

Integrating Job Analysis, Performance Management, and Governance: A Case Study of HR System Reinforcement in a Small Church

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Abstract

This case study examines the development of a consistent Human Resources (HR) system within a small faith-based nonprofit organization ("Church A"). The methodology relied on a qualitative review of governance documents, PTO policies, job analysis forms, position descriptions, the performance appraisal process, and a 360-degree pastoral assessment tool. The review showed that governance materials and organizational policies were clearly articulated, and the detailed job analyses contributed to strong role clarity. Some areas needed improvement: a lack of behavioral anchors in evaluations, misalignment between job descriptions and appraisal tools, and limited developmental focus in multisource feedback. Suggestions included job-specific performance appraisal addenda, behavioral anchors, rater training, and structured follow-up from 360 processes. Even with limited resources, small faith-based nonprofits can develop congruent, evidence-based HR systems aligned with industrial–organizational (I/O) psychology practices.

Keywords: HRM System Strength, Job Analysis, Performance Management, Role Clarity, Organizational Justice, Nonprofit HR, Document Analysis, 360-Degree Feedback

1. Introduction

Without the Human Resources (HR) budgets and HR staff typically found in larger organizations, micro-organizations like nonprofits and churches are often run on a “minimum viable HR infrastructure” characterized by ad hoc, reactive, or personality-oriented systems and routines (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). These organizations often struggle from an HR

standpoint by leaving employees in a “weak signal” or state of confusion about what is expected of them, how they are evaluated, and how their roles fit into the bigger picture (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

This case study argues for a different perspective: Industrial-Organizational (I/O) psychology's fundamental concepts, originally tailored for corporate use, are adaptable tools of equity that can be successfully implemented in smaller settings (Colquitt, 2001). Micro-organizations can use adaptable I/O techniques, such as job analysis and rater calibration, to strengthen clear, unbiased signals and reduce the impact of random variation (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

This study employs HRM system strength to examine whether Church A's primary HR practices effectively send signals that are unique, uniform, and contribute to a sense of shared understanding (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Applying this standard, the analysis reveals areas where Church A's practices introduce confusion, allowing personal interpretations to cloud employee understanding and alignment (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). This study also explores Church A's Paid Time Off (PTO) policy to pinpoint a core element of procedural justice, illustrating how specific and equitable policies strengthen the system and ultimately improve employees' attitudes toward organizational fairness (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). Church A illustrates how HRM system strengths can be successfully implemented in the micro-organization context (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

1.2 Background & Purpose

Church A's previous “human resource” system had characteristics common to many small nonprofits. Staff policies were intuitive and handled on a case-by-case basis. Before starting the redesign process in 2018, many processes had remained the same informally. Job descriptions had not been revised in approximately ten years, with the last update in 2008. The ambiguity of job duties often led to confusion for staff members. Without documented job responsibilities, it was difficult, if not impossible, to objectively compare accountability standards, competencies, or expectations.

These qualitative factors also affected the church's ability to manage performance. Performance reviews were sporadic and lacked evaluative metrics, such that some staff members had never received formal documentation of their job performance. Several key areas of data driven decision making were therefore impacted, including development opportunities, transparent compensation, and overall organizational justice. While each of these processes was made on an ad hoc basis, the lack of formal documentation introduced unnecessary risk around governance and justice.

The church designed its Personnel Plan to act as its organization's minimum viable infrastructure for HR practices. Rather than a loose compilation of related documents, the Personnel Plan would ideally serve as a system that sends a unified signal to employees about what is expected of them, how they will be held accountable, and how they will be rewarded. The solution included several interconnected features: a standardized job analysis process that included triangulation of data sources, uniform job descriptions that captured core duties and competencies, and a formalized PTO policy that would enable employees to perceive stronger

procedural justice. Additionally, the church implemented an annual review process requiring self-evaluations and committee evaluations to ensure regular performance documentation. Church leadership also included a modified 360-degree review process for pastors.

1.3 Research Questions (RQ)

This case study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How was the personnel system at Church A developed, and what processes guided the creation of job descriptions, policies, and review procedures?

RQ2: How does the Personnel Plan create clarity, structure, and accountability through updated job descriptions, job analysis techniques, PTO policies, and performance assessment mechanisms?

1.4 Significance of Study

Practical Significance

Nonprofits operate on limited budgets, and some small organizations may lack dedicated HR staff. Smaller nonprofits may rely on volunteers or administrators to maintain informal, reactive, or personality-based practices (Kim & Peng, 2018). The outcome of this Personnel Plan sheds light on what others have referred to as a “minimum viable HR infrastructure” by condensing the guiding principles of Industrial–Organizational psychology into micro-organizations with limited monetary or technological means.

