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Research Methods for Business (LCLM6004)

Assignment Title: Component 1 – Business Research
Proposal

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Abstract

This research proposal examines the impact of ethical human resource (HR) practices on employee satisfaction and organisational performance using Clean for Good Ltd, a UK-based social enterprise, as a case study. The company has distinguished itself within the commercial cleaning industry by implementing employment practices such as paying the London Living wage, providing contractual sick pay, offering Living Pension contributions, profit-sharing, and promoting employee wellbeing. Despite growing interest in ethical employment and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices, there is limited research exploring how these initiatives influence organisational performance within social enterprises operating in labour-intensive sectors.

The study aims to investigate the relationship between ethical HR practices, employee satisfaction, and organisational outcomes. Specifically, it seeks to identify the employment practices adopted by Clean for Good, evaluate their effect on employee motivation and retention, and assess how these contribute to service quality and business performance. A qualitative case study approach is proposed, using semi-structured interviews with employees and managers alongside analysis of company reports and academic literature. Thematic analysis will be used to identify key patterns and insights from the collected data.

The findings are expected to contribute to both academic knowledge and business practice by demonstrating how ethical employment strategies can enhance employee wellbeing, strengthen organisational performance, and support sustainable business growth. The research will also provide practical recommendations for organisations seeking to improve workforce engagement while maintaining commercial success and social responsibility.

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1. Introduction

Business organisations increasingly recognise that employees are valuable assets whose wellbeing significantly contributes to organisational performance. Ethical employment practices, including fair wages, employee wellbeing, career development, and inclusive working environments, have become strategic priorities for organisations seeking long-term sustainability. Social enterprises particularly emphasise balancing commercial success with positive social impact.

Clean for Good Ltd is a London-based ethical commercial cleaning company established in 2017 to transform employment practices within the UK cleaning industry. Unlike many traditional cleaning companies, Clean for Good pays the London Living Wage, provides contractual sick pay, profit-sharing, Living Pension contributions, guaranteed working hours, and promotes employee dignity. According to its 2024–2025 Impact Report, the company employs 85 staff across 61 client sites while maintaining high employee satisfaction and strong business growth.

Despite these achievements, little academic research has examined how ethical employment practices influence employee satisfaction and organisational performance within social enterprises operating in the cleaning industry. This research therefore aims to investigate the relationship between ethical HR practices and organisational outcomes at Clean for Good.

2. Identification of Business Problem

The UK cleaning industry has traditionally experienced significant employment challenges, including low wages, insecure contracts, poor working conditions, limited employee engagement, and high staff turnover. These issues reduce employee motivation, negatively affect service quality, increase recruitment costs, and damage organisational reputation.

Although Clean for Good has adopted innovative employment practices, there is limited evidence explaining which specific HR practices contribute most to employee satisfaction and organisational success.

The business problem can therefore be stated as:

How do ethical employment practices implemented by Clean for Good influence employee satisfaction, retention and organisational performance.

Addressing this problem is important because many organisations continue to struggle with labour shortages, employee retention, productivity, and ESG commitments. Understanding the effectiveness of ethical HR practices could provide valuable guidance for organisations seeking sustainable competitive advantage.

3. Research Aim, Objectives and Research Questions

Research Aim

To evaluate how ethical human resource practices influence employee satisfaction and organisational performance at Clean for Good Ltd

Research Objectives

1. To examine the ethical employment practices implemented by Clean for Good.
2. To investigate the relationship between ethical HR practices and employee satisfaction.
3. To evaluate how employee satisfaction contributes to organisational performance.
4. To recommend strategies for improving employee wellbeing and organisational effectiveness.

Research Questions

1. What ethical HR practices are implemented by Clean for Good?
2. How do these practices affect employee satisfaction?
3. How does employee satisfaction influence organisational performance?
4. What improvements could further strengthen Clean for Good's HR strategy?

SMART Evaluation

The research objectives satisfy the SMART framework because they are:

- Specific—focus on ethical HR practices.
- Measurable—employee satisfaction and organisational performance can be assessed.
- Time-bound—research completed within one academic semester.

4. Critical Literature Review

Employee wellbeing has become one of the most significant strategic priorities in modern human resource management (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Organisations increasingly recognise that motivated employees improve productivity, innovation and customer satisfaction.

Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory argues that salary alone cannot motivate employees; recognition, achievement and meaningful work are equally important. Clean for Good demonstrates this through profit-sharing, employee recognition awards and supportive management.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) suggests that employees seek safety, belonging and self-esteem before reaching self-actualisation. Clean for Good addresses these needs through guaranteed working hours, contractual sick pay, Living Pension contributions and supportive leadership.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) explains that employees reciprocate positive organisational treatment with increased commitment and loyalty. This theory supports Clean for Good's employee-centred business model, where investment in workers results in higher engagement and lower turnover.

Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) proposes that organisations should create value for all stakeholders rather than shareholders alone. Clean for Good exemplifies this through its commitment to employees, customers, investors and society.

Research by Pfeffer (1998) demonstrates that organisations investing in employees experience lower turnover and higher organisational performance. Similarly, Guest (2017) argues that employee wellbeing positively influences productivity and customer satisfaction.

Recent studies highlight the importance of ethical leadership and ESG strategies. According to CIPD (2024), organisations providing fair pay, wellbeing initiatives and inclusive cultures outperform competitors in employee engagement.

Clean for Good's practices align closely with Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), promoting fair employment while maintaining commercial growth.

However, existing literature focuses largely on large corporations. Few studies examine ethical HR practices within social enterprises operating in labour-intensive industries such as commercial cleaning. This represents an important research gap that this seeks to address.

5. Research Methodology and Design

Research Philosophy

The study adopts an interpretivist philosophy because it seeks to understand employees' experiences and perceptions.

Research Approach

A Qualitative research is selected because it enables detailed exploration of employee experiences rather than numerical measurement.

Research Strategy

A single case study design focusing on Clean for Good is appropriate because it allows an in-depth understanding of ethical employment practices within one organisation.

Data Collection

Primary data

- Semi-structured interviews with employees
- Interviews with managers

Secondary data

- Clean for Good Impact Reports
- Academic journal articles
- CIPD reports
- Living Wage Foundation publications

Sampling

Purposive sampling will be used to select participants with direct experience of Clean for Good's employment practices.

Samples:

- 10 cleaners
- 3 supervisors
- 2 senior managers

Data Analysis

Interview transcripts will be analysed using analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes such as employee wellbeing, motivation, organisational commitment and job satisfaction will be identified.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability will be improved by using consistent interview questions.

Validity will be strengthened through triangulation using interviews, organisational reports and academic literature.

Ethical Considerations

The study will follow the University ethical guidelines.

Participants will:

- Provide informed consent
- Remain anonymous
- Have the right to withdraw
- Have confidential data securely stored

Limitations

Potential limitations include:

- Small sample size
- Research limited to one company
- Time constraints
- Potential response bias

6. Business Relevance and Practical Implications

The findings could help Clean for Good improve employee engagement and strengthen its ethical employment model.

The research could support:

- Improved staff retention
- Reduced absenteeism
- Higher employee satisfaction
- Improved customer service
- Strong ESG performance
- Better organisational reputation

The findings may also provide practical recommendations for other cleaning companies seeking to improve working conditions while maintaining commercial success.

Potential implementation challenges include increased operating costs associated with ethical employment practices. However, these may be offset by reduced recruitment costs, improved productivity and enhanced customer loyalty.

7. Conclusión

This research proposal has examined the importance of ethical human resource practices in improving employee satisfaction and organisational performance through a case study of Clean for Good Ltd. The proposal identified a significant business problem within the UK cleaning industry, where low pay, insecure employment, and poor working conditions continue to affect employee wellbeing and service quality. Clean for Good offers an alternative model by prioritising fair pay, secure employment, employee wellbeing, and social responsibility.

The proposed research aims to explore how these ethical employment practices influence employee motivation, retention, and overall organisational performance. A qualitative case study methodology, supported by semi-structured interviews and secondary data analysis, has been selected to provide an in-depth understanding of employees' experiences and the effectiveness of the company's practices. The study is grounded in established theories of motivation, stakeholder management, and social exchange, providing a strong theoretical foundation for analysing the findings.

Overall, this research has the potential to contribute to both academic knowledge and business practice by demonstrating how ethical employment strategies can create sustainable competitive advantages. The findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for Clean for Good and other organisations seeking to improve employee wellbeing, strengthen organisational performance, and promote responsible business practices within the commercial cleaning sector.

8. References

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