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In the Heartland of the HR-Jurisdiction

HRT – A Source to Professional Rivalry?

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Summary

This research shows a profession which still struggles with being acknowledged and confirmed as a profession, which possesses abstract knowledge rather than solely being an expert on practical techniques. It is emphasized that HR need to get close to the business and focus on adding business value by mainly working strategically and tactical. The profession has consequently increased the abstraction and it is aiming for more influence and legitimacy. The profession does hence try to expand its jurisdiction and inter-professional rivalry consequently exists. The results from this research shows and clarifies inter- and intra professional rivalry as forces which aim for increased abstraction in order to gain legitimacy and influence. The HR-Transformation has enabled and enhanced further abstraction and distancing. However, the research further shows that there is a potential risk that the HR-profession loses its function if the centralization and specialization go too far as this might create divisions and subgroups and within the profession which might open up for vacancies in the system of profession. The HR-profession might, by distancing itself too far, lose influence and legitimacy as it does not any more control the initial tasks of its heartland of jurisdiction, for which their clients used to recognize them for.

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PART I

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background

The view and opinions regarding the HR profession have during recent years gone through a major shift where an increasing focus has been put on HR as a business partner which is supposed to be able to build a strategic function in alignment with an organization's goals and vision (Francis & Keegan, 2006; Jemrog & Overhog, 2004). Boudreau and Lawler (2009) argue that the general HR function today has at least three identifiable roles to play. The longest-running still-existing role is personnel administration, i.e. the delivery of clerical and administrative services. During the last two decades, a role as business partner has emerged, meaning that HR today also is expected to implement and deliver HR practices and services that support an organization's business model (Boudreau & Lawler, 2009). In the context of this relatively new business oriented approach to HR, a third role has during the last decade emerged, which emphasizes and highlights that HR should become a full worthy strategic partner, meaning that HR should be directly involved in major business decisions of an organization and consequently influence the formation of strategy, the design of organization and also the business model (Boudreau & Lawler, 2009). The trend of a business oriented approach and consequently a wider range of roles within the HR profession, has created a situation where the role of personnel administration is diminished among HR-professionals and the clerical and administrative services are increasingly outsourced or transferred back to line managers. HR-departments have consequently to a large extent been so called rationalised, transformed and been given strategic responsibilities (Jemrog & Overhog, 2004).

This is a change which can be traced to the general development of a more business oriented approach in an increasing number of environments which before have been relatively unaware of terms like markets, customers and cost center within their fields (Boudreau & Lawler, 2009; Winroth, 1999). Public organizations, support activities and even whole professions are facing demands of having a business oriented and economical mind-set, which aims at rationalisation in order for them to be able to become more efficient and find ways to create

value for an organization or department. This development is generally associated with the term “management”, which tend to sum up to three key points: working processes should and can be rationalized, the organization’s goals need to be in focus, efficiency and predictability need to be prioritized (Winroth, 1999).

The HR-profession is, as described above when introducing the different roles HR play today, an example of a profession, which has been strongly influenced of this trend and has consequently undergone a major change, something which, the emergence of the concept Human Resource Management (HRM) is a clear example of, according to Winroth, (1999). HRM highlights, rather than traditional personnel management, a consultative, proactive and strategic HR-work, which should be connected to organizations’ overall goals, in order to create surplus value for its organization (Francis & Keegan, 2006). This is something which can be referred to the second role, as described above, when acting as a HR Business Partner (HRBP) in the organisation.

Influenced by the thoughts of HRM, a new concept has emerged during the last decade, the so-called “HR-Transformation” (HRT). The ideas of HRT originate from the researcher and consultant, Dave Ulrich, at the Michigan University (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich, 2009; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). Ulrich argues for specialization and standardization of an organization’s HR-work so that pure personnel administration can be transferred back to line managers, “HR-centres” or even be outsourced in order for the remaining HR-work to be able to focus on the strategic role and how to add surplus value to the organization, something which can be referred to the above described third role (HR as a strategic partner). These transformations aim to increase the efficiency and the business orientation as well as develop a greater strategic HR competence with the HR professionals (Ulrich, 2009). The thoughts of Ulrich have been transformed and conceptualized by management consultants and are today spread as a model for HR-work reformation and the relatively new concept is increasingly gaining field (Boglund, et al. 2007; Lindeberg & Månsson, 2010).

1.2 Problem Area

HRT has had a major impact worldwide and organizations in Sweden are no exceptions as HRT here seems to have gained status as being the “correct” model for HR-work and corporations within both the private and public sector have embraced these ideas (Boglund, et al. 2007; Lindeberg & Månsson, 2010). However, HRT and the concept’s of Ulrich have been

criticized as relatively few academic studies have been done in the field and little empirical evidence exist that the transformation actually has the desired outcome that organizations are looking for (Cook, 2006; Boglind, et al. 2007; Boglind, et al. 2011). Cook (2006) states that there is a significant discrepancy between the model's intentions and its results, something which also is supported by Boglind et, al (2011). Previous research concerning HRT and various Swedish organizations support the idea of a potential gap between theory and practice, something that seem to be connected to factors such as expectations, roles and identity of the HR-profession (Möllerström, 2010; Josefsson & Thor, 2007).

It is consequently interesting to notice that numerous organizations are proceeding with these HR transformations without any certainty of the long-term effects from it, something which raises the question about the motives and incentives behind the undergone transformations. Ulrich (1997) and Ulrich & Brockbank (2005) as well as consultants, which have embraced concept in line with the HR-Transformation, argue that HR professionals uses this kind of transformation to claim and gain influence in their organisations. This assertion is something that Boglind et al (2011) also briefly highlight and reason about in their study from 2011. However, their research cannot, due to its exploratory design, provide any evidence to the truth of this matter but there are some indications in their research that the so-called HR-specialists have slipped down on the organizational hierarchy due to the HR transformation, while for example HR Business Partners have climbed the ladder. Such changes are something that Boglind et al. (2011) in the long run think can result in a bifurcation of power within the HR profession (Boglind et al, 2011). Nevertheless, HR-professionals are acting as lobbyists for changes in line with HR-transformation and as stated above, an highlighted assertion is that the transformation actually might be undertaken to enhance the HR professionals' overall status and influence in the organization.

Authors, who speak for the ideas of Ulrich and HRT, emphasize that it is crucial that the HR-professional realize that real strategic HR is about being able to be in the very heart of business to be able to deliver sustainable performance and growth. Building an appetite and expectation for strategic HR and business leadership is essential in order to gain legitimacy and influence (Adams, 2012; Boudreau & Lawler, 2009). Adams (2012) argues that HR Professionals need to assume a leadership role and be able to manage business conversations in order to be able contribute in obtaining an organization's goals. It is therefore a rather dramatic change within HR where its professional status and heartland area is questioned with

a fundamental shift from a focus on reactive personnel administration to a business oriented and strategic approach. HR-professionals are hence, according to contemporary literature, encouraged to actively take part in the evolvement of the organization by taking the role as a business and strategic partner in alignment with concepts like the HRT-model.

The incentives and motives behind concepts like the HR-Transformations and how it potentially can be connected to how the HR-professionals aim to enhance their legitimacy and status, is a research area, which due to the HRT-concept's rapid spread is highly relevant. It seems reasonable to believe that this can be an expression of inter- and intra-professional rivalry as both HR-professionals and other professions might have difficulties accepting, the new emerged HR roles and tasks connected with the business oriented and strategic HR-approach. This rivalry could explain why there seem to be such a significant discrepancy between theories and practice, as stated above.

The terms inter- and intra-professional rivalry have emerged from the idea that all professions are linked together in a so-called system of profession's, where professions compete and rival over its heartland of scope of work and tasks (Abbott, 1988). According to this theory, professions are in constant conflict over its so-called jurisdiction and take different actions in order to claim and/or maintain its control. Also, professions are no homogenous groups and intra-professional rivalry consequently emerges due to for example internal stratification, which in itself often contribute in developing the profession or sometimes even can be the cause of degeneration of professions (Abbott, 1988). In this paper I would like to contribute to this line of research with an interview study with HR-professionals regarding the HR-professions development and the HRT phenomena.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to analyse HR professionals experiences of the trend of HRT by focusing on the incentives and motives behind the transformation and how these can be connected to the intra and inter-professional rivalry of HR. This research aims to contribute to research within the theoretical field of HRT as well as to the professional development of the HR-profession. The following research questions were formulated in order to reach the purpose of the study:

- How does the concepts of inter and intra-professional rivalry explain the HR-Transformation?
- What do HR-professionals think should be in the heartland of the HR-jurisdiction?

