



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

# Career paths for HR professionals within the shared service model

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-A comparative study of two cases

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## Abstract

Career assistance in contemporary large organisations is one of the dealings of human resource (HR) departments who help employees planning and develop their career. An increasing trend is a transformation of the HR function by implementing the shared service model. However, career planning and visible career paths for the HR professionals themselves, the persons helping other making their career, is at risk of being neglected.

This thesis “Career paths for HR professionals within the shared service model” aimed to describe and analyse the career moves of HR professionals within the shared service model. Two research questions were asked in this explorative study: Which are the patterns of movements in the shared service model and which factors can be identified as having enabled HR mobility in the companies?

The method of investigation was a comparative case study consisting of 21 semi-structured interviews with HR professionals two organisation: one private manufacturing company and one public healthcare company. Choosing two companies offered the possibility to look for similarities and differences in career moves and explanations for such differences.

As a tool for analysing the empirical data the theoretical framework of Bourdieu’s theory of practise was chosen. The main findings showed that the shared service model promotes career moves both within and across different subfields. A complex mix habitus and social and cultural capital was identified to enable career movements. Factors of importance included “the right personality”, personal drive, business acumen, networking, social skills and experience. However, specific movements of HR professionals were in close relation to the institutional context, emphasising the field. Furthermore, it was a mutual relationship between the field, habitus and different forms of capital.

The results showed the significance of continued research. Continued studies could be focused on the career possibilities for HR professionals who have reached the high positions.

**Keywords:** *HR professionals, career, shared service model, HR competencies, mobility, theory of practise.*

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## List of abbreviations

HR	Human Resource
HRM	Human Resource Management
HRT	Human Resource Transformation
SSM	Shared Service Model
HRSC	Human Resource Service Centre
HRCOE	Human Resource Centre of Expertise
HRBP	Human Resource Business Partners
T	Tier

# 1 Introduction

When a person enters a new employment, the employee often expects that there will be some career plan and development possibilities. In times of growing global competition, new production concepts, IT development and globalisation, organisations have to focus more on how to adapt to changing circumstances and new demands from customers and suppliers while at the same time being profitable. Such changes include reorganisation of the function of human resource (HR) supported by Farndale et al. (2009, p. 544):

*“In organisations today, there is constant talk of downsizing, outsourcing, and redesigning how an organisation operates to ensure it remains competitive and efficient, and is able to make the most of economies of scale and scope. The Human Resource (HR) function is of course not immune to such activities, and increasingly new approaches to delivering Human Resource Management (HRM) in organisations are being explored”.*

## 1.1 Background

Decreasing costs and increasing efficiency is strived for by most companies in order to strengthen their abilities to survive in the competitive markets of modern society. Organisational changes are common to increase the efficiency of work. HR usually handles much of the work connected with reorganising but indeed HR departments themselves are subject to organisational changes. It should though be noted that HR departments is mostly associated with larger companies having at least 100 employees as described by Ulrich et al. (2008, p. 830):

*“Generally, start-ups and small companies have little or no HR staff. Until a company has 50 to 75 employees, it hardly needs a full-time HR professional; a line manager can usually handle required basic HR activities. As companies grow, HR departments and staffs grow as well”.*