Jobs within micro-organizations can first be broken down into observable/measurable components using triangulated job analysis methods. Outside consultants might be consulted as part of the triangulated approach to job analysis. If consultants are not accessible to organizations such as Church A, then the leadership review/questionnaire/committee hybrid used in this study represents a low-cost solution that still follows recommended job analysis procedures (Brannick et al., 2013; Sanchez & Levine, 2012). Despite limited personnel, the committee synthesized data from multiple sources to produce job descriptions and specifications that were both legally defensible and grounded in behaviorally based work analysis.

The Personnel Plan also reveals that reliable procedural timelines can act as proxies for formal HR technology. Rather than purchasing performance management software or other expensive systems, predictable “on ramps” and “off ramps” for Church A’s annual evaluation period codified regularity, expectedness, and transparency of timing, key mechanisms for strengthening the performance management “signal” in the absence of formal infrastructure (Aguinis, 2013; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). For micro-organizations specifically, the consistency of the cycle may serve as its own signal of when employees can expect these processes to occur.

Calibration meetings should be brief in micro-organizations. To the extent that volunteer committees and even individual volunteer evaluators change from cycle to cycle, Church A mitigates interpretive divergence by codifying the evaluation's purposes in a concise, 15–20-minute meeting. Few case studies detail procedures for calibration in micro-organizations, but

this practice is widely supported in the performance appraisal literature (Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

The Personnel Plan also incorporates procedural justice by being transparent in its documentation. Once an organization hires enough employees to require employee policies such as Church A's PTO policy, these written procedures serve as prominent cues that everyone is subject to the same process. This written transparency may allow smaller organizations to satisfy employees' needs for consistency, which forms the foundation of employee perceptions of fairness (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Together, these elements highlight that even micro scale nonprofits can standardize and improve their people's practices by instituting routine, visible, and repeatable procedures. This case contributes to a growing body of literature that demonstrates effective HRM is defined not by organization size, but by the clarity, communication, and alignment of its elements (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Scholarly Significance

Applying HRM system strength to a highly constrained environment, this research offers a valuable contribution by demonstrating its practical applicability. The literature argues that distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus (creating a "strong signal") are more important in micro-contexts (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Without structured signals, small staff numbers and informal reference groups are likely to lead to greater bias and treatment variance. This case demonstrates that I/O concepts are scalable for small businesses and not limited to large corporate giants. They are basic tools of fairness in all organizations.

Definition of Key Terms

Personnel Committee: A governing body responsible for implementing personnel policies, conducting interviews, performing annual reviews, and maintaining employee documentation.

Job Analysis: A formal procedure employed for describing the responsibilities, prerequisites, and competencies necessary for executing tasks.

Job Description: A formal document that outlines job duties, qualifications, and reporting relationships.

Performance Review: A structured evaluation process that includes self-evaluation, supervisor evaluation, and a set of standardized criteria such as communication, productivity, and attendance.

360-Degree Feedback: A multisource evaluation method used for the pastor, integrating feedback from parishioners through a standardized survey.

Halo Effect (Halo Error): A common performance appraisal bias in which a rater's positive impression of an employee on one dimension unduly influences ratings on unrelated dimensions, resulting in inflated or overly favorable evaluations. Halo errors are more likely when rating categories lack behavioral specificity or when raters rely on global impressions rather than job-related behaviors (Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994).

Leniency Error: A rater bias in which evaluators systematically assign higher performance ratings than an employee's actual behavior or results warrant. Leniency occurs when raters avoid giving lower scores, often due to interpersonal comfort, conflict avoidance, or vague rating criteria. This results in inflated evaluations and reduced differentiation among performance levels. (Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994).

1.5 Literature Review

Through synthesizing I/O psychology literature and theory, this review aims to understand how HR infrastructure functions in small nonprofit organizations. These ideas are linked to practice through the implementation of governance policies, job analysis/job documents, vacation policies, and performance management practices. These components allow us to assess if an HR system possesses integration, organization, and justice.

HR practices in small faith-based organizations often look more like informal routines than coherent systems. HR systems work best when they provide employees with consistent, clear signals about what is expected of them and what they will be rewarded for. Informal routines send mixed signals, with clarity coming from the individual supervisor rather than an organization-wide process. Implementation is also hampered by capacity constraints. Small nonprofits often lack sufficient staff, or even a full-time HR professional, to establish dependable administrative routines (Kim & Peng, 2018). This lack of formalization impacts on the complete employee experience: from initial recruitment to ongoing training and reviews, and finally, to compensation.

For these reasons, the Human Resource Management (HRM) System Strength framework can help shed light on nonprofits' ability to evolve from informal routines to formalized systems that exhibit greater levels of distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Clear expectations, communicated and enforced regularly, allow employees to understand which behaviors and outcomes are desired. This understanding is critical if members occupy unique roles within the organization or if committees help dictate HR decisions. Formalized expectations, clear policies, and regular evaluation cycles can mitigate ambiguity and promote stronger perceptions of fairness (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Kim & Peng, 2018).