1.4 Disposition

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the field of study and aims at giving the reader a good overview and understanding of previous research and present the problem area connected to this research area and further aims to convince the reader of the relevance of this study.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

This report proceeds by presenting the theoretical framework in chapter 2, which clarifies and describes the theoretical perspectives that are regarded as relevant for this study and systematically will be used when analysing the presented empirical data. Initially will a general view of the dominating theories within the field of professions be presented in order for the reader to get an understandable overview of previous studies within this theoretical field. Rather quickly is the framework narrowed down to present the ideas of Abbott and “The System of Professions” and the inter- and intra-professional rivalry perspective.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The following chapter presents in detail the research’s method. It clarifies what was done, how it was done, how it was analysed and how it was presented to the reader. The chosen research approach suitable for this study is initially presented and how primary and secondary

data was collected.

Chapter 4 – Material

In the following chapter is the reader introduced to the collected data from the interviews. The interview guide to company A and B can be found in appendix I if the reader desires more information about the interview questions.

Chapter 5 – Analysis

In this chapter is the material analysed and discussed in relation to the chosen theoretical framework and the highlighted problem area of this field of study.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions

In following chapter is the conclusion presented. The research questions are answered and suggestions for further research are highlighted.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Concept of Professions

“Professions dominate our world” (Abbott, 1988 p 1.). It is such a common phenomena today that we in general tend to not reflect over why certain groups dominate and control various kinds of knowledge and scope of work. “They heal our bodies, measure our profits and save our souls” (Abbott, 1988 p 1.) and refer to these work tasks as exclusive and privileged to the professions such as physician, economist and priest. The concept, profession, was initially narrowly used and was mainly reserved for “the three learned professions: divinity, law and physics” (Hellberg, 1991). However, as more occupational groups with similar characteristics as the three learned professions emerged in the beginning of the 20th century, the concept came to include increasingly numbers of occupations meaning that they became classified as professions with expert knowledge within a certain theoretical area and scope of work (Hellberg, 1991; Winroth, 1999). This transformation did however not proceed without opposition and resisters argued that only the “three learned professions” should and could be regarded as “real” professions. This did consequently contribute to a long-lasting theoretical debate concerning what should be regarded as a profession or not, an issue which still today researchers have not reached fully consensus about. Studies of professions have consequently been dominated by an interest in explaining the dominant position of a few occupational

groups and research efforts are made to identify what characteristics separate professions from occupations and consequently how these factors relate to influence, social and economic power, which for a long time has been synonymous with the concept of professions (Samuel et al, 2005).

The actual increased amount of argued identified professions did however root and nurture the ideas of a common process development for occupations, professionalization. The benchmark has been that professions play an extensive role in the society and that the so-called professionalization is alleged to happen through a particular process (Winroth, 1999). This process has mainly been studied in alignment with two covering themes. The first one has focused on examining a specific profession and its historical development. The second theme highlights that a profession do not evolve isolated from other professions, it is rather in a constant conflict with other professions and occupational groups regarding their work field, influence, status and control, so called professional rivalry. How to deal with this in a strategic way is highly relevant for a profession's influence and status (Abbott, 1988; Torstendahl & Burrage, 1990; Winroth, 1999).

The latter theme has during the last two decades become the dominating one with the researcher Andrew Abbott (1988) as a pioneer when viewing professions as a part of a system and looking into the system's environment in order to be able to analyse professional development. Abbott's work: "The system of professions – An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor" (1988) has had a major impact on this theoretical field and is still today frequently used when analysing professional development of different professions. The overall key concepts of Abbott's work will consequently be presented in the following section as it can contribute in clarifying perspectives on the motives, incentives as well as potential consequences for the HR-profession when going through changes in alignment with the HR-Transformation.

2.2 The System of Professions and Inter-professional Rivalry

2.2.1 Profession and Level of Abstraction

In contrast to previous traditional studies of professions, which as stated above put substantial emphasize on developing an exact definition of what can be regarded as a profession, Abbott

embraced a rather loosely and offhand approach to this matter and defines professions as “exclusive occupational groups applying abstract knowledge to particular cases” (Abbott, 1988 p. 8). Abbott highlights that his work aims at dealing with the underlying questions connected to the evolution and interrelations of professions and more specifically the ways occupational groups control knowledge and skill (Abbott, 1988). The evolution of professions is considered as a result from their interrelations and these interrelations are argued to be determined by the way these groups control their knowledge and skill. There are however two different ways of achieving this control and that is what distinguishes if an occupation is regarded as a profession or not. One accentuates techniques intrinsically and occupations using it are generally called crafts and to control such an occupation, it controls its technique (Abbott, 1988). Abbott (1988) argues further that the other form of control includes abstract knowledge and that practical skills grows out of an abstract system of knowledge and consequently control of the occupation lies in the control of the abstraction that generate the practical techniques. The practical techniques may then actually be delegated to other workers.

Abbott (1988) regards this abstraction to be the characteristic that best identifies a profession and highlights that abstraction is the quality that distinguishes and sets inter-professional competition apart from competition among occupations in general. “Abstraction enables survival in the competitive system of professions” (Abbott, 1988, p. 9) and only a knowledge system governed by abstractions can seize a new working area as its “problem” to be an expert on, and consequently by doing so defend it from intruding professions. Abbott (1988) regards the knowledge system and its degree of abstraction as the “ultimate currency of competition between professions” (p.9). However the degree of required level of abstraction meaning how abstract is abstract enough to be professional is highly relative and subjective as the degree of abstraction necessary for survival varies with place and time in the system of professions. However what is relevant is that abstraction should be effective enough to compete in particular historical and social context (Abbott, 1988). A profession does consequently in this perspective claim exclusive right to control specific tasks or scope of work by arguing for its possession of abstract knowledge.

2.2.2 Professionalization

A dominating theme and perception within previous studies and research done within the field of professionalization has been that occupations develop in a shared pattern when advancing

towards becoming a so called profession which researchers have come to consensus to name professionalization (Abbott, 1988; Hellberg, 1991; Winroth, 1999). This assumption is fairly easy to embrace as a novice within the field which is why the ideas of Harold Wilensky (1964) here is presented in order to give an idea of some of the taken actions in professionalization. Notable is that Wilensky's ideas (1964) are also presented and reasoned within Abbott's work, whereas he strongly rejects the ideas of professionalization being a unidirectional process. Nevertheless, the ideas of Wilensky, about what professionalization can mean, and some of Abbott's interpretations of it, are briefly presented in the following sections:

Professionalization begins when there is an increased demand of a particular task to be done or scope of work and an occupation group start doing that full time. An effect of that is that the demand of training and development increases and schools are created. The schools seek affirmation, legitimacy and consequently seek affiliation and connection to established universities and schools, which often has the effect of higher standards, longer training and full time teachers within that field. These teachers then, together with their graduates, propagate, promote and potentially create a professional association. In the work of being regarded as a profession can a name-change reoccur, and attempts is made to separate competent from incompetent which can lead to internal conflict between the educated graduates and the elderly on-the-job employees. Reflections and thoughts about what is considered central and predominant in the occupation may lead to relocations of routine work to paraprofessionals and stratification within the professions can emerge. Professions can also seek for state protection meaning that for example a license is required to conduct a certain scope of work or tasks, something that for example is mandatory for physicians and pharmacists (Wilensky, 1964).

Abbott (1988), as well as numerous of other and more recent and updated studies strongly opposes this incremental view on professionalization (Hellberg, 1991; Winroth, 1999) but this example indicates that professionalization can involve many different kinds of taken actions which aims at strengthen the profession. However, Abbott (1988) emphasizes that one of the fundamental assumptions when analysing a profession should be that the process of professionalization, (or de-professionalization) is multidirectional as well as it is not a isolated process, something that will be further develop in the following section.