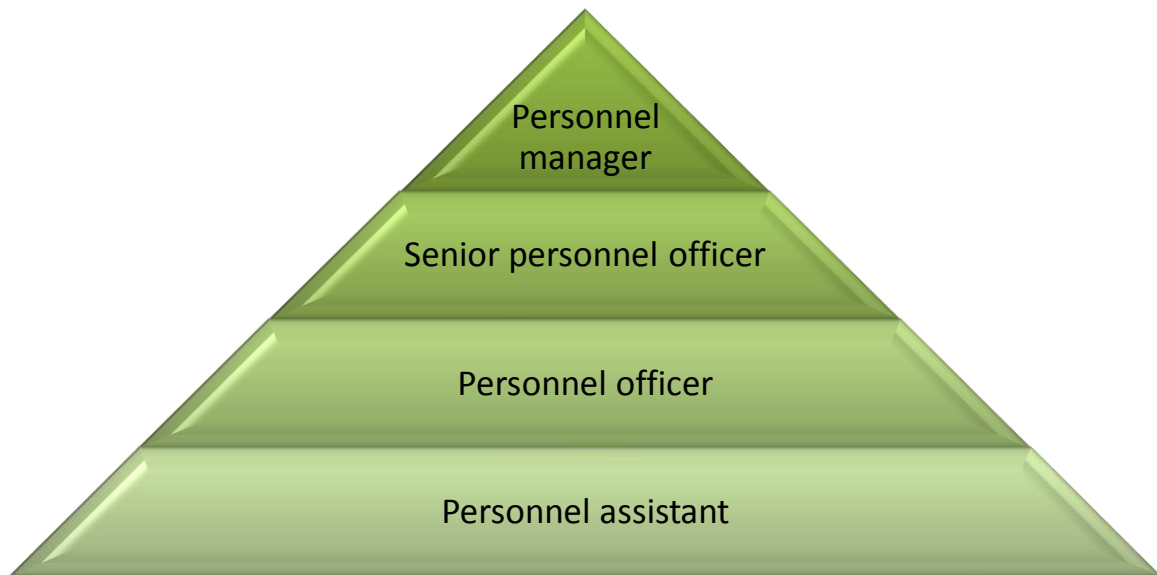
According to Baruch (2004, 2006) the changing nature of work during the last decades has lead to a transformation of careers and career management, both within and outside the organisations. As a result of the changes one can speak in terms of an “old” and a “new” career. In large organisations the “old” career took place within the internal labour market and was associated with long-term stability. The “old” careers were predictable, secure and linear. By contrast the “new” career can be described as unpredictable, vulnerable, multidirectional, dynamic and fluid. Furthermore the “new” career is associated with high levels of insecurity (Baruch, 2006; Hassard et al., 2012). The changes in career have also led to a shift of responsibility, moving more of the responsibility to employees. Nowadays employees are responsible for assessing themselves, developing marketable skills and attitudes as well as planning to reach their career needs (Baruch, 2006; Wiersma & Hall, 2007; Krishnan & Maheshwari, 2011).

Despite the changes putting more responsibility on employees much responsibility still remains at the organisations and hence their role should not be underestimated. The organisations should provide tools, resources and structure for the employees. Thus facilitate

resources for the employees to develop themselves and create career plans based on the organisational capabilities (Baruch, 2006; Wiersma & Hall; 2007; Krishnan & Maheshwari, 2011).

The organisational responsibility for aiding career movements of a company's employees is normally handled by an HR department who contributes in the creation of career plans for the employees. But how about the career opportunities for HR professionals, do they have a career plan and who makes it? Ulrich & Brockbank (2005) claim that HR often advocate development for others but too often fails to invest in its own development.

An entry way into HR via administration was a common path in the past. The traditional functional organisation model allowed movement vertically up the department pyramid (see Figure 1. below). One started as a personnel assistant, moved on to a personnel officer's position, afterwards becoming a senior personnel officer and finally, becoming a personnel manager (Tamkin et al., 2006).



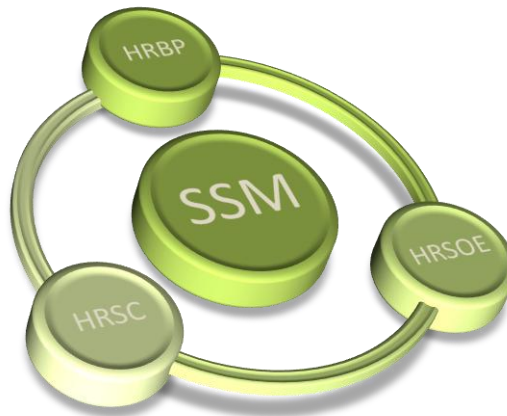
**Figure 1. Traditional organisation of the HR function and the “old” career moving from bottom to top.**

However, from reorganisations of the HR functions this path may not be available today since a distinction between operational and strategic levels of HRM has been made (Ulrich 1997; Ulrich & Beatty 2001; Ulrich & Brockbank 2005). The organisational changes of the HR functions is a result of the so called *HR Transformation* (HRT) which' main objective is to reduce cost of personnel and to add value. According to Beer (1997, p. 49) the increased demand for efficiency in terms of cost reduction and value adding is the main driving force for HR transformations:

*“Pressures for cost reduction not only demand a different corporate organisation, they place pressure on the human resource function to be cost effective. Reengineering of the HR function is occurring in many corporations and with it a search for a new role and organisational form”.*

## 1.2 Shared service model

In order to make the work of HR more effective Ulrich (1995) proposed the *shared service model* (SSM) as a new organisational form for organising the work of HR. The SSM separates HR into the three functional units: *service centre* (HRSC), *centre of expertise* (HRCOE) and *business partners* (HRBP) as shown in Figure 2 below. This functional partition of the HR function is also referred to as the “three legged stool” (Reilly et al., 2007; inspired by Ulrich, 1995, 1997). In addition the same notion is also described as the *HR transformation* (HRT) (Beer, 1997; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).



