transformation of all stakeholders of an organisation, employees, managers and clients takes place in organisations and, hence, explaining how organisations can help their employees to positively transform themselves. More specifically, it has explained how the University did not facilitate the positive personal transformation of its employees by treating them with principles that are neither consistent with human sustainability and relational coordination together (i.e., treating people as ends in themselves, mutual respect, effective communication) nor with those generally viewed by the programme administrators as some of the most desirable traits a collaborator could have. The common traits employees highly value are respect, honesty, and good communication, which are also fundamental for both human sustainability and relational coordination and are also expected to be treated based on these values. This suggests that the University has facilitated a less positive personal transformation of persons, which has a limited positive impact on their worker outcomes. In this case the negative direction of the cycle of human sustainability is activated. If the University had treated employees with principles consistent with both human sustainability and relational coordination, it could have facilitated a greater positive personal transformation of its employees, which could have had a higher positive impact on their worker



outcomes. In this case, the positive direction of the cycle of human sustainability would have been activated.

Consequently, this thesis has aimed to make a contribution to the theory of relational coordination by explaining how the University in this study, as well as organisations in general, can facilitate the positive personal transformation of all their stakeholders (i.e., employees, managers, clients) by adopting human sustainability and relational coordination principles and how they cannot manage to do so. This is an original contribution to knowledge since the theory of relational coordination claims that “there can be no organizational transformation -or social transformation- without personal transformation” (Gittell, 2016, p.12). However, it does not explain how this personal transformation of human beings in organisations takes place.

This thesis has contributed in this area by explaining how the personal transformation of all persons can be facilitated and actually take place through the implementation of the proposed definition and conceptual framework of human sustainability (i.e., through organisational practices that inform staff about financial and other major issues, provide meaningful work to employees, and involve them in the decision-making process). This is fundamental since Gittell (2016) argues that we cannot have high levels of relational coordination, which lead to increased worker outcomes without first having achieved a personal transformation of human beings in the organisation.

The focus of this study has been on frontline employees, the programme administrators but, once the conceptual framework of the cycle of human sustainability is created, it can be utilised in further research and applied to all other stakeholders of an organisation (i.e., managers, clients, suppliers, the community, shareholders).

This study legitimises the sector of “human sustainability” by theorising and defining it, aiming to make a contribution to the field, since theory and research remain limited. Hence, I define human sustainability (HS) as follows, based on Kant’s “Formula of Humanity as an End” and the “Formula of the Realm of Ends” (Kant, [1785] 1990). “Human sustainability is when organisations respect human beings as free, rational and responsible, include them in policy formulation and

decision-making and encourage them to build mutual respect with all persons within and beyond their organisations.” In addition to defining human sustainability based on my analysis of the data collected from the interviews, I put forward a conceptual framework, “The Cycle of Human Sustainability” explained in this section.

Although the cycle of human sustainability focuses on frontline employees in this study, it could be utilised to examine any other major stakeholder of the University (i.e., academics) and in other sectors (i.e., healthcare, banking, retail). Therefore, the contribution to the advancement of a theory of human sustainability regarding this thesis is beyond the context of the study since the field of human sustainability is related to all sectors, limited to none, focusing on the various organisations and their stakeholders. Stakeholder management, “is based on a moral foundation that includes respect for humans and their basic rights” (Freeman et al., 2018, p.3), reminding organisations that the ethics of business are not different, thus they are not of a “lesser grade”, from everyday ethics (Phillips, 2003). The reason for this large spectrum of human sustainability is because it focuses on human beings, stakeholders, their dignity, humanity and their role relationships in organisations (Kant, [1785] 1990; Bowie, 1999; Bowie, 2017; Pfeffer, 2010a; Pfeffer, 2018; Gittell, 2002a; Gittell, 2016).

## **7.2 Limitations of this study**

As in any research project, the study has several limitations. Chapter three mentioned the advantages and disadvantages of the methods used to collect and analyse data. Furthermore, the main limitations comprise: 1) the study has a cross-sectional design and therefore shows associations rather than causality; 2) the interviews were conducted over a relatively short period of time and are a snapshot of the interviewee’s experiences and meanings; 3) the research is one case study, although it includes four Schools from four different Colleges.