HRM policies must work together as part of a system. Policies are only as strong as their implementation, so they need to be applied consistently to employees. If a PTO policy is administered fairly and transparently, it can act as a procedural justice policy because employees know what to expect (Colquitt et al., 2001). There is strength in both having a policy and applying it consistently.

Job analysis plays a critical role in this system because it provides information for decisions related to selection, training, performance appraisal, and pay. Specifically, job analysis determines what work is performed and what is required to perform it successfully (Sanchez & Levine, 2012). Job analysis offers objective criteria (KSAOs) on which to base evaluations. With objective information, we can ground our assessments on actual behavior instead of perceptions, even when using low investment, streamlined methods (Brannick et al., 2013).

Content validity further supports the value of job knowledge: HR systems "cannot be legally defensible until based on job-related data that has been gathered in a systematic manner" (Breugh, 2017).

These theoretical frameworks clarify why Church A was ideally suited for exploring these concepts. Prior to the intervention, their existing structure showed the same HR problems often discussed in nonprofit research. With job analysis theory (Sanchez & Levine, 2012), role theory (Tubre & Collins, 2000), performance management theory (Aguinis, 2013), and HRM system strength theory (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) as guides, it's possible to analyze how specially designed HR documents can address organizational risks in low-infrastructure situations. The study of this small nonprofit highlights how I/O theory can inform the creation of an HR system that is well-integrated, unbiased, and evidence based.

2. Method

The methodology for this study uses a qualitative design. Its aim is to understand the development of an integrated HR system within a small faith-based organizational context. This approach allows for investigating complex interrelated elements within this type of organization (i.e., governance, policy, and performance management) within their natural setting. As these organizational dynamics are intertwined, a qualitative design is appropriate for examining them holistically.

To align with the design, a document analysis was utilized. This involved examining and interpreting organizational documents. This permitted a systematic examination and interpretation of an organizational document to extract meaning, identify patterns, and make sense of the document's connection to theoretical constructs related to the strength of HRM systems and organizational outcomes (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Given that the Personnel Plan for Church A is the church's formally codified HR system, document analysis enabled the examination of its HR practices retrospectively without the need to approach personnel to collect data. This is a common approach, especially in low-resource settings such as small nonprofit or faith-based organizations (Kim & Peng, 2018; Russo, 2009). Document analysis, therefore, retained the integrity of the study's purpose in terms of its methodological appropriateness within the parameters of the resource context.

This approach could also be used for smaller organizations that rely on archival written artifacts as the primary sources for expectations, policies, and HR decisions (Russo, 2009). A review of written materials also reveals the extent to which established procedures reflect I/O psychology principles, like job analysis, role clarity, performance management, multisource feedback, and organizational justice. Comparing the Personnel Plan to these domains sheds light on the "strength" of the HRM system in terms of consistency, distinctiveness, and consensus. (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Document review can be used both descriptively and evaluatively in this case study.

To provide further context, the church examined in this study is a small nonprofit religious organization. The church's workforce model is similar to that of other smaller-scale faith-based organizations that have limited resources (Kim & Peng, 2018). The paid workforce includes

ministry leaders, administrative employees, and program-related staff such as musicians, health coordinators, and custodians. Prior to the execution of the plan, many HR practices were informal, inadequately documented, or based on practices developed more than a decade ago. This organizational background highlights why codification and system development were necessary.

Human Resources matters were managed by the Personnel Committee, which included the Pastor, Council President, Committee Chair, and other members. The Personnel Committee is charged with the majority of HR responsibilities, such as performance evaluation, recruitment and selection, development of personnel policies, and advising with the Congregation Council. A Personnel Plan was created to establish organization and standardization, with clearly defined roles and transparent processes for those working with employees. Given the church's small, mission-focused nature, the HR system must be tailored to address operational needs, nurture relationships, and make the most of volunteers and scarce resources. When comparing the Personnel Plan to existing nonprofit research, the organization's distinct qualities must be considered.

For this case study, Church A's Personnel Plan was analyzed. The components of the Personnel Plan are included in Appendices A-I to represent the codified HR system analyzed in this study. The main units of analysis in the document are as follows:

- Personnel Committee Charter Defines the committee's purpose, composition, responsibilities, and oversight functions.
- Paid Time Off (PTO) Policy Outlines PTO accrual rules, usage procedures, weekend limits, and approval expectations.
- Standard Job Analysis questionnaire and instructions to evaluate job duties, time allocation, required skills, and work conditions.
- Standardized Job Descriptions: Contains standardized job descriptions for all paid positions, including job summaries, duties, qualifications, and special requirements.

2.2 Case Overview

The personnel issues with Church A correlate with typical examples given in prior works on smaller, resource-deficient nonprofits. Existing literature suggests that nonprofits that lack HR capacity tend to exhibit informal routines that lack strong or consistent HR signals (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Kim & Peng, 2018). The absence of job descriptions, infrequent performance reviews, and the lack of any formal policies within Church A placed it exactly in the problem area identified in the literature. Thus, the Personnel Plan was developed to address the specific concerns as highlighted in the literature and serves as a practical application of the theoretical constructs discussed in the literature review.