**Figure 2. Organisational description of the shared service model (SSM) showing the functional partition into HR service centre (HRSC), HR business partners (HRBP) and HR centre of expertise (HRCOE).**

Ulrich (1995) describes that the shared service model can be seen as divided into two set of activities depending on them being transaction-based or transformation-based. The division is the base for the creation of a service centre to handle transactional activities of administration and a centre of expertise to handle transformational activities that are non-administrative in nature. Thus, the service centre requires administrative experts whereas the centre of expertise needs technical experts. The last function of the SSM is the business partners whose work is to organise the HR work in accordance with overall business goals. Ulrich and colleagues (Ulrich et al., 2008, p. 829) argue that HR departments should operate as a “*business within a business*” which means that HR strategies should be in a line with overall business strategies and add value to the business.

However, a study in UK shows that only 18 percent of HR actually has implemented all three components of shared service model (CIPD, 2007). Furthermore, the concepts HR transformation and the SSM have been criticised by being too narrow (prescriptive) and didactic rather than empirical (Caldwell, 2003).



### 1.2.1 Increased use of SSM

SSMs have had a breakthrough as the way to organise HR and many large and multinational organisations are implementing SSMs in their HR function (Cooke, 2006; Farndale et al., 2009). In Sweden many large and international companies have reorganised their HR departments using SSMs as found by Boglind et al. (2011, p 578):

*“At the beginning of the twenty-first century, several well-known multinational companies based in Sweden (Ericsson, ABB and Volvo) undertook a major makeover of their HR function. These companies used the concept of HR transformation and referred to Ulrich’s ideas for inspiration”*

### 1.2.2 Issues related to SSM

There are claims that SSM should promote career movements within organisations and increase mobility. Especially, the clear functions in SSM should support mobility and make the requirements for movement visible and easier to pursue. However, as the use of SSMs as organisational models is increasing there are indications that it affects the career development for HR professionals in a negative way.

Defining new roles, role segmentation, skill gaps and insufficient resources are pointed out as problem areas in the implementation of SSMs (Tamkin et al., 2006; CIPD 2007). A gap between the ambition of the function to deliver certain roles and its ability to develop HR professionals into them is an emerging problem (Tamkin et al., 2006). Moreover, companies re-organising their HR departments have often performed the re-organisation without enough considerations related to specific competencies required for the different HR functions and the career paths of staff within a specific function (CIPD, 2006). In addition, Crouse and colleagues (2011) emphasise that HR professionals need to develop their current competencies due to changed roles of HR professionals.

Ulrich (1997) claims that the biggest hinder to the success of shared service operations is the remaining attitude that creates boundaries around HR functions. Boundaries make distinctions among people in an organisation: generalist versus specialist, compensation versus staffing. In addition, Ulrich argues that boundaries cause hinders for: the flow of information, work, decision making and rewards. Ulrich (1995, p. 20) suggests the removal of boundaries by introducing a common goal:

*“Boundaries can be removed by creating a common goal that supersedes each individual goal, by moving individuals around to different roles within the function through career transitions, and by building incentives that encourage boundary-less behaviour”.*

## 1.3 Research problem, aim and research questions

The effects of SSMs on career developments of HR professionals are not fully understood and there is a need for further research (Cooke, 2006). There are claims both that SSMs enables increased mobility (CIPD, 2007) and claims that SSMs suppress mobility of HR professionals (Cooke, 2006). As a larger number of companies reorganise and make HR transitions employing SSMs the need to know its implications becomes more important.

According to the theory of practise SSM should enable clear HR functions and create more career paths and increased mobility. However, research show that HR careers might become an issue when implementing SSMs. This supports a need for a comprehensive study of HR professionals within SSM.

The aim of this thesis is to make an explorative study and analyse the career moves of HR professionals within the shared service model. The underlying assumption for the work is that the shared service model promotes career moves, since the model has a clear structure with certain roles and responsibilities.

The research questions of this study are defined as follows.