2.2.3 Jurisdiction

Abbott's main interest, as indicated above, is how occupations actually achieve dominance in a professional system and furthermore how that dominance is maintained or changed over time. Abbott (1988) strongly emphasizes that when aiming for analysing a profession the actual work should be in focus as the central phenomena of professional life is the so-called link between a profession and its work. This link is, in this context, known as jurisdiction. Abbott accordingly states: "to analyse professional development is to analyse how the link is created in work, how it is anchored by formal and informal social structure, and how the interplay of jurisdictional links between professions determines the history of the individual professions themselves"(Abbott, 1988, p.20). Consequently by focusing on the dynamics through which occupations define their jurisdiction and analysing the tasks or work activities of occupations you can understand changes in the professionalization. Abbott (1988) further argues, as indicated above, that professionalization of an occupation should not be studied in isolation from other occupations as an occupation's capability to claim and maintain exclusive control of particular tasks and scope of work is highly depending on inter-professional competition.

His model and approach further emphasizes that it is unrealistic to assume an occupational group to have an internal homogeneity, and that differentiation rather should be assumed and it per se is a source to occupational and professional change over time. Profession or occupational groups, which as Abbott states are a part of a professional system, should also be expected to be affected of major shifts and trends, which occur internally or externally. By acknowledging these orienting assumptions and definitions, Abbott (1988) argues that this model or perspective can illuminate general conditions and sources of jurisdictional changes of an occupational group or within a system of professions. The following section will describe the parts that Abbott (1988) in his perspective and model classifies as a part of the system's environment.

2.3 Intra-Professional Rivalry

2.3.1 Internal Stratification

The previous professional theory highlighted above, focuses on how professions gain and maintain influence and control over its jurisdiction. Nevertheless, there are professions that lose the battle in the system and consequently their existence and role are outplayed and a so-called de-professionalization or professional regression can also occur, as stated above. Internal stratification is something, which Abbott argues to be one of the main sources to professional regression. This is a phenomenon, which he argues to be connected to a pattern of internal status where professions tend to abdicate from the very scope of work and task for which they initially claimed public jurisdiction. More specifically professions, which have the highest status among their peers, seem to be working in a purely professional environment where the communication with the external environment goes through other professionals or paraprofessionals and not for example through clients, which is a communication that often is transferred to for example business partners. Professionals are in that sense isolating themselves from the profession's heartland of jurisdiction. A profession is organized around the knowledge and abstraction centred system it applies, and hence does status within a profession often reflect degree of involvement of that abstract knowledge. Professionals may hence tend to focus on that knowledge rather focus on for example clients and extraneous factors (Abbott, 1988). Consequently, the most prestigious professional work is often academic work which in general have very limited contact with clients and the one's facing or dealing with the clients are at the beginning of its career or at the bottom of the status ranking within their professions.

However, Abbott argues that: "Professional admire academics and consultants who work with knowledge alone; the public admires practitioners who work with clients" (Abbott, 1988, p. 119) which becomes hard to combine. When the front line service, which consists of the fundamental tasks and consequently their basis for legitimacy, becomes the place for low-status colleagues and paraprofessionals, the professions jurisdiction can be questioned, weakened and potentially open up a potential vacancy in the system of professions and the evolvement of professional regression arise as a consequence of leaving its heartland of jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988).

2.3.2 Client Differentiation

Client differentiation can occur within professions as some grasp and keep the privilege to serve high-end clients and other are consequently limited to serve low-end clients, something which can be an effect of intra-professional power battles. Abbott argues that it may consequently have significant system implications as it can reinforce the intra-professional status differences synonymous with the above described internal stratification. The system implications of client differentiation are regarded as significant and complex to deal with, and can result in specialization and the consequence of created divisions and separations within the profession (Abbott, 1988). Notable is that client differentiation should not be confused with task differentiation (specialization) which on the contrary often strengthens the jurisdictions and do not generate a vacancy in the system which client specialization may result in. Client specialization may on the other hand according to Abbott vacate a jurisdiction and create loose divisions or groups within the profession by making some parts of the jurisdiction less relevant and central.

A central problem in this is further that the so-called client-specific professionals are vulnerable to the fates of their clients which by definition is outside the system and naturally out of their control. Abbott argues that this connection and problem becomes even more severe when client differentiation also has developed into task differentiation. Specialization so complete that the mobility between professional subgroups is minimal creates a situation where the whole profession becomes highly inflexible for shifts in the demand (Abbott, 1988).

2.4 Summary

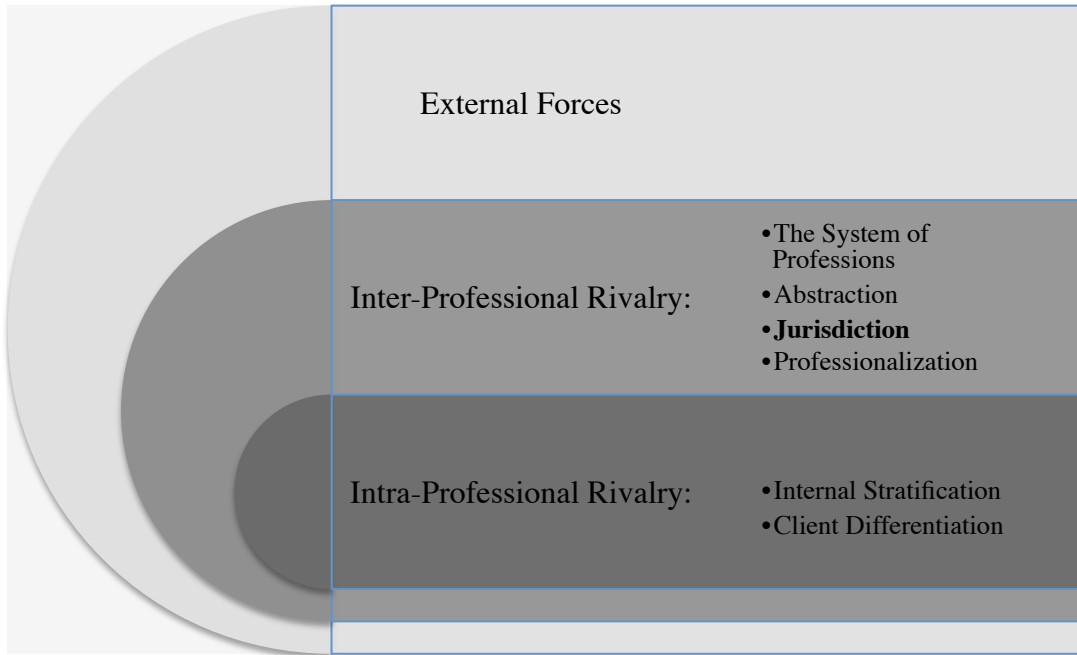
This research aims at answering the research questions how the concepts of inter and intra-professional rivalry can explain the HR-Transformation and what HR-professionals think should be in the heartland of HR-jurisdiction. Consequently, the presented theoretical framework systematically can be used when analysing the collected material from conducted interviews with HR-professionals as it starts with explaining what lies in the concept of inter-professional rivalry such as the jurisdiction, and then moves on by presenting intra-professional rivalry.

This theoretical framework further brings relevant concepts about a profession at three

general levels, starting with the aspect of accepting “The System of Professions” (Abbott, 1988) and the previously explained assumptions that when aiming for analysing a profession, then should the actual work should be in focus as the central phenomena of professional life. The so-called link between a profession and its work. A link, which in this context is called the jurisdiction. Consequently, by focusing on the dynamics through which occupations define their jurisdiction and analysing the tasks or work activities of occupations, you can understand changes in the professionalization. Professionalization of an occupation should not be studied in isolation from other occupations as an occupation’s capability to claim and maintain exclusive control of particular tasks and scope of work is highly depending on inter-professional competition. Professionalization should be regarded as a multidirectional process. It is further unrealistic to assume an occupational group to have an internal homogeneity, and that differentiation rather should be assumed and it per se is a source to occupational and professional change over time. The latter assumption of internal differentiation within a profession, should be analysed below the system level and in this theoretical framework, internal stratification and client differentiation has been highlighted as highly relevant aspects to investigate as it shows what affects and consequences specialization and intra-professional rivalry can have on a profession’s jurisdiction.