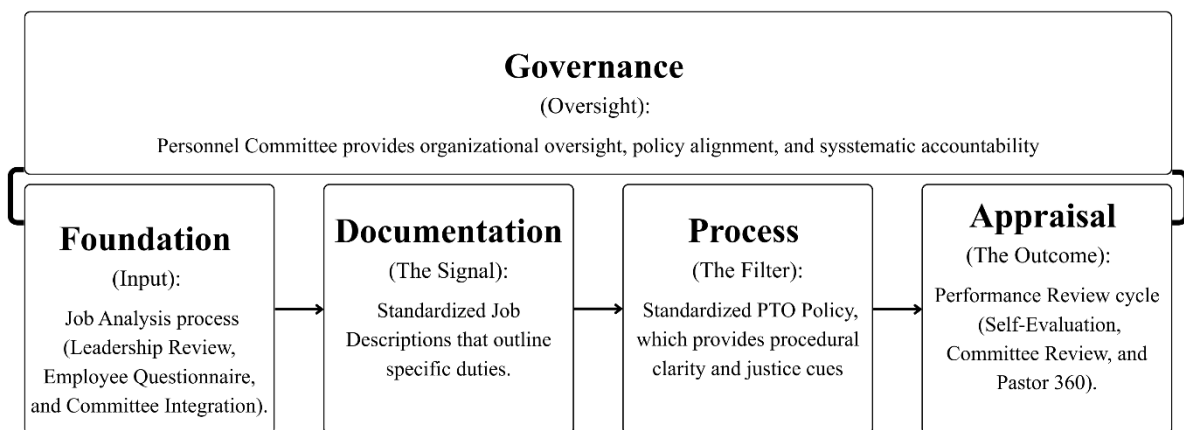
The goal of this case study is to provide insight into the creation and implementation of a standardized personnel system at Church A. The system has been documented in the Personnel Plan, an all-inclusive packet that contains organizational policies and procedures. More specifically, the Personnel Plan acts as a church-wide human resources infrastructure kit. The

Personnel Plan offers the following five primary components: (a) governance structures in the form of a Personnel Committee; (b) a coherent Paid Time Off (PTO) program; (c) a job analysis system and related job analysis tools; (d) updated job descriptions for each paid position; and (e) a formalized performance review system that includes an employee self-evaluation and a 360-degree pastoral evaluation. These five components collectively establish the context within which the organization’s HR system operates. In this micro context, the Personnel Plan shows how clarity can be achieved in HR signals through well-ordered documentation, process transparency, and integrated governance even in resource-constrained environments.

To help visualize, Figure 1 shows the components of the plan's five elements: governance, PTO policy, job analysis, job descriptions, and performance reviews. One can see how the different components relate to each other and work together as a system to address the organization's HR challenges. The representation shows a flow from data-gathering to realization of roles to formal supervision, where each component is seen to contribute to the next. E.g., the logic of alignment is seen in the flow from data-gathering to formal supervision, where the job analysis provides the data for the job description on which the evaluation and governance decisions are based.

Figure 1

The Integrated HR Infrastructure Model for Church A



Note. This figure demonstrates the flow from data collection to systematic oversight.

The purpose behind forming this Personnel Plan was to resolve the personnel issue of not having an HR department. When reviewing the document, it stated that job descriptions were last completed in 2008. This left them outdated compared to the work being done currently. Standardization was needed to allow for dependable supervision as well as rebuilding performance expectations and a common baseline for evaluations. The job description also allowed them to create a need for an evaluation cycle using standard forms. Previous evaluations were stated to either not exist or to have been done inconsistently. All these factors played into why they needed to design an HR system.

Church A's three-step process for revising job descriptions aligns perfectly with literature that describes job analysis as the critical input for any defensible HR system (Brannick et al., 2013; Sanchez & Levine, 2012). The triangulation of incumbent questionnaires, leadership input, and committee summary demonstrates a recommended hybrid work analysis method that allows small organizations to collect valid, observable, job-related information with limited resources. This demonstrates how the theoretical principles of work analysis were translated into the actual redesign of Church A's job documentation.

To ensure job descriptions are updated as part of the redesign process, the Personnel Committee took a three-step approach. First, review current job descriptions. The Personnel Committee reviewed all current job documents. Second, collect information from each employee. All employees were asked to complete a job analysis questionnaire designed to gather information about the job including: task, duty, or function performed; time spent performing this task, duty, or function; knowledge and skills required to perform this task, duty, or function; equipment, tools, and machinery used to perform this task, duty, or function; other people this job interacts with or contacts; laws and/or regulations that must be followed while performing this task, duty, or function; hazards specific to this job. The third step involved integrating the employees' answers with the expectations of the leaders. The Personnel Committee merged the data to develop and produce updated job descriptions that accurately reflect the employee's current professional position. The triangulated approach not only reduces uncertainty among employees on ensuring that job descriptions are updated, but the resulting job descriptions are also evidence-based and reflect actual work behaviors.