*What are the patterns of movements in the shared service model?*

*Which factors can be identified as having enabled HR mobility in the companies?*

#### **1.4 Definitions of main concepts**

*Career* has different meaning for different people and may involve not only vertical but also lateral movements. In this work *career* is defined as “an actor’s movements through a social structure over time” (Becker & Strauss, 1956, in Iellatchitch et al., 2004, p. 2).

*Shared service model* is an organisation of HR practice into activities organised in service centre (transaction based services), centre of expertise (transformation based services) and HR business partners (attached to the line organisation) (Ulrich, 1995).

*Mobility* has historically been defined in a variety of ways. In this work *mobility* is related to transitions or movements of HR professionals and is defined as “willingness or propensity to make a move, given an opportunity” (Parnes, 1954, in Veiga, 1983, p. 64).

*Competence* is defined as an individual's demonstrated knowledge, skills or abilities (Ulrich et al., 1995).

*Internal labour market* is an administrative system of HR practices for allocating labour within an organisation (Baron & Kreps, 1999).

#### **1.5 Disposition**

The disposition of this paper mainly follows the chronology of the work performed. The historical background of the problem is introduced followed by a short description of previous research in the area and a presentation of the theoretical framework of the field. Then the chosen research method is presented followed by the empirical data from the research. The results are discussed in the analysis and finally the conclusions are presented.

## **2 Previous research**

This chapter aims to present previous research concerning HR professionals and their development within the shared service model. A literature review shows that there is research concerning specific units of the shared service model but few or no research concerning the whole model. The existing research of interest concerns HR transformation (Hällsten, 2008; Boglind et al., 2011), HR service center (Farndale et al., 2009; Pritchard & Symon, 2011) and HR business partners (Brockway, 2007; Wright, 2008).

### **2.1 The shared service model and implications for HR professionals**

Cooke (2006) states that the adaptation of a HR shared service model has implications for various groups of employees in an organisation. The employees may include those working in line management, users of service and HR staff. Furthermore, the impact of a HR shared service model on different groups of employees may differ from country to country and from industry to industry. Cooke (2006) also claims that the adoption of a shared service model may impact the nature of HR work, career patterns and even decrease career opportunities for HR professionals. However, a study in UK made by CIPD (2007) found that the implementation of HR shared service models has created more career opportunities and made it easier to move between HR roles.

Boglind et al. (2011) shows that in Sweden the new structure of the HR function, which may result in division of power among HR professionals and new career opportunities, has led to negative consequences for those working in HRSC. A study in UK have similar implications as it shows that the more junior and entry-level and administrative jobs, usually carried out in HR service center, are being de-skilled and graded lower (CIPD, 2006). Compared to the lower graded jobs at HRSC, Ulrich (1995) describes HR business partner as the most challenging job in the shared service model. Furthermore, Francis and Keegan (2006) find that working as a HR business partner seems to be an ambition for many HR professionals due to higher salary, status and prestige.

However, sufficient research concerning the impact of adoption of HR shared services on various groups is lacking (Cooke 2006). For instance, Truss et al. (2002) claims that it is unclear how different roles within the shared service model are created.

### **2.2 HR competencies**

Ulrich (1997) emphasises that the future of the HR profession lies in the definition of essential competencies and clear roles for practitioners. Ulrich claims that HR has its own set of competencies that professionals need if they want to maximise the value they add to customers (employees, line managers). In addition Farndale et al. (2009) claim the competencies of shared service model staff are crucial to its success and the training of staff is important. This supports Baron and Kreps proposal for internal career development and an internal labour market (Baron & Kreps, 1999).

In a study by CIPD (2005) pointers predicting the route to the top in HR was investigated. The results identified the following factors as positive for reaching the top: being a generalist

rather than a specialist, having a degree, being older, having worked for a number of different organisations and having had more career steps. However, the identified factors only accounted for 27 percent of the prediction supporting the existence of other factors being of greater importance such as personal attributes and attitudes, qualifications, experience and competencies. Significant barriers to career progression were found to be: staying in one organisation, over-specialising and the existence of shared service centres. However, specialists claimed to have better career options on larger organisations.

### 2.3 Mobility in HR

Since there is no direct research of mobility in HR, mobility in general or connected research in HR will be discussed. Career research deals with mobility and the focus of this research is to describe and analyse the moves of HR professionals within the shared service model. However, the concept of *career* is seen as too narrow. The concept of *mobility* is seen as more appropriate in this study and is more applicable to the theoretical framework.