Above the system level are major social shifts and trends that also affect the development of professions, which consequently also need to be considered when aiming for best possible understanding for a professions development.

Below is a summarizing illustration with the theoretical framework’s key terms presented in order to make the presented theory as clear as possible for the reader how the framework will be used when analysing the collected material. It does also clarify how the presented theory is connected to the highlighted research questions:



Summarizing illustration based on Abbott's (1988) "The System of Professions"

PART II

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

A hermeneutic scientific approach was chosen in order to be able answer the highlighted research question, as it due to its complexity, requires an approach which assumes subjectivity, hence that there are different perceptions and interpretations of reality and that you have to be able to look at the context in order to be able to interpret and draw conclusions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This approach hence allowed the research to get the HR-Professionals own perception and interpretation of the HR-jurisdiction, the HR-Transformation and other forces affecting the HR profession's development. The research process was characterized of interaction between theory and collected data and should hence be stated as an abductive approach (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

3.2 Data Collection and Selection of Respondents

The primary source of data was interviews held with HR-professionals at two companies. Good access was available as the HR-management teams were willing to help promote the study in the organization in order to find interviewees. The respondents were chosen due their long and extensive experience of the HR-profession. Anonymization of the companies and individuals was done in order to not expose them and the companies will in the paper be referred to as company A and company B.

3.2.1 Company A

Company A is a multinational organization, which has its own production, R&D and sales departments in different parts of the world as well as in Sweden. Its HR function in Sweden did in 2003 go through a transformation where focus and structure was changed from having local HR-departments to a centralized system. The organization was aiming to rationalize and standardize the HR-function throughout the company. The company today uses so-called HR Business Partners (HRBP) that act as HR consultants to line managers and they are primarily expected to work with HR-matters at solely a strategic level. The main operative HR-tasks have been transferred to line managers or to different specialist centres. These centres are where line managers or HRBP that have any specific questions regarding some operative HR-

issues, such as the labour law and employment contracts, can call. Each division in the company has its own HR function and hence its own HR Business Partners and specialist centres. The interviews were held with HR-professionals, which work as HR Business Partners and/or at a strategic level with HR. All the HR-professionals that were interviewed have a long and extensive experience from working with HR both at this company and at other companies. The interviews were focused on the HR-professionals own perceptions and observations about the development of the HR-profession and the HR-Transformation within their organization. In order to not expose certain individuals, the interviewed persons will consequently be referred to as HR-professionals (HRP), or simply “the respondent”.

3.2.2 Company B

Company B is a Swedish consulting firm, specialized in helping small and medium size companies with HR. They offer consultant assistance with strategic and tactical HR-issues as well as with operative and administrative HR-issues. The company emphasizes and propagate for a strategic and business-oriented approach to HR. The interviewed consultants have a long, extensive and substantial experience from the HR-profession as they all have worked for numerous of years at different companies of varying size at different governing positions within HR. The interviews were focused on the HR-professionals own perceptions and observations about the development of the HR-profession and the HR-Transformation. In order to not expose certain individuals will the interviewed persons consequently be referred to as the consultant, or simply “the respondent”.

3.2.3 The Interviews

Qualitative interviews were held with the respondents in order to be able to get their perceptions and interpretations. The interviews were held in a semi structured way in order to be sure to get answers to the key-questions of this research and still being able to keep an open approach to potential relevant follow up questions, which can emerge during interviews (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Merriam, 1988). Five interviews were held with HR-Professionals at company A and seven interviews were held with HR-Professionals at company B. Four of the interviews were due to geographical distance held over telephone. Eight of the interviews were recorded. The interview guide was created after conducting theoretical research within the highlighted field (appendix I). However, even though a

standardized interview guide was used, also numerous of follow up questions were asked

The hermeneutic scientific approach allows a certain closeness to the research, meaning that the researcher cannot always be neutral, something which affects the interview situation. My presence, interaction and interpretations during the interview have consequently affected the respondents' answers, which is unavoidable in qualitative research where the researchers own understanding is important for the analysis (Silverman, 2001).

3.3 Presenting the Collected material and Analysis

I listened to the interviews several times and looked through my notes and chose the parts that were relevant for this research. Each person's interview responses were divided according to the presented analysis model to see the differences and similarities in the responses. A variation and patterns emerged then. To give the reader a good overview as possible of what was said in the interviews, I decided to reproduce the quotes that were most representative and even those that were most divergent

3.4 Validity and Reliability

I have aimed at ensuring as high validity as possible for this research. With regards to internal validity, I did to the extent it was possible record the interviews and I took notes. The semi-structured interviews gave the opportunity to listen carefully and ask questions in order to clarify certain statements, which can diminish potential misunderstandings. I did not refer to any of the other peoples answers that were given from the other interviews, in order not to aim the other respondents in a certain direction and to fully get that person's perceptions and interpretations.

Reliability refers to what extent a research yields the same results on repeated trials and the trustworthiness of the given content (Merriam 1988). Since the study is of an anonymous character, it is hard to re-do the exact same study. Also, since it is hard to investigate secondary data to prove given facts due to its anonymity, a reader might question the contents reliability. I have with this in mind tried to ensure that the data was presented with many and long quotes so the reader can decide by himself whether he agrees with the interpretation, or would rather do a different interpretation of the statements.

Chapter 4 - Material

4.1 The HR-Jurisdiction

The respondents in Company A explained that the main function for the HR-professionals in the organization is to support line managers with HR-matters and also work strategically with HR-issues and consequently take part in board meetings in order to represent the HR perspective. Most of the HR-Professionals highlighted that this way of working is rather different compared to the HR-work ten to fifteen years ago, when it was common to have HR-departments where the HR-professionals were rather generalists which took care of everything from tactical and strategic HR-work to more operative and practical parts of HR. Today instead they are rather few HR Business Partners. The main difference is that the line managers today to a greater extent “owns the question”, stated some of the HRP. The line manager today is expected to have full responsibility of their personnel including the administrative parts. The personnel are consequently supposed to primarily contact their closest manager if they have questions and not for example a HRBP. The line managers or HRBP should if they have specific questions about for example the labour law, employment contract, contact the specialist centres which today have the main responsibility for these kinds of administrative questions.

The HRP hence explain that the HR-function today is rather centralized at their organization with the HRBP as the line managers’ consultants and with the specialist centres that cover questions and demands concerning questions of administrative character from the whole business unit. The HRBPs are the ones that are situated in the operative parts of the organization and are consequently informed and updated about on going changes in the company. The specialist centres have according to some of the respondents often not that kind of direct contact with, for example, the line managers. The HRP highlighted that this way of working opens opportunities for them to work highly business oriented which all of them emphasized as crucial. “*You have to know what the business is all about in order to be able to contribute and add value*” stated one of the HRP, and explained that it is essential to understand how the company makes money and how the organization is structured in order to contribute in the strive to strengthen the results. “*HR does not in general generate any*

revenues by itself and must consequently know its role as a support function which must have a business oriented mind-set". One of the HRP states that *"if you think you are going to work with people as a HRBP, you are wrong"* and explains that they often are occupied with so called business cases and issues which they solve by looking at large excel sheets with data. *"You need to be on your toes for the company and be able to present solutions to different issues which more than often actually is connected to figures and numbers which you need to have an understanding of"* stated one of the HRP and explained that you have to strive for enhancing the company's result. The respondent further stated that HR, literally speaking, are experts on what human resources the company has, and they should have knowledge and ideas about how that resource optimally can be allocated or used.

"Its actually more about calculating and working with business development than practically dealing with people" stated one of the HRP and explained that a misperception they often face, among both some line managers and other employees, is that HR solely is about dealing with the personnel and being some kind of "therapist" for the personnel and deal with administrative tasks connected to the personnel. Some even highlighted that there are some line managers and employees that try to ask the HRBP for help with tasks of a more administrative character, such as questions about how many vacations days they can demand, but as one of the HRP expressed it *"it is not my function or role to answer those kinds of questions and they need to learn that they should primarily turn to their manager for those kinds of questions"* and further explained that the line managers need to take a big responsibility regarding these questions and turn to the HR specialist centres when they have questions of this character.