Along with the job description updates, the Personnel Plan documented an annual evaluation cycle. This critical step eliminated the inconsistencies of the old process. Church A's evaluation cycle redesign is a clear application of performance management research. The literature notes organizations without an established cycle are at risk for halo error, leniency, and inconsistent standards (Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994). The inclusion of a predictable annual cycle, with reflective forms and a feedback meeting, turns the evaluation from an informal occurrence to a regular event. Aguinis (2013) states that performance systems must include consistency and frequency, and form documentation to hold employees accountable. The Personnel Plan also documented an annual evaluation cycle that includes four structured steps:

1. An employee self-evaluation,
2. A committee evaluation using a standardized form,
3. A formal feedback meeting between the employee and the Personnel Committee, and
4. A recommendation to the Congregation Council regarding performance outcomes.

The new process established a uniform repeatable process allowing transparency, consistency, and documented accountability. The addition of the multisource pastoral evaluation allowed us to implement 360-degree feedback. Studies have shown that multisource tools have greater validity and valuable insight when there is no option of direct supervisory review (Smither et al., 2005). Multisource feedback allows us to specifically fit the needs of a small church where multiple congregational members see the pastoral leadership daily. By integrating a 360-degree

tool, Church A applied multisource feedback principles to strengthen leadership evaluation within its governance constraints. The Personnel Plan also includes a 360-degree feedback tool for the pastor, which complements the broader evaluation framework and provides a multisource perspective on pastoral leadership.

Church A relies on its Personnel Committee as the leading governing body that is responsible for implementing personnel policies and resolving personnel matters. The committee's mission is to help the congregation council with HR-related activities, including job descriptions, hiring recommendations, compensation considerations, staff needs, discipline, and performance evaluations. The committee is responsible for adhering to the organization's governing documents, which include the Employee Handbook and the church constitution. The full Personnel Committee Charter, outlining the mission, composition, and responsibilities, is provided in Appendix A.

The members of the Personnel Committee include the Pastor, Council President, Committee Chairperson, and two other members of the committee. Each member is given duties as follows:

- Pastor: Participates in performance evaluations, compliance with specific authorizing requirements, and record keeping.
- Council President: Acts as a bridge to the Congregation Council, gives updates on progress, and supports interviews and assessments.
- Committee Chair: Develop agendas (distributed prior to meetings), takes minutes/distributes minutes, maintains job descriptions, ensures annual performance evaluations are completed and facilitates new hire process.
- Committee Members: Participate in evaluations, policy development, and recruitment efforts.

The clear structure formalizes human resources governance, allocates responsibilities, and increases accountability in documentation and assessment activities.

3. Results

Findings were interpreted using the HRM system strength lens to better understand how Church A's Personnel Plan conveys HR-related expectations across the dimensions of distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Questions were used to assess each element of the system, including governance documents, PTO policies, job analysis protocols, job descriptions, performance review instruments, and the pastoral 360 degree tool regarding how well it conveys expectations, how predictable it is in practice among employees and over time, and how likely it is that stakeholders will share a common understanding of what it means. This lens was also used to evaluate internal alignment among elements (e.g., do job analysis outcomes carry over to job descriptions? Are job descriptions used to meaningfully develop criteria for evaluations?). The PTO policy was also assessed for contribution to procedural justice as it creates clarity and predictability around time off procedures (Colquitt et al., 2001). The results that follow are thus organized by the three interrelated components of HRM system strength: distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus.

3.2 Distinctiveness

Distinctiveness is defined as the visibility, understandability, and clear communication of HR practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). The policies created and documentation required by the Personnel Plan created visible HR expectations within Church A. Creating a formalized Personnel Committee also supports distinctiveness by clearly outlining where decision-making authority lies and how evaluations, documentation, and oversight should take place. This visible distribution of responsibility and clearly outlined roles aligns with the prescribed duties for strong HRM systems. Strong systems support less noise by providing clear signals to employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Job description redevelopment further supports distinctiveness. Church A completed a three-step job analysis process that was aligned with recommendations by research on job and work analysis (Brannick et al., 2013; Sanchez & Levine, 2012). By triangulating data from an incumbent questionnaire with church leadership's expectations, Church A was able to craft job descriptions that focused on observable, up-to-date job behaviors (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

While many positions benefited from distinct job descriptions, there were some positions that were left generalized. For example, the duties of the Office Administrator are clear and very specific. However, the choir director's job description lacks the same level of detail. When job-related documentation lacks clarity or is uneven across the organization, the HR signal becomes weak to those employees. Employees in positions with generalized or vague job descriptions will have a weaker understanding of what effective performance looks like. This creates opportunities for rater errors and adds noise to the system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

The PTO policy contributes strongly to distinctiveness. Rules regarding accrual, weekend limits, and approval processes are clearly stated, creating visible and understandable expectations. These clearly outlined rules support procedural justice by enabling employees to view the organization's rules as predictable and transparent (Colquitt et al., 2001).