According to Forrier et al. (2009) the central idea of career mobility is to have movement capital which involves individual skills, knowledge and competencies. However, Forrier et al. (2009) has found that the number of jobs available in the internal and external market influences career mobility and suggests that career options and choices may depend on contextual opportunities.

According to Tamkin et al. (2006) there are three possible career moves: sector (public, private, and voluntary), organisation (international, big, small or popular) and role (specialist or generalist). The researchers found that it is advisable to move around in an HR career, and get experience in different functions, sectors and organisations, rather than staying in one organisation. Similar to Kelly and Gennard (2000) Tamkin et al found that generalists are perceived to have better career opportunities than specialist. Further, differences in skill requirements were found to affect the development of HR professionals in a negative way.

*“The fact that skill requirements are also different from each other makes the task of developing people into these roles all the harder, especially since within the specialist community, areas like reward, employee relations, and learning and development may be growing away from each other with the deepening of expertise”* (Tamkin et al., 2006, p. 55).

Kelly and Gennard (2000) have examined how HR professionals achieve board of director status. The authors emphasise that labour market changes have implications for the career paths of managers and identify three career pathways – vertical (moving up), zigzag (movement between, and within, management specialist functions, including entry, exit and return to personnel) and parachute (without any previous work experience in personnel/HR). The zigzag pathway was found to be the main pattern and increased training and development opportunities helped the career progression of managers. Moreover, being a generalists rather than a specialist was beneficial for managers in order to advance their careers.

Ulrich (1997) claims mobility in HR has changed from linear to a mosaic of experiences. The mosaic career is about building experience inside and outside the function, working in diverse fields, with diverse tasks and roles. Further, Ulrich (1997) suggests job rotation between

different units as a way to overcome role segmentation and facilitate career development of HR professionals. A CIPD (2006) study among its own HR members showed that some organisations actually used job rotation or temporary assignments to build experience and move graduates from service centre roles to specialist and business partner roles. However, Cooke (2006) claims that the transition from HRSC to HRBPs is difficult due to the lack of opportunities to develop general HR and business awareness skills.

Wright (2008) conducted a study of management consultants becoming HR business partners. The author states that the idea of HR managers becoming business partners and internal consultants opens up HR work for other occupational groups. This leads to reduced entry barriers to HR and increased mobility across different functions. Another reason for reduced entry barriers is the growing emphasis on customer-facing skills and IT at HR service centres. This implies less need for an HR background and as a consequence career routes out of administration become more difficult (CIPD, 2006).

Monks (1993) claims that experience from industrial relations and personnel management is a very important element in career progress. Additionally, Monks argue that the type of organisation and their cultures may affect the career progress of HR professionals. Thus, personnel managers continued their career within those organisations whose culture promotes a proactive approach to personnel management and involves HR professionals in a wide range of areas.

Heaton and Ackah (2007, p. 958) have researched changes in HR careers and argue that the contemporary HR career is more fragmented in its progression:

*“The traditional way into professional role, through vertical promotions in one organisation, is replaced with a more difficult and fragmented career progression, since employing organisations increasingly require the HR function to demonstrate that it “adds value” and look to possible new ways of delivering this”.*

The authors conclude that the changes in delivery of HR services could affect both the number of jobs available and the nature of those jobs. However, Heaton and Ackah (2007) still acknowledge that in some public organisations there is still a traditional career ladder and a high level of security. Moreover, those currently working in public sector had made fewer job moves than those in private or voluntary sector.

### 3 Theoretical framework

For the theoretical framework and as a tool for analysing the empirical data Pierre Bourdieu's *theory of practice* (1977) was chosen. Bourdieu's theory is one of the grand theories and entails more space to interpret different concepts compared to, for example, psychological studies which tend to offer clear constructs and measures. The grand theories are used to look for widespread explanations for a particular social phenomenon (Arthur, 2008).

The *theory of practice* is a multi-level framework describing individuals as producers of social practices in social space while following specific logics of practices (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011). One of the greatest strengths of Bourdieu's work is its multi-level analysis, that is, the interaction between the theory's three main concepts - *field*, *habitus* and *capital* (Iellatchitch et al 2003).