The HRP highlighted that all the line managers, due to the centralization and HR transformation, have been given bigger responsibility and have to deal with more personnel administration and the HRP emphasized that it overall works well and that they have embraced these ideas but there are of course exceptions. It is stressed that some managers is not very keen on taking this administrative personnel responsibility and consequently tries to use their HRBP as their right hand for personnel administration. This is rather tricky, stated some of the HRP, as their official role is to support the line managers but not do their job for them, and the HRBP consequently need to be very clear about what their role is and is not. Most of the HRP highlighted that this most often is not a problem, but there are a few which emphasized that there is a tendency to "say that the HRBP only work with strategic questions

today, but many do in fact take the role as aiding the line manager with practical HR issues and constantly act as a fire extinguisher for unexpected problems and the line managers expect them to take that role". *"We are in some cases acting as we still are responsible for the personnel administration with the only difference that we now serve managers higher up in the organizational hierarchy"* stated one of the HRP and explained that the HRBP has somewhat of a superficial and loose role and power, as they formally should work strategically and with business development. However, they end up doing the managers personnel administration as they often are in a position of dependence to the line managers.

When reasoning about the role of the HR-profession today, there seem to be a broad consensus among the interviewed consultants that HR-professionals should have a business oriented mind set and realize that it is essential to understand an organization's business and how it makes money in order to be able to contribute to the best possible outcome and result for the company. It is emphasized that HR is a key component in most processes within a company as having the right people at the right places can determine whether or not the company is a success or not. The HR-perspective should consequently ideally, have a natural place in the company's whole organization. HR should be involved in major strategic planning just as well as dealing with tasks of a more local character. Some compare it with being an essential "cog in the wheel" in the organization. However, it is highlighted that HR by itself is not given that influential role, and some of the consultants expressed that HR-professionals constantly have to prove their right to exist, as HR by itself do generate any direct revenues. They do highlighted at the same time that it is more like a state of mind or "reality check" in order to remember that the role of HR is to help the company to present the best possible result and that you consequently cannot act like an isolated islands and only act reactive when the company communicate that they have a "HR-task or problem". Instead you need to be a part and involved in the whole organization, understand the business, how the company generate revenues and how HR proactively can contribute and add value. By doing so, can HR contribute to better results and a goal is as one of the consultants expresses it: "to convince decision makers to not consider HR just as an expense in the income statement, but rather view it as a resource which can help obtain better results if administered properly". There is consequently little or no doubt among the consultants that the HR-perspective can contribute, add value and should if possible have an influential role.

Most of the consultants further explained that the general development within HR, including the name change from PA (Personnel Administration) to HR, has opened up the mind set for what PA or HR is. There seem to be a perception that the conception Personnel Administration was, and somewhat is, connected to the detailed handling of administrative tasks related to the personnel such as: arranging the employment contract, salary and benefits, working hours and the labour law. It is emphasized that HR-professionals or PA-professionals used to be connected to these tasks solely and there was a tendency among HR-professionals and at some HR-departments to act as an “isolated island” meaning that they were just focusing on their specific concrete technical tasks rather than including the whole organizations overall strives, vision, mission and goals in their work and they did consequently act rather reactive on request from the organization. However, some consultants on the contrary, stated that PA and HR actually include the same kind of work and tasks and that little new content have been added under the term HR, and these consultants uses the expression: “*paint up the pig*”, meaning that HR or PA basically still deals with the same tasks but that the name change in itself somewhat has opened up the mind set among many people that PA-work do not just involve pure operative administrative tasks.

They further explained that HR-professionals need to have a wide range, as explained above. Many of the consultants emphasized several times during the interview the need of having extensive and deep knowledge about the labour law. One of the consultants used the metaphor of having a “*palette of HR-tools*” and that it is essential for HR’s credibility in an organization to fully know and handle all of these tools, just as well as they need to be able to work strategically and goal oriented in line with a company’s vision and goals in order to actually have a perception of how the tools is applicable in the best possible way. When asked for examples of strategic work, it is highlighted that more or less all activities can be viewed at a strategic level. It is in many ways about working proactive with how HR should develop within that particular company, what role it should have and it is also about connecting all HR-activities, specific knowledge or tools to the “whole picture”. By doing this, you can map how you create, or perhaps not create value for the organisation. The content is that the HR activities should contribute in obtaining the company’s goals and that it is necessary to work at a strategic and tactical level, in order to be able to connect the operative HR-work to the company’s overall business strategy. They further stated that it is by working in this way that you as a HR-professional can contribute at, for example, the board’s table and consequently gain influence and get the legitimacy to add your HR-perspective to different questions.

However, several of the consultants highlighted that how high influence and legitimacy you as a HR-professional in an organization get is highly connected to how you are as an individual. They once again emphasised that it is about showing that you have an understanding of the business and that you have something to add which creates value for the organization in order to not be neglected as a stab function.

4.2 Increased Influence due to the HR-Transformation

The majority of the interviewed HRP stated that the structure works well and that they have the space to be able to work strategically and with business issues. It is emphasized that the HR-professionals, literally speaking, have the role of being a business partner, which is in accordance with their formal title, HR- Business Partner (HRBP). They highlighted that their spot and role at board's meetings, and at other organizational decision makings, are widely accepted and they feel that they have the right to take part in any discussion which is brought up. However, it was emphasized again that it is essential to have business-oriented mind set and by doing that, show that you have something to add to the meeting. *“Everyone more or less have to earn its spot and you can never forget why the company exists and that you are there to do what you can, to show how the company can improve its result”* stated one of the HRP and emphasized the need of being able to see the whole picture, in order to be able to contribute to the best possible outcome. The HRP explained that the HR structure and undergone transformation has had the effect that HR overall has gained more influence as they today are represented at all board meetings at high levels and, as stated above, most of the interviewed emphasized that they can speak freely and add their HR perspective to any raised question.

It is explained that HR, to a certain extent, was represented at board meetings even before the transformation but some of the HRP explained that it today is easier to get a understanding for what function and role a HRBP has, compared to the formerly used term: HR-manager. One of the HRP further explained this by describing how a HR-manager, when attending board meetings, could get questions of a very personnel administrative and local character, even though this was not the manager's field of expertise as he or she was there to raise HR-issues of a more strategic and tactical level. The transformation has hence, according to the HRP, helped to clarify that there are numerous of different roles within HR to the rest of the organization and has hence showed what HR's functions are. The HRP further states that the

centralization and the specialist centres which deals with mainly personnel administration of operative character has made it possible for the HRBP to a greater extent to focus on the strategic issues as they now can refer those kind of questions from line managers to the specialists centres.

According to the consultants, it seems to be a balance between giving and taking, meaning that several of consultants highlighted that HR-professionals could, and should, have a seat at the board's table if they have something to contribute, but it should not be a purpose of its own. In order to be able to contribute you have to be able to "see the whole picture", not only what lies in the HR-departments interest, but rather the whole organization, and it is by doing so you gain influence.

Most of the consultants highlighted that the outspoken business oriented approach to HR is somewhat a new phenomena among HR-professionals and that the profession to a great extent has developed so that the motto today is to work "proactive with HR-questions rather than reactive", meaning that they cannot just wait for the company to alarm that they have an HR-issue for them, instead HR should, as stated above, be a natural part of the organisation and be able to follow the development and constantly do a demand or requirement analysis and see what needs of HR expertise that exists. They can consequently, by knowing the organisation's development and strives well, work proactively and to a greater extent contribute in adding value to the organization.

One of the consultant's described that some of the HR-professionals in leading positions are almost in a "hostage situation" meaning that they have a formal influence and place at board's table but that it is highly depending on that you stick to your specific area and if you deviated from that, you risk loosing your formal spot. You become somewhat a front man and "*if you do not play the game and do what is expected you risk loosing your spot*" which the consultant emphasized can lead to bad performed HR-work if you constantly are trying to adjust to others and the point of having HR in a leading position is hence lost according to the consultant. It is once again emphasized that striving for influence should not be a purpose of its own. "The purpose and goal should be to do good HR" is stated and further explained that good HR is something that works like "lubricant" in an organization and makes everything proceed smoothly. If you focus too much on arguing and claiming your place and influence in organization you tend to risk forgetting your role's main function and purpose. It is further

stated that by being that essential lubricant in an organization you will most presumably gain influence and legitimacy but, once again, you have to show that you have an understanding for the business and further convince that having a HR-perspective can strengthen the result.