3.3 Consistency

Results consistency refers to whether HR practices are administered in a predictable manner and are stable across employees and over time. Overall, Church A's Personnel Plan increases consistency in their HRM system.

Creating a policy to move from ad hoc reviews to evaluating employee performance on a regular basis (once per year) is the biggest increase in consistency. Standardizing evaluations to occur on a regular basis with set steps clearly supports performance management recommendations of having formal reviews to minimize rater error and inconsistency (Aguinis, 2013; Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994). Formalization of the process should increase synchronicity, expectedness, and reliability of procedures around employee evaluations, which leads to overall strength of the HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Administering the same evaluation form for all positions will also increase consistency by ensuring all employees are rated according to the same categories. However, these established categories are relatively generic and are not connected to job-specific behavioral anchors. Thus,

raters must decide for themselves how broad conclusions can be applied to specific job duties. Individualized interpretation weakens consistency whenever it is required by managers (Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994). Demonstrated consistency will not be fully realized until these practices are used for multiple years. For practice to be consistent, it must be implemented repeatedly and in the same way by different raters over time (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Consistency is also upheld by the PTO policy, as all employees are given the same policy. Clearly defining how and when something happens acts as a procedural justice tool to limit ambiguity and the opportunity for leaders to treat employees differently (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Consistency is being addressed through standardization and documentation. For Church A to continue to improve consistency, it will need to ensure these practices are repeated over time.

3.4 Consensus

Consensus is the level to which stakeholders share meaning about what HR practices represent. Consensus is still the weakest dimension of Church A's HRM system strength for several reasons. The research of Bowen & Ostroff (2004) suggests that successful HRM relies on agreement regarding policy and practice interpretations, but this study's document analysis points to several issues that disrupt the shared understanding. Several areas of "noise" were identified during the document review process that weaken shared understanding. For example, standards for what constitutes "effective performance" are unclear due to interpretive divergence among role descriptions. While some job postings (ex. Office Administrator) are robust and specific, others (Choir Director) are not. When job descriptions are not uniform, employees and raters cannot establish a shared baseline for measuring performance, weakening the HR signal and causing individuals to rely more heavily on their own interpretations (Brannick et al., 2013; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

A second source of noise comes from the rotating membership of the Personnel Committee, which is another factor suppressing consensus. Without documented training or calibration procedures, new committee members will have subjective interpretations of what HR policies mean and how to apply various rating criteria. High staff turnover impedes the "shared meaning" that forms the foundation of a strong HRM system. This challenge has been observed in other small nonprofit settings where governance is reliant on volunteer participation (Kim & Peng, 2018; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Subjective rating anchors on the current employee evaluation forms allow for too much rater interpretation. Without clear, job-specific examples of what each category should look like, raters are forced to interpret the relative meaning of productivity, communication, quality, etc., on their own. Studies have demonstrated that when rating categories are broad and unanchored, rater reliability decreases and tendencies toward halo, leniency, or idiosyncratic rating errors increase (Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994; Aguinis, 2013). This disconnect creates a "paper versus practice" scenario in which the document may exist, but not the shared understanding.

The final area of noise that weakens consensus was related to how the 360 degree pastoral tool is used. Currently, it is functioning largely as a diagnostic tool and not as a developmental tool. If there are no formal processes in place to ensure evaluators and pastoral leadership are

communicating about how feedback should be used (i.e., facilitated feedback debriefing, goal setting, and midterm check ins), then shared meaning cannot be achieved about the tool's purpose. Research on multisource feedback has found that performance improvements were only seen when feedback was utilized along with a development plan and coaching (Smither et al., 2005). Until these practices are embedded, this tool will send mixed messages and weaken consensus.

4. Discussion

In this case, we see how triangulated job analysis (use of leader expectations with incumbent feedback) can reduce ambiguity in job descriptions while also establishing defensible, data-based job documentation when organizations have limited resources. The lack of specificity in Church A's job documentation is likely due to the method of allowing several raters (pastor, members of the Personnel Committee) to provide input on job performance without first ensuring they share a common understanding of the rating categories. When evaluators define categories differently, the resulting variation disrupts psychological contracts and affects the shared meaning that theory identifies as critical for effective HRM system strength (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

A brief rater calibration meeting should be held before each evaluation cycle. Holding a meeting directly impacts consistency and consensus by ensuring a unified understanding of rating criteria (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Calibration ensures consistency by making sure that raters are using rating categories in the same way for each employee. Calibration ensures consensus by allowing raters to develop shared meaning about what effective performance looks like. Strong HR signals will exist when raters form similar interpretations about what is expected of them, minimizing noise and mitigating the potential for halo or leniency effects (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). This tool speaks directly to consensus by creating a common meaning among raters and consistency by making sure the same standards are used for each employee and over time.