Further empirical research, both cross-sectional and longitudinal, is necessary. Additional research could take place including a greater number of organisations and institutions, both in higher education and beyond, within the United Kingdom and abroad. The reason for this is that the fields of both human sustainability and relational coordination are not restricted to one sector or

country. Interesting comparisons can arise from this national and international research, across various industries, that can be meaningful to advance further theory and research.

### 7.3 Implications of this study

This study is significant for the field of higher education and beyond primarily for the following reasons: 1) It indicates how organisations and institutions can help their people positively “transform themselves,” and become better employees; 2) it legitimises, theorises and defines the field of human sustainability in order to develop a theory of human sustainability based on Kant’s moral philosophy. It could hold a significant position in the strategy of organisations (both for-profit and not for-profit), in the various industries, aiming at all major stakeholders. It focuses on employees but, once developed, this theoretical and practical framework, could be expanded to include more stakeholders (i.e., clients, managers, the community); 3) it reminds organisations that the ethics of business are not different, thus they are not of a “lesser grade”, from everyday ethics (Phillips, 2003). This reminder is fundamental to prevent problems; 4) it gives importance to human beings, to people in organisations, who have dignity and humanity and should always be treated as ends in themselves and never as means only; 5) it helps organisations become more viable and sustainable in both the short and long run; 6) it provides a conceptual and practical framework to enable consideration for the design for human sustainability in organisations; 7) it enhances the thinking and reflecting of the interviewees on work relationships, which is a real benefit (i.e., thinking and reflecting on their roles); 8) it enhances and complements the other sectors of sustainability (i.e., environmental, ecological) since organisations who respect their employees and encourage mutual respect are more likely to respect the environment on their own, without imposed relevant rules and regulations; 9) it presents evidence suggestive of how organisations can facilitate the personal transformation of their employees which, in turn, could lead to organisational and social transformation; 10) it contributes to the advancement of qualitative research in the field of relational coordination since most of the studies undertaken are quantitative; 11) it enhances the literature concerning work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction in general and, in particular, regarding the theory of relational coordination and

the field of higher education; 12) it enhances research concerning frontline employees in general and, in particular, in higher education which, to date, remains limited; 13) it is a multi-level analysis, considering all levels in the university (i.e., individual, group, school, college, university, societal) providing important insights in higher education research and beyond; and, 14) its added value is that it draws the connections between personal and relational transformation of employees in organisations, which will generate transformation in the stakeholder environment inviting other researchers as well to look at these connections.

The major implications for research are relevant to the proposed definition of human sustainability and the conceptual framework of the cycle of human sustainability. Hence, these two can be the basis for further research in various disciplines and orientations (i.e., business ethics, human sustainability, relational coordination, worker outcomes, human resources, organisational theory and change, social issues in management, corporate sustainability, strategic management).

The major implications for practice in this study comprise: 1) It provides information to managers in higher education and beyond, regarding frontline employees. This information considers how programme administrators are related to their colleagues which is significant for the field of higher education and other sectors; 2) it provides ideas for managers regarding practices that work since often, in various kinds of organisations in different sectors, employees are engaged in organisational practices, that seem not to be working effectively (Pfeffer, 1994; Pfeffer, 1998); 3) it gives ideas to managers to create workplace policies and procedures to diminish difficult conditions, and not continue to harm their staff (Pfeffer, 2018). This is significant because the literature in management, top managers and leaders, and public policy practitioners is not attentive to the role of workplace environments, despite existing research concerning their influence on health (Pfeffer, 2018); 4) it helps managers understand certain issues that are important in dealing with their staff. For example, it helps them realise that fear and abuse are ineffective, they are “anathema” in the work environment (Pfeffer, 2010b); 5) it explains the reasons that organisations should treat people with respect for their dignity, rather than only as “economic agents” or as “factors of production” (Pfeffer,

2010b); 6) it provides managers and practitioners an alternative way of thinking and relating, based on a moral, rather than a “utilitarian” foundation, which prioritises human beings to profit, necessary to avoid problems in organisations (Bowie, 2013). In doing so, it prioritises human sustainability and does not permit it to be surrendered when faced with financial strains or growth of shareholder return regardless of the costs on people and society (Pfeffer, 2018); 7) it can be the basis for the design of policies that advance role relationships and their coordination preventing various problems in organisations (i.e., high turnover of frontline employees, decrease in work engagement, proactive work behaviour and job satisfaction, appearance of health problems in the short and long term); 8) it explains to managers that giving priority to human sustainability does not mean that they do not need to worry about funding, or shareholders; it means that these matters should not be the priority. Prior research indicates that organisations can position employees at the centre of their policies and, at the same time, generate increased “long-term returns” (Pfeffer, 1998); 9) it explains that, based on this moral thinking, managers can ameliorate their workplace, the way employees work and relate, and find ways to help the organisation become more viable and sustainable.