4.3 Rationalization and Reorganization

Some of the HRP argued that HR's increased influence and that the company today emphasizes that HR should be involved at board meetings is related to the last years rationalisation and reorganizations, which has lead to changes of the working force. HR has been an essential part both when downsizing and when finding ways to utilize the human resources in optimal ways. One of the HRP stated *"HR might have gained influence due to these factors as the company has realized the importance of dealing with the human resources in the best possible way"* and explained that it is highlighted as a presumed competitive advantage to manage its human resources in the most efficient way. Some of the HRP stated that some of the most important questions that they strategically work with today are to attract, keep and develop the right kind of personnel. Defining what the right kind of person for that particular company, department and position is a part of that strategic work. They constantly raise the question *"how can we attract the most talented people to our company?"* and the HRP hence emphasized that the question of employer branding is a highly important part of HR as it is considered to be a competitive advantage if you can attract and keep the most talented people.

Most of the consultants emphasized that they have not in general been confronted with any negative attitude from other professions in companies such as that the HR-professionals or the HR-perspective should not be included in the major decision making in organizations. They do however highlight that there are of course exceptions and that it is highly related to the level of maturity of the company, but the consultants reckons that it is by adding the previous explained business approach to HR that you gain legitimacy to enter these kinds of discussions. It is further highlighted that it today is an increased demand of having a so-called HR-function at companies as there is a somewhat a norm among companies that you *"should have it"* and it is indicated that some organization's might actually not know what HR stands for or do, but it has become a conception or quality assurance synonymous that the company *"cares about the personnel"* even if that sometimes can be highly questioned. One of the consultants expressed it as *"the word HR, has somewhat become a fashion word and*

companies know that they should have it, but do not necessarily know what it means” and continued the reasoning by comparing HR with other buzzwords like for example CSR, which the consultant highlighted as an important matter but people do not in general know what it means, *“but they know that they should have it in the public point of view” “it is almost like using a checklist – CSR? Check. HR? Check”*, meaning that is good to have for the image of the company.

Nevertheless, this “fashion” is an opportunity for HR-professionals to seize, in order create HR that adds value to the company. The key to do that is to have a business-oriented approach to HR, stated one of the consultants. Several of the consultants highlighted that it is a greater acceptance and recognition of HR today and they reckon that a contributing factor to this is the increasingly focus on employer branding. They reasoned that many companies have stepped away from viewing the personnel as a homogenous source of labour and that it is more focus on attract and keep top talent to its company, something which today, more outspoken, is regarded to be a competitive advantage. Some of the consultants connect this development to the fact that many companies work with a significantly smaller working force than 20 years ago due rationalisation and the emerge of new technique. It has also become more important to attract and keep competence and as a couple of the consultants expressed *“it is getting increasingly important to take care and develop the human resources you have, as they today are more limited than ever before”* and this is a task which HR-professionals have embraced. Some of the consultants further state that it seems like HR is given more influence due to the change in society where we have transformed from a production society to a service society and it is highlighted that the most important resource for companies today consequently is the personnel, the human resources. One of the consultants further reasons that one inspiration of starting to work in a more strategic way may have been introduced during the wave of rationalization’s and reorganization’s often conducted by management consultants and that their strategic approach might have influenced HR-professionals to somewhat defend their field of expertise by starting working strategically themselves within their field.

4.4 Future outlook for HR-Professionals and the HR-Transformation

The HRP explained that the HR-Transformation for many years has lead to increased influence and accessibility to decision-making positions for HR professionals. However, the

current on going change might in the end have the opposite effect, stated the HRP. The company is currently undergoing an organizational change where big parts of the HR function will be downsized in order to rationalise and be more flexible to downturns. It is explained that the company still have a need for the HR-functions and the solution will hence be that some of the HR-specialist centres and call centres will be outsourced and an increased amount of the personnel administration will be laid on the line managers. The number of HRBPs will also be downsized which, according to the HRP, will have the effect that they will practically not have time to join any board meetings. One of the HRP highlights that the role of the remaining HRBP will change so that it will be an increased focus on ordering and contracting HR services from external actors and secure the quality of those “bought-in” services. The HRP highlighted that a risk of this is that important knowledge about the company is lost and that the “bought-in” solutions do not suit the organization. One of the HRP further reasoned about whether or not the HR-professionals still will have a given place in the organization as the line managers are supposed to do more of the actual personnel administration work themselves and the specialist-centres will be external. The HRP stated that *“a very good manager could actually conduct some of this strategic work with HR as well, and the question is consequently if HR can keep its influential position with these changes, do we still have a function?”* and explained further that it might be a tendency of downsizing HR’s function when stepping away from other HR-tasks than solely the strategic work. Nevertheless, most of the respondents faced this change with curiosity and a positive approach of what will happen in the future.

Closeness and knowledge of the organization and having access to the whole palette of both the strategic and operative HR-tools is highlighted numerous of times by the consultants and that is also something which is highlighted as some things that might become a lack of, if proceeding with the so-called HR-Transformation which most of them associate with a strong centralization, specialization and somewhat outsourcing. The consultants also highlight that there is a risk that you as HR by proceeding with that kind of specialization and distancing the functions that you loose essential and crucial knowledge of the company and the personnel. They further highlight that it is rather easy standard solution and structure for a, on the contrary, complex task, “it is always rather complex when dealing with people” explains one of the consultants. Some of the consultants further emphasize that the very core of HR has for a long time been the operative HR-work, such as knowing the labour law for example, and it is essential to have a closeness to these kind of operative questions to know what it is all

about and to not distance yourself too much and work solely strategic and move these tasks to distanced expertise centres as well as back to the line managers. By doing so argues some consultants you might lose your function, as HR no longer can offer that deep knowledge about the company in a HR-perspective and consequently you risk being not able to add value to that particular organization.

PART III

Chapter 5 – Analysis

5.1 Increased Abstraction

The presented material shows, and confirms what have been highlighted before, that less focus within HR today is put on basic HR transactions and administrative tasks. It is emphasized that HR instead need to get close to business and focus on adding business value by mainly working strategically and tactically. This is in the perspective of professions theory (Abbott, 1988) that was introduced in the theoretical framework, a way for this occupational group to control its knowledge and skill by increased abstraction. The development of a profession is according to Abbott (1988) regarded as a result from interrelations, which are determined by the way occupational groups control their knowledge and skills and HR has accordingly stepped away from using the so-called techniques of the profession as a control tool and is instead focusing on increased abstract knowledge as a way to protect its occupation and do hence argue for possession of certain abstract knowledge, something which according to highlighted theory makes the HR-occupation to be regarded as a profession.

An example of abstraction is the strategic work within HR that for example can mean as, exemplified in the material, that HR-Professionals create HR structure, planes, routines, administrative tasks and HR transactions, but they do not, or should not according their formal role, do the HR-transactions themselves or have contact with the personnel. These kinds of tasks or techniques of the profession is, according to the material, delegated to roles lower in the hierarchy or to other occupations and professions as it often, as in the presented material, is outsourced. This is consequently in line with what Abbott's (1988) theories which highlight that practical skills grow out of an abstract system of knowledge and that control of the occupation lies in the control of the abstraction that generate the practical techniques.

Abstraction consequently makes it possible for the HR-profession to distance itself from the practical techniques by delegating it to other workers and can according to the highlighted theory gain more status. An example of this is the interviewed HR-Professionals, which stated that delegating the administrative tasks to specialist centres, was essential in order for them to be able to have that influential and strategic role in the organization. It was exemplified that other professions and line managers within the organization otherwise seem to turn to them with administrative questions and the HR-professionals consequently seem to think that they need to distance themselves from those practical techniques in order to be taken seriously and be recognized as a profession which not primarily deals with administrative tasks.