If Church A were to hold a 15–20-minute calibration meeting before each evaluation cycle, raters would have the opportunity to discuss rating categories, review examples of performance for each category, and ensure they are standardizing their expectations. This low-cost intervention would increase rater reliability across evaluators and across time, supporting a more stable and credible evaluation process. This intervention directly operationalizes consensus by creating shared meaning among raters and Consistency by ensuring the same standards are applied across different employees and time periods (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Even with a small organization and a small HR department, this case demonstrates how they still managed to generate powerful signals of distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). This case study shows that HRM system strength is achievable regardless of company size if the organization has well-defined and aligned practices. Another valuable takeaway from this case is how the organization's consistency among organization documentation, job-relatedness of expectations, and evaluation forms narrowed discretion, allowing less room for decisions to be made on subjective impressions and increased the defensibility of decisions by laying out clear standards that other small nonprofits can follow.

The PTO policy even serves as a great example of a procedural justice mechanism.

The Personnel Plan specifies tools used in the evaluation process; it does not outline how performance data, supporting notes, or multisource feedback scores are stored/accessed/shared. Research on procedural justice suggests that employees perceive equity along outcome and procedural lines (i.e., whether the process was open, trustworthy, ethical, and fair) (Colquitt et al., 2001). Outlining the plan's confidentiality and data handling protocol (i.e., who will have access to evaluations, how long they are kept, where they are stored, and how results are disseminated) would improve confidence in the evaluation procedure. It would also enhance the perceived legitimacy of church governance by establishing accountability measures for confidential information.

Although the pastoral 360-degree feedback tool has diagnostic strength, there is no mention of development or follow-up process in the Personnel Plan description. Research has found that multisource feedback only leads to performance improvement when implemented with goal setting, reflective discussion, and continuous coaching (Smither et al., 2005). By including a formal follow-up, the 360-degree feedback process gains more distinctiveness, as it explicitly signals its commitment to employee growth. Consistency is also strengthened by standardizing the procedures that follow the assessment completion (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Without these features, the 360 tool may only be perceived as a one-off assessment mechanism. By defining a development roadmap for the 360 process, organizations can strengthen both distinctiveness and consistency. Providing employees and leaders with a clear, visible statement about how multi-source feedback will be used to promote growth increases distinctiveness (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Standardizing a series of steps to follow each completion (debriefing, goal setting, and mid-year check-ins) increases consistency. Without consistent follow-up, each new feedback cycle muddles the system's ability to create a shared meaning by introducing noise rather than signal (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). We learn from this case that multisource feedback at small nonprofit organizations should always be accompanied by a development roadmap.

To improve the "signal" of the pastoral evaluation system, the Personnel Committee would need to implement a Post 360 Development Plan that includes (1) a debrief session facilitated by a committee representative, (2) Defining two to three specific development goals based on the feedback, (3) a roadmap outlining specific strategies and timelines, and (d) amid year check in to review goals and revise as needed. Implementing these steps would elevate the pastoral evaluation "signal" from a mixed or unclear HRM signal to a strong, development-focused system characterized by transparency, clarity, and accountability.

4.2 Limitations

While there are many strengths to the personnel system analysis, there are also contextual and methodological limitations. Because of these limitations, the results can only be interpreted as descriptive of the written HR system and cannot be used to make definitive conclusions about how the system operates in reality. The biggest weakness of this study is that it used the Personnel Plan and other written artifacts as its sole source of data. This was solely a document review and therefore analyzed what the desired HR system was designed to be vs. what it is doing in practice. While it was found that the HR system overall did seem well written and

comprehensive in the Personnel Plan, this study could not determine if annual reviews were occurring, if PTO policy was adhered to, or if multi-source feedback was conducted. This leaves room for a paper vs. practice gap in which the documents may be strong but were not able to be verified to be consistently repeated over time, implemented consistently, or enacted by all stakeholders in the same manner (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Long-term execution and behavioral impact could not be confirmed because only the statement of what the HR practices should be was captured.

This “paper vs. practice” gap also offers a practical warning for other small nonprofits: documentation alone does not create consensus. Policies can create written expectations, but they do not create shared understanding until they are put into practice repeatedly over time by multiple raters. That’s why distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus are vital components of a strong HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). For organizations with limited HR capacity, the lesson is that codified policies are a necessary foundation, but they must be reinforced through training, communication, and repeated application to truly build alignment.

The case also illustrates the difference between “signal” and “noise” in HR systems. Unofficial routines, ad hoc decision making, and tacit expectations create noise that muddies the organization’s message about which behaviors are rewarded. Meanwhile, the cohesive Personnel Plan described in this case sends a clear signal that good documentation, formalized procedures, and aligned evaluation tools can help organizations establish consistent expectations. This concept can translate to any small nonprofit trying to transition from informal, personality-driven practices to formalized, system-driven HR practices.