In conclusion, the implications for practice of this study are significant, diverse and related to all levels in the organisation and beyond (i.e., individual, group, organisational, interorganisational, societal) including all major stakeholders. This is important for both the sector of higher education and other sectors. For example, prior research in higher education suggests that universities should do the following: diminish “work-related stress” and ameliorate “work-life balance” for all their staff, thereby ensuring that their workload is “appropriate and not excessive”; diminish “student: staff ratios”; ameliorate levels of assistance for academics; revise “counselling services”; persuade staff to use all their vacation days and the various existing possibilities of “flexible working” (Kinman & Jones, 2004).

Finally, the implications of this study go beyond the field of higher education, primarily because they are relevant to the following issues: they help people understand the health risks they are under at work; they help senior managers comprehend the “costs of their toxic management practices” (i.e., illness costs, high turnover); they help government understand the various physical and

psychological costs of staff dealt with their “public health and welfare system”; they help society understand that it needs “social movements” which give human sustainability and workplace contexts, the same significance it gives to environmental sustainability and the physical context (Pfeffer, 2018).

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## Appendix A: Interviews

- Total number of interviews: 45
- 4 Schools from 4 different Colleges: School A/College A, School B/College B, School C/College C, School D/College D.
- Interview period: June 2018 - February 2019
- Participant pseudonym example: A4, programme administrator. Hence, “A” (is the name of the School which is School A in this example); “4” (is the number of the interview in this example. The sequence of numbering is random and not related to a role or any other particular reason); “programme administrator” (is the role of the person and in this example the person is a programme administrator).
- School A: 15 persons participated as follows:
  - A3, programme administrators’ manager
  - A12, programme administrators assistants’ manager
  - A1, A4, A5, programme administrators
  - A6, A9, programme administrators’ assistants
  - A13, finance and operations administrator
  - A7, finance assistant
  - A2, receptionist
  - A8, A10, A11, A14, A15 academics
- School B: 11 persons participated as follows:
  - B2, programme administrators’ manager
  - B1, B5, programme administrators
  - B3, programme administrators’ assistant
  - B4, administrative assistant
  - B6, finance assistant
  - B7, B8, B9, B10, B11, academics
- School C: 12 persons participated as follows:
  - C1, C2, C3, C5, programme administrators
  - C4, finance and operations school administrator
  - C6, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, academics
- School D: 7 persons participated as follows:
  - D1, programme administrators’ manager
  - D5, administrators’ manager
  - D3, D4, programme administrators
  - D2, D6, D7, academics



## Appendix B: Flexible Interview Guide

**Introduction of the interview:** Thank you for participating. We will not discuss personal issues, but in case you do not want to discuss one topic please ask me to move on to the next one, without explaining the reasons. Could you kindly see the plain language statement and consent form, once more if you wish, and sign the consent form. Please always ask me if you need any further explanation on any topic we will discuss. Now I start the audio-recording and the interview begins.

**Key topics/issues discussed at the interview: \***

\*Topics were the same for all roles (i.e., frontline, academics), adjusted accordingly per role, and not always discussed in the same order since the flow of interview was prioritised. The word “colleagues,” in the topics below stated, refer to colleagues both within and between functions.