The material shows an overall insecurity and feeling among some of the HR-professionals that they constantly have to prove their right to exist, as they feel that it is hard for HR, to show what work they do, in a quantitative way with measurable data and there are many misperceptions about the role of HR, as exemplified above. A way to strengthen the HR-Professionals status, legitimacy and influence does hence seem to be by abstraction and distancing themselves from the practical techniques. An example of this is the HR-Transformation that was presented in the material, which has enabled the organization to clarify the HR-roles within the organization where only HR Business Partners have contact with line managers and the practical techniques has been transferred to different specialist centres and to line managers.

The HR-professionals highlight that they have gained influence and status due to this transformation which has meant clarification of their role in the organization as well as distancing from the administrative tasks. This does once again confirm that distancing and abstraction from the techniques help HR to gain status as a profession that possesses the abstract knowledge about human resources and personnel related issues. They claim to be experts within this field and should be included in the business work for its expert knowledge in human resources and personnel rather than be limited to being experts on conducting HR-transactions and administrative tasks. HR has hence moved from possessing the techniques to possessing the abstract knowledge of this field and distances itself from the techniques in order to gain more status, legitimacy and influence. The jurisdiction, meaning what the HR-profession' does and has legitimacy to do, has consequently been expanded, something that the relatively new roles as HR Business Partners, HR Strategic Partners are examples of.

5.2 Professionalization

It can further be argued that the HR occupation has gone through and still are going through a professionalization in accordance with highlighted actions of professionalization by Wilensky (1964). The HR-professionals do for example highlight the use of HR instead of PA, which in the perspective of professions theory can be regarded as a name change in order mark a change of content of the occupation. The respondents do for example highlight that the change from PA to HR has opened up the mind set for what a professional working with HR or PA does. An increasingly number of HR-professionals have further an university degree, within the field of personnel administration and/or psychology and it is highlighted by some of the respondents that the educated graduates can remove the insecurity related to somewhat a inferiority complex as one of the respondents stated it. The earlier described delegation and outsourcing can be regarded as a sign of the emergence of paraprofessionals and stratification within the HR-profession. These taken actions and effects can consequently also be interpreted as a sign of abstraction and hence attempts to distance itself from the practical techniques of the profession in order to gain legitimacy, influence and expand its jurisdiction, which was emphasized in the previous section. Nevertheless, this shows and indicates that the HR-profession has ambition to develop and expand its area of expertise such as for example entering the field of business development. The way of using abstraction in order to protect and develop the profession has consequently also been used by the HR-profession to expand its jurisdiction as the profession has claimed influence over other areas than just, as exemplified, HR Transactions and administrative tasks.

5.3 HR's Jurisdictional change

The HR-profession has, as exemplified and analysed above, expanded its jurisdiction as the tasks and work connected to the profession has increased. The HR-profession consists of numerous of roles, where the role of working tactical and strategic, for example as a HR Business Partner, is relatively new. Nevertheless, it appears according to the respondents to be well anchored in the formal as well in the informal social structure within the HR-profession, something that also strengthens the statement that a jurisdictional change and professional development in line with Abbott (1988) theories have occurred. However, it appears as if the jurisdiction and HR's claim of having an influential business oriented role within organizations is challenged from other professions as examples are given where HR-

professionals state that they have to argue for its right to exist and they feel the need to distance themselves from the practical techniques in order to get the legitimacy to work at a strategic level. This does hence seem to be a case of inter-professional competition as HR is trying to expand into this field and are facing subtle resistance in terms of a questioning if HR has the right competence for taking a business role, as presented in the material.

External forces such as major shifts and emerging trends also seem to have shaped the HR-jurisdiction. The increased abstraction has made it possible for the HR-profession to expand its jurisdiction when vacancies in the system of profession (Abbott, 1988) have emerged. It is for example highlighted by the HR-Professionals that the concept of “employer branding” has gained field during the last decade and it appears in the professional theory perspective, as the HR-profession has claimed this field to be within their jurisdiction and expertise. They indirectly argue that they possess that abstract knowledge. The HR-profession has consequently expanded its jurisdiction due to an opened vacancy in the system of professions. The concept of Employer branding has according to the presented material increased HR’s influence in the organization, something that is in line with highlighted theories of abstraction (Abbott, 1988) and can be regarded as inter-professional rivalry as the profession has expanded its jurisdiction and by stating it as its problem, is it possible to argue that HR defends it from intruding professions.

Another case that can be regarded as an example of external force, which has affected the HR-professions jurisdiction and influence, is the rationalization and downsizing which were emphasized by the HR-professionals during the interview. These tasks were highly connected to dealing with people, which HR according to the respondents was and is synonymous with, and this did consequently open somewhat a vacancy in the system of professions. HR increased its status as being the expert of dealing with the personnel as well as how to optimally allocate the human resources. HR appears to possess that abstract knowledge.

5.4 Internal Stratification

HR-professionals highlighted the need of having extensive and deep knowledge about for example the labour law and the key HR-Transactions and administrative tasks. This was argued to be just as important as the ability to “see the whole picture” and work strategically in line with the company’s vision and goals. Working strategically was explained as the thing

many HR-professionals aim for and it is hence synonymous with status within the profession. It was consequently emphasized a concern and worry, that a too big distance between the HR-professionals, which work with strategic questions, and the ones that work with HR-transaction and administrative tasks might have negative consequences for both the organization as well as for the HR-professions development. They see a risk that HR, by proceeding with distancing, outsourcing and specialization, might lose essential and crucial knowledge of the company and the personnel.

It was emphasized that the very core of HR for a long time has been the operative HR-work, and it is essential to have closeness to these kinds of operative questions in order to be able to conduct good HR work at all levels. This can, in the perspective of professions theory, be regarded as internal stratification as the development in line with abstraction might go too far and the profession consequently due to internal status tend to abdicate from the very scope of work, which the profession initially claimed jurisdiction for. The professionals with the highest status within the profession are the ones that work at the most abstract level, which potentially can lead to isolation from the professions heartland of jurisdiction. It is a tendency of internal stratification within the HR-profession as the HR-Transformation has led to specialist centres without any primary contact with the personnel and line managers. This is due to the fact that the HR Business Partners are supposed to deal with the contact with the managers and the line managers to take care of the administrative tasks. There is with this internal stratification a risk that the HR-profession jurisdiction and function can be questioned. However, something which is positive in the aspect of legitimacy and credibility is that it is the HR Business Partner that has the highest status within the HR-profession and it is also this profession that has the main contact with the clients rather than for example with para-professionals. Nevertheless when their basis for legitimacy, becomes the place for low-status colleagues and paraprofessionals, the professions jurisdiction can be questioned, weakened and potentially open up a potential vacancy in the system of professions. A consequence of leaving its heartland of jurisdiction can subsequently be professional regression.

5.5 Client Differentiation

It is in terms of internal stratification a good thing if the professional with the highest status in the profession has contact with clients as it gives credibility to the profession that the clients are a central and important part of its work, something that was emphasized in the section

above. However, when looking in the perspective of client differentiation when analysing the highlighted centralized HR-system, it is possible to argue that this kind of client specialization, where mainly the HR Business Partners are the ones that are in contact with the line managers or clients, may strengthen the potential internal stratification and the above described intra-professional status. It consequently appears, as this intra-professional status can be a source to rivalry within the profession. Specialization in line with the HR-transformation has clearly created different divisions within the HR-profession and numerous of the respondents highlighted that it is hard to move between these specialist units and the cooperation between them is often limited. This is highlighted to be different from before when it was a common to have a HR-department where almost every role within the HR-profession could be found. It was emphasized to be generalist rather than specialist. This new system in line with the HR-Transformation and specialization has hence opened up for client differentiation, which in itself seem to have increased the distance between the roles within the HR-profession. Some evidence are found concerning the HR-system is moving towards outsourcing certain HR-functions connected to personnel administration. However, a risk with making some parts of the jurisdiction less relevant and central, can be that the whole HR profession's jurisdiction is vacated and even looser divisions or groups can emerge within the profession and once again the professions function and relevance can be questioned if it do not maintain its heartland of jurisdiction. An example of this seem to emerge right now when some of the former core work tasks of this profession, such as recruitment, is outsourced and what is kept is the strategic HR-work. The number of HR Business Partners is also down sized as a consequence of this reorganization, which means that the HR-professionals will not have time to attend to board meetings. This does ironically mean that the HR-Transformation which for a long time have increased HR's influence will now, when they enters the stage of outsourcing of the administrative units, contribute to a stagnation, or maybe even a reduction, of HR's influence in the organization. Some of the respondents highlighted that HR's function is questioned and that it is hard to motivate its existence when you do not still control the very core of the profession, such as the HR-transactions and the personnel administration.