Since this was a single-case design in a faith-based context, it has inherent limitations in generalizability. The church is a small, faith-based nonprofit organization with a governance, volunteer engagement model, and a denominational context. As a result, this system may not translate to secular nonprofits, larger religious institutions, or organizations with different doctrinal governance models. The system was developed for a small staff that included roles of office administrator, organist, parish nurse, and part-time music ministry leaders. The case study did not test whether the design would scale effectively in larger organizations with higher complexity in staffing.

The lack of interviews, surveys, or feedback from employees, committee members, or pastoral leadership was one of the limitations of this study. The data analysis produced many procedural justice cues, such as the presence or clarity of PTO policy, but cannot speak to whether staff feel the system is fair, usable, useful, or meaningful. Without knowing the perception of the staff of the HR system, limited conclusions can be made about perceived effectiveness. For example, within the Personnel Plan, there are set standardized review cycles, but we do not know if employees will accept them, find them useful, or be satisfied with them. According to justice theory, we can't fully understand subjective experiences without complementary data like employee feedback (Colquitt et al., 2001). The researcher was directly involved in the development of the Personnel Plan; however, this study was constructed as a retrospective document analysis, and as such, no formal research data were gathered from staff or leadership (i.e. interviews or surveys) to complement this analysis. The documents themselves can stand

alone as a 'strong signal' of what HR practice should look like, but without formalized feedback from participants, we do not know if employees will accept them or how the system actually 'feels'.

The case study's key limitations include document-only data, which prevents verification of real-world HR practice. There is a lack of employee perception data, which reduces insight into fairness, usability, and system acceptance. Potential researchers' bias due to proximity to the church is also evident. By recognizing these limitations, aids one can ensure appropriate interpretation of the case study findings. This also provides direction for future research in the evaluation of HRM system implementation in small nonprofit organizations.

4.3 Future Research

Addressing the limitations of this document analysis, future research opportunities include evaluating the implementation of fidelity in reviews and the use of PTO policy. A longitudinal study would help evaluate the paper vs. practice gap by observing whether annual reviews and policy applications occur consistently over a 3- to 5-year period. Assessing staff perceptions of procedural justice (Colquitt et al., 2001) can be done by using a qualitative design to determine how staff perceive the new system's fairness. Comparing HR system design across multiple churches (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), a multi-site comparison could be performed to examine HR models across different nonprofits to test their generalizability beyond a single case context. Studying developmental outcomes of enhanced 360-degree feedback processes (Smither et al., 2005), by examining the outcomes for long-term impact, can provide information on whether structured follow-up coaching leads to measurable leadership growth.

4.4 Conclusion

This case study provides information on how organizations with limited resources can successfully transition from an informal, reactive personnel situation to a formalized HR system. By integrating job analysis with performance management and governance, Church A created a structured framework that increases role clarity and procedural justice.

Even though the policies provided more clarity than Church A's previous approach, a solid system still needs each part to be in sync and supportive of the others. Church A exhibited strengths in governance and the PTO policy, laying a good foundation. Their PTO policy sent clear signals of procedural justice by laying out straightforward guidelines that are consistently applied, allowing for less opportunity to favor someone. One area Church A could develop further is its performance appraisal system. Their policy sent murky signals regarding the lack of behavioral anchors. One way to directly improve consistency and consensus would be to implement rater calibration. Rater calibration directly aligns how everyone involved interprets the standards for each rating (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). This case study could be used as a starting point for other small businesses to create a fair, defensible, and aligned system even when you have no HR department.

The significance of this case is its demonstration of how I/O concepts, such as job analysis, role clarity, performance management, organizational justice, and HRM system strength, are translated into a micro context and do not require a large infrastructure to be effective. Bowen

& Ostroff's (2004) theory are generally conceived in relation to large, complex corporate systems. However, this small faith-based organization demonstrates that strong HR signals are possible in an extremely resource-scarce environment if reasonable documentation, expectations, and decision-making processes are in place. Job analysis methods (Brannick et al, 2013; Sanchez & Levine, 2012) and performance management theories (Aguinis, 2013; Woehr & Huffcutt, 1994) can be thoughtfully scaled, preserving validity and fairness. In fact, the emphasis on system strength is magnified in the micro context: small staff sizes, volunteer committees, and informal reference groups create more variation in treatment in the absence of structured HR practices, making distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus even more critical for ensuring equitable treatment. HRM system strength as a function of fairness, allowing small nonprofit organizations to reduce grey areas, control bias, and define expectations in the absence of significant HR manpower. I/O theory is further generalized by this case, illustrating how the basic building blocks of practice can create strong, uniform HR signals in organizations characterized by minimal infrastructure.

Overall, the case demonstrates that strong, coherent HR signals do not require organizational scale; they need alignment. Small organizations can meaningfully apply core I/O practices to create fair, consistent, and defensible personnel systems even within significant resource constraints.

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Authors contributions

The author was responsible for the study design, data collection, and drafting of the manuscript. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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