- Description of their roles, tasks and responsibilities, length of time in University
- Views on how they communicate with colleagues in terms of frequency, timeliness, accuracy and problem-solving regarding their work to support the students
- Perceptions of the degree they share goals with colleagues and the degree colleagues share goals with them while working to support students
- Perceptions of the degree they share knowledge with colleagues and the degree colleagues share knowledge with them while working to support students
- Perceptions of the degree they respect their colleagues and the degree colleagues respect them while working to support students
- Views on their selection process in the University, whether they are involved in hiring or not
- Views on the criteria regarding their promotion and evaluation process in the University
- Views on their job descriptions regarding their content and the degree they are followed
- Views on their contract and the various relevant issues (i.e., layoff policy)
- Views on their wage and its relation to the average wage in this country’s market
- Views on the degree they are involved in decision-making in the University (i.e., policies)
- Views on cross-functional meetings or huddles with colleagues
- Perceptions of collaboration with colleagues and traits they want a collaborator to have
- Perceptions of proposing novel ideas and the degree they are accepted and implemented
- Perceptions of being comfortable to evaluate a more senior colleague (i.e., line manager)
- Perceptions of how meaningful and interesting they consider their job to be
- Views on the quantity and quality of training courses in the University
- Perceptions of the autonomy, flexibility and security regarding their job
- Views on comparison between the University’s system, and their previous workplaces
- Perceptions of their first day of employment in the University (i.e., organisation)
- Views on whether they can bring personal problems to work or not
- Perceptions of being comfortable to socialise with colleagues in University events
- Views on the number of colleagues they consider them as good friends
- Perceptions of how dedicated, immersed and enthusiastic they are with their work
- Views on whether it is possible to prevent problems at work
- Perceptions of dealing with issues that are not directly related to their work
- Views on the unions and their coping with difficult situations at work
- Perceptions of their overall satisfaction with their job

**Conclusion of the interview:** I stop the audio-recording and end the interview. I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation for your participation. It was very useful. Thank you.

## Appendix C: Initial Coding Frame

### Theme one and relevant codes

Theme 1: Communication, collaboration between roles and functions, respect, mutual respect, self-respect, extreme workload, culture of School/University compared to other universities/organisations

- Frequent communication
- Timely communication
- Accurate communication
- Problem-solving communication
- Sharing goals
- Mutual respect, respect, self-respect forms of expressing respect
- Collaboration - general traits employees want a collaborator to have
- Collaboration between and among colleagues/Teamwork
- Feeling comfortable to express opinion in evaluating a senior colleague
- Feeling comfortable to bring family/private problems to work
- Feeling comfortable in socializing with others in informal events
- Communication with new colleagues
- Number of colleagues who are friends and meet regularly out of work
- Comparison with other organisations
- Extreme workload

### Theme two and relevant codes

Theme 2: Knowledge, training

- Providing knowledge to colleagues
- Knowing about the work of colleagues in the School
- Knowing about financial information of the School/College/University
- Knowing about layoff policy
- Knowing about what is included in job description
- Knowing about the formal mechanisms for development of new structures and policies
- Knowing about cross-functional meetings or huddles with the other workgroups
- Knowing about available training and doing training
- Knowledge/induction/orientation for new colleagues
- Knowledge about the official rules for being promoted
- Knowledge and respect
- Knowledge and innovation



## Appendix C (continued)

### Theme three and relevant codes

#### Theme 3: Selection, hiring, evaluation, promotion, funding

- Formal form of evaluation
- Informal forms of evaluation
- Monetary or other incentives in doing the job/rewards for the job
- Hypothetical hiring process - desired traits to look for a new collaborator when participant is not involved in the hiring/ and, when participant is involved in the hiring
- Actual hiring process - what traits participant looks for a new collaborator when participant is involved in the hiring process and hires people
- Selection process to get this job
- Job description and its implementation
- Job description, coordination, and relationship building traits
- Promotion process for different roles
- Research funding from the School to staff/ Funding from government to the University

### Theme four and relevant codes

#### Theme 4: Satisfaction, work engagement, coping with difficulty

- Satisfaction with wage
- Coping with difficult situations at work, speaking up, unions
- Satisfaction with promotion process
- Meaningful job
- Interesting and intellectually stimulating job
- Job at the level of one's skills, qualifications and desires
- Job security
- Dedication to work
- Feeling enthusiastic about the job
- Rewarding job
- Job full of meaning and purpose
- Being immersed in the job
- Overall satisfaction with the job
- Extreme workload, both visible and invisible work