5.6 Summary

The analysis of the presented material, in the perspective of professions theory, shows an occupation, which has emerged into a profession by increased abstraction. The HR-profession has accordingly stepped away from using the so-called techniques of the profession as a

control tool and is instead focusing on increased abstract knowledge as a way to protect its occupation and argues for possession of certain abstract knowledge, something which according to highlighted theory makes the HR-occupation to be regarded as a profession. However, it is a profession which still struggles with being acknowledged and confirmed as a profession which possesses abstract knowledge rather than solely being an expert on practical techniques. It is emphasized that HR need to get close to business and focus on adding business value by mainly working strategically and tactical and the profession has consequently increased the abstraction and it is aiming for more influence and legitimacy. The profession does hence try to expand its jurisdiction and inter-professional rivalry consequently exists. The HR-profession is questioned and challenged and the profession has in line with inter-professional rivalry been able to use the concept of the HR-Transformation to distance itself from the practical techniques in order to gain legitimacy and status. In the perspective of professional theory and the concepts on inter-professional rivalry, the HR-Transformation can be argued to be undertaken in order to strengthen the HR-profession's role in the system of professions as it helps the profession to increase its abstraction and distance it from the practical techniques of the profession.

The abstraction and distancing has created a profession with increasingly specialization and as the HR-profession is no homogenous group, intra-professional rivalry consequently exist. Intra-professional status has become more evident due to the specialization and it could be argued that the HR-Transformation in the perspective of professional theory and the concepts of intra-professional rivalry is used by the HR-professionals to distance themselves from practical techniques of the profession by for example outsourcing or delegating these tasks to specialist centers. However, it is strongly argued by the respondents that there can be negative effects from this kind of specialization and distancing from its jurisdiction and the analysis shows that internal stratification as well as client differentiation exists within the profession. It is hence a risk for vacate jurisdiction and looser division or groups within the HR-profession.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

I started off this research by highlighting and problematizing the HR-profession's development towards becoming a strategic business partner and it appeared as the HR profession had left its heartland of jurisdiction, as the role of personnel administration had been diminished. It was highlighted that the concept of the HR-Transformation, which emphasizes centralization and standardization, increasingly was gaining field as the “correct” model for HR-work. However, I noticed that numerous organizations were proceeding with these HR transformations without any certainty of the long-term effects of it. This raised the question about the motives and incentives behind the undergone transformations. It was highlighted that it exists a perception that HR professionals uses this kind of transformation to claim and gain influence in their organisations. I found it reasonable to believe that this can be an expression of inter- and intra-professional rivalry as both HR-professionals and other professions might have difficulties accepting the new emerged HR roles and tasks connected with the business oriented and strategic HR-approach. I consequently wanted to contribute to this line of research with an interview study with HR-professionals regarding the HR-professions development and the HRT phenomena. The purpose of the study was to analyse HR professionals experiences of the trend of HRT by focusing on the incentives and motives behind the transformation and how these could be connected to the intra and inter-professional rivalry of HR. This research hence aimed to contribute to research concerning HRT as well as to the professional development of the HR-profession.

6.1 Research Conclusions

- How does the concepts of inter and intra-professional rivalry explain the HR-Transformation?

The HR-profession is questioned and challenged and the profession has in line with inter-professional rivalry been able to use the concept of the HR-Transformation to distance itself from the practical techniques in order to gain legitimacy and status. In the perspective of professional theory, and the concepts on inter-professional rivalry, the HR-Transformation can be argued to be undertaken in order to strengthen the HR-profession's role in the system of professions as it helps the profession to increase its abstraction and distance it from the practical techniques of the profession.

Intra-professional status has become more evident due to the specialization and it could be argued that the HR-Transformation, in the perspective of professional theory and the concepts of intra-professional rivalry, is used by the HR-professionals to distance themselves from practical techniques of the profession by outsourcing or delegating these tasks to specialist centers. However, it is strongly argued by the respondents that there can be negative effects from this kind of specialization and distancing from its jurisdiction. The analysis further shows that internal stratification as well as client differentiation exists within the profession. It is hence a risk for vacate jurisdiction and looser division or groups within the HR-profession.

- What do HR-professionals think should be in the heartland of the HR-jurisdiction?

The HR-profession has expanded its jurisdiction as the tasks and work connected to the profession has increased. The HR-profession consists of numerous of roles, where the role of working tactical and strategic, for example as a HR Business Partner, is mostly emphasized. This role appears, according to the respondents, to be well anchored in the formal, as well as in the informal, social structure within the HR-profession. This also strengthens the statement that a jurisdictional change and professional development has taken place. The jurisdiction has been widened and it appears as increasingly focus is put on strategic and tactical HR-work to be in the heartland of HR's jurisdiction. However, it is at the same time highlighted the need to keep a closeness to the professions practical techniques, something which appears incompatible with the centralizing HR-Transformation.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

This research shows a profession which still struggles with being acknowledged and confirmed as a profession, which possesses abstract knowledge rather than solely being an expert on practical techniques. It is emphasized that HR need to get close to the business and focus on adding business value by mainly working strategically and tactical. The profession has consequently increased the abstraction and it is aiming for more influence and legitimacy. The profession does hence try to expand its jurisdiction and inter-professional rivalry consequently exists. The results from this research shows and clarifies inter- and intra professional rivalry as forces which aim for increased abstraction in order to gain legitimacy and influence. The HR-Transformation has enabled and enhanced further abstraction and

distancing. However, the research further shows that there is a potential risk that the HR-profession loses its function if the centralization and specialization go too far as this might create divisions and subgroups and within the profession which might open up for vacancies in the system of profession. The HR-profession might, by distancing itself too far, lose influence and legitimacy as it does not any more control the initial tasks of its heartland of jurisdiction, for which their clients used to recognize them for. This research does hence have a theoretical contribution in the field of the HR-Transformation and the HR-professions development as it clarifies incentives and motives why HR-professionals might act as lobbyists for a centralizing and distancing HR-Transformation.

6.3 Criticism to the Research

There are weaknesses in this research, which need be taken into consideration when evaluating and taking part of the presented results. The interviews were solely conducted with HR-professionals which work at a strategic level and the results might have turned out differently if it would have been possible to also get and add the perspective from HR-professionals working as specialists. It is further difficult to argue for any general applicable conclusions due to the relatively small amount of conducted interviews. It is also notable that I have not during a long time followed and studied the respondent's perceptions about the HR-professions development and the HR-Transformation. I have instead taken part of their experiences of these changes at one occasion after the changes, which is why certain answers might have turned out differently if they were asked in the middle of the transaction to the centralized HR-system.

6.4 Future Research

A limitation in this research is that only HR-professionals working at a strategic level were interviewed. It would consequently be valuable to do a research where HR-professionals working in for example the specialist centres also will be interviewed in order to obtain more nuance and perspectives on the aspects of inter and intra-professional rivalry and perceived motives and incentives to the HR-Transformation. It would further be valuable to study an organization working with a HR-structure in line with the HR-Transformation for a longer time and conduct more interviews to be able to draw general conclusions how the HR profession's legitimacy and status might be affected of the HR-Transformation in a long term perspective.

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Appendix I - Interview guide

1. How do you define PA and HR?
2. In what way do you work with PA and/or HR today?
3. What role/function do you think that the HR-profession should have?
4. What is HR's role in the strategic and business oriented work?
5. What do you see as strategic HR competence?
6. What issues do you find to be strategic?
7. Has the HR-profession changed in character during the last years? How?
8. Which factors have driven the development and possible changes?
9. What do you think of the possible changes? Why?
10. What is the purpose of the changes and why are they carried through?
11. How does the role of the HR look like in relation to other professions today? Has the relation changed over time? If yes: How? Why?
12. What do you think of the concept in line with the HR-transformation, stated by Ulrich?
13. Do you use it? Why/Why not?
14. What do you think of HR's role today? What changes would you like to see?
15. What do you think will happen with the role of HR on a short and long term basis?