The researchers Mayrhofer, Iellatchitch, Mayer and Chudzikowski adjusted the work of Bourdieu to career research. Because their adjustments are more fit to the topic of this thesis their studies (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011; Mayrhofer et al., 2004; Iellatchitch et al., 2003) was chosen to be used as references rather than Bourdieu's original work. Bourdieu's work is described as "*a primary candidate for an overarching theoretical framework in career studies*" (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011, p. 22). Moreover, these authors have extended Bourdieu's theory by introducing the new concepts: career field, career habitus and career capital (Iellatchitch et al., 2003).

Using the theory of practice to analyse careers has several advantages, one being that it avoids the choice between objective or subjective career or between macro and micro perspective. It also includes neglected areas like power distribution, social hierarchy and social inequalities into career research. Other advantage is that it offers a reflexive relationship between agents and structure, goes beyond the organisation as the main point of reference (Mayrhofer et al., 2004).

However, Bourdieu's theory of practice has some disadvantages. In relation to career research it cannot describe how social capital is structured, which measurements are relevant in transitions between different fields or how organisations recognise symbolic capital (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011). Further, Crossley (2001) argues that there are several issues related to the concept of habitus. The criticism points out the lack of explanation for how the habitus shapes and constitutes human subjectivity.

#### 3.1 Field

Field is as a patterned set of practices with certain rules and roles. It can be described as a playground or a battlefield where individuals try to enhance their position or a status (Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004). Moreover, field is the social context and network of positions in which individuals act and by doing this re-define the context (Bourdieu, 1986).

"Each social field is semi-autonomous, characterised by its own determinate agents, its own history, its own logic of action and its own forms of capital" (Mayrhofer & Iellatchitch, 2000, p. 9).

Iellatchitch and colleagues (Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004) use the concept of *career field*. Careers themselves are not fields but the concept of *career field* highlights that careers develop within a field. The concept of career field allows a cross-sectional look at careers highlighting an arena where careers develop despite of profession, job or an organisation.

*“Career fields are the social context within which individual members of the workforce make their moves”* (Mayrhofer et al., 2007, p. 92).

## 3.2 Habitus

According to Bourdieu, habitus is an embodied history of an individual (1990b, in Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004). The habitus is dynamic and constantly changed by new experiences and each individual has her own habitus formed by her biography (Crossley, 2001). Krais (1985, in Iellatchitch et al., 2003, p. 738) also includes the individual’s schemata of perception, thinking, feeling and evaluation in the definition of habitus. The concept of habitus and the concept of field are related to each other. Crossley (2001) describes this connection as a circular relationship.

“Involvement in a field shapes the habitus, which, in turn, shapes the actions that reproduce the field” (Crossley, 2001, p. 87).

*Career habitus* was introduced by Iellatchitch and colleagues (Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004) and refers to a habitus that is formed within a specific career field.

*“A particular career habitus ensures that an agent acts, perceives and thinks according to the rules of the field, and his movements within the field of career appear as the ‘natural’ way. He/she acts intentionally without intention”* (Bourdieu, 1987, 1990a:12, in Iellatchitch et al., 2003, p. 738).

Iellatchitch et al state that an individual need not have the exact habitus required when entering a career field. It is enough to have a habitus close to the career field that in turn modifies the habitus according to the nature of the field. The central idea for career habitus is progression and desire for growth, either climbing the ladders, increasing reputation or level of expertise (Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004).

## 3.3 Capital

Bourdieu defines capital as resources in different forms which include economic, social, cultural or informational and symbolic (Mayrhofer et al., 2004). According to Bourdieu (1986) it takes time to build up capital and it involves costs, for instance by transforming one type of capital into another.

### 3.3.1 Economic capital

*Economic capital* consists of monetary value of which income is the most important element. It is relatively easy to change economic capital into other capital forms but vice versa is usually difficult (Postone et al., 1993, in Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004).

### 3.3.2 Social capital

*Social capital* concerns relationships and is defined by one's social network based on who you know and who knows about you. The amount of the social capital depends on the size of the network of connections and the amount of capital owned (Bourdieu, 1986). The social capital includes group and class memberships (Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004). However, Bourdieu (1986) claims that a network of connections is not naturally or socially given. Instead he means that the network of relationships is a product of both short-term and long-term investment strategies.

### 3.3.3 Cultural capital

*Cultural capital* is constituted by competence and skills but also includes academic degrees and physical objects. The object forms can include cultural products, for example books, paintings or machines.

### 3.3.4 Symbolic capital

The social field and its rules determine what qualifies and is socially recognised and legitimate as *symbolic capital* (Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2002).