## Appendix C (continued)

### Theme five and relevant codes

#### Theme 5: Participation in decision-making, autonomy, flexibility

- Participation in the School's development of new structures including policies
- Autonomy in the job
- Flexibility in undertaking tasks and responsibilities
- Flexibility in working/break hours

### Theme six and relevant codes

#### Theme 6: Proactive behaviour, creativity, innovation

- New/alternative ideas discussing with line manager and other colleagues
- Introducing new methods at work - individual innovation
- Preventing problems in the workplace
- Taking charge, dealing with issues that are not directly related to one's work
- Taking charge, situations that required a person to act above and beyond at work

## Appendix D: Plain Language Statement



College of Social  
Sciences

### Plain Language Statement

**Title of the research:** The role of relationships at the workplace.

**Subtitle of the research:** The way different workplace relationships have an impact on the work of programme administrators at the University.

**Invitation to participate in this research:** My name is Elli Meleti. I am the investigator for this project and would like to invite you to take part in this research study. Before you decide if you are willing to participate, it is important that you understand the goals of this research and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information carefully, keep it for your records, and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear to you or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you very much for reading this.

**Brief explanation of this research:** The main purpose of this research is to better understand how high-quality relationships between employees impact work-related communications. We understand high quality relations as relations between employees that involve shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect. The particular setting of our research is that of front-line employees (i.e. programme administrators) at the University. In short, we investigate how high-quality relationships influence the work of program administrators in providing student support.

**The scope of this research:** The scope is to better understand the role of relationships in the workplace, so that we can contribute to the improvement of organizational practices that improve human development along with organisational effectiveness.

What does it mean to participate in this research?

- 1) Participants should be aware that their participation is entirely voluntary and will not have any influence on their job at the University. The mere fact that the school gives permission to the researcher to undertake the research and interview participants based on their consent, is an indication that the employees' participation is approved and as such, will not have any influence on their job at the University.
- 2) Participants will be asked to give an interview at their own convenience.

## Appendix D (continued)

- 3) The interviews will be recorded only with the consent of participants. Participants are encouraged to agree on the consent to the interview recording, as this facilitates transcription of the interview, and preserves all the information essential to undertake the research.
- 4) In the absence of participant consent the interview will not be recorded.
- 5) There are potentially multiple benefits of participation. This research eventually aims to improve the work conditions of programme administrators, and other similarly situated employees. The school could consider the results of the research at its completion, and eventually decide on potential improvements. Moreover, participants could use their interview as an opportunity to reflect on their work, and possibly come up with ideas for improvement of their work relationships.
- 6) Participants will be made aware that confidentiality is limited, because, it might not be completely possible in some cases (i.e., the announcement of harm to participants or others), and, the data might be divided/filed or re-used in line with Data Sharing provided on this form. The personal data of the participants will be protected, since I will substitute their names with pseudonyms. In addition, the name of School, College and the University of the interviewee will remain confidential. I will also use the data collected in the writing and defence of my PhD thesis, and in any publications that result from my thesis. In all of these instances, confidentiality is maintained.
- 7) The College Research Ethics Committee has approved this project.
- 8) The main contact for this project is me, Elli Meleti (email XXX). In case I cannot deal with your inquiry, please contact my supervisor for this research, XXX (email XXX).
- 9) In case there are any further concerns regarding the conduct of the project, please feel free to contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, XXX at their email XXX.



# Appendix E: Consent Form



College of Social  
Sciences

## Consent Form

**Title of Project:** The influence of human sustainability on relational coordination

**Name of Researcher:** Elli Meleti

**Name of Supervisors:** XXX, XXX

I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw, within 30 calendar days from the interview, without giving any reason.

I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.

I do not consent to interviews being audio-recorded.

I do not consent to the use of direct quotes.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research.

I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my employment arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

I acknowledge that all names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised, and pseudonyms will be used to refer to them.

I acknowledge that the material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times<sup>1</sup>.

I acknowledge that the material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

I agree to take part in this research study

I do not agree to take part in this research study

**Name of Participant:** ..... **Signature** ..... **Date**.....

**Name of Researcher:** ..... **Signature** ..... **Date** .....

|

1. Confidentiality is limited, since it might not be completely possible in some cases (i.e., the announcement of harm to participants or others), and, the data might be divided/filed or re-used in line with Data Sharing provided on the Plain Language Statement form.