*“Fields /.../ provide the criteria for transforming capitals that individuals have at their disposal into symbolic capital. Only if capitals are ‘acknowledged’ in the respective field they become symbolic and, for this reason, a valid currency”* (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011, p. 24).

### 3.3.5 Career capital

*Career capital* was added to Bourdieu's theory by Iellatchitch et al. (2003). Career capital is gained through personal, educational and professional development activities and exists within a career field. From another point of view, its “knowing-why”, “knowing-how”, and “knowing-whom” (Arthur et al., 1999 in Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004).

Every individual within a specific field has a unique mix of career capital. Different elements of the capital are valued depending on the field. Choosing which capital to utilise does not follow a certain rational plan, but it is rather results from habitus as a combination of different external factors (Iellatchitch et al., 2003).

Career capital is needed in order to move within or across a career field. The more the rules of the field are known, legitimate and seen as valuable, the bigger are the chances to succeed. However, each career field involve a struggle about what is legitimate in the field (Iellatchitch et al., 2003).

## 3.4 Application of theoretical framework

In this thesis career field is treated as a “super-field”. That is, the shared service model is treated as a “super-field” where HR Service Center, Center of Expertise and HR Business Partner are subfields.



## **4 Method**

As a consequence of the aim of an explorative study a qualitative research strategy was chosen.

### **4.1 Research strategy**

The qualitative approach of the study aims to provide much descriptive material concerning the context of investigation and cases located there. Qualitative research allows not only focusing on individuals as the central unit but also allows studying various patterns of attitudes and behaviour (Hakim, 2000). In addition, a qualitative study is open for the unexpected and useful in exploratory cases when little is known about the research phenomenon.

Bryman and Bell (2007) state qualitative studies has the weaknesses of being too subjective since findings of a study rely much on the researcher's own interpretation on what is significant and what is not. The freedom of interpretation also poses a risk that it becomes difficult to track back how the researcher came to conclusions. Further, it is claimed that repeating the same study is almost impossible due to the fact that standard procedures are rarely followed. Often the sample has few respondents, not constituting a representative sample, which makes it problematic to generalise obtained results. Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest generalising findings to theory rather than to populations.

### **4.2 Research design**

To investigate career moves of HR professionals within the shared service model a comparative study with two cases was chosen. A comparison between two cases can provide better understanding of social phenomena (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Moreover, choosing more than one company offers the possibility to find explanations for similarities and differences in career moves and gain further understanding of particular contexts of the cases.

To gain the empirical data semi-structured interviews were chosen. Semi-structured interviews follow a certain structure but allow additional questions during the interviews (May, 2001). The structural element is particularly important in order compare two cases.

### **4.3 The sample**

The two samples of the case study consisted of a private manufacturing company (company A) and a public healthcare company (company B). The first criterion for choosing the companies was that their HR functions work in accordance to the shared service model for at least a two of years. The second criterion was that the companies should have performed a reorganisation of the HR functions within the last 10 years.

#### **4.3.1 Company A**

At the private manufacturing company the HR transformation started in 2004/2005. The main reason for the reorganisation was cost saving. Before the reorganisation of HR there were 16 - 17 quite independent business areas and the HR organisation was diverse and decentralised. The HR function today consists of service center, center of expertise, business partners and corporate HR while the pay-roll function is outsourced.

The company has international presence and performed the HRT in three countries simultaneously: Sweden, France and USA. In the three countries there were 437 HRBP in 2005 (Q4) while in 2011 (Q4) there were 206 HRBP. The HRSC was set up in 2005 with 92 HR professionals and in 2011 the number had increased to 167. Meanwhile, the HRCOE had close to 50 HR professionals the whole period. The HR function in Sweden consists of 200 HR professionals. The HRCOE employs 15 HR professionals, 80 - 100 HR professionals work in the HRSC and there are 80 - 100 HRBPs.

#### **4.3.2 Company B**

The public healthcare company reorganised the HR function in 2009 as part of a restructuring of the entire company. Before the reorganisation there were 10 business areas compared to 6 areas today. The positions and requirements in HR were changed and an HR service center, with a goal to increase efficiency in recruitment processes, was established. For example, HR administrator was introduced to replace the previous roles personnel assistant and personnel officer.

The present HR department consists of a strategic HR unit (1 HR manager and 15 HR strategists), an HRSC (7 HR administrators) and 6 local HR units (each with 1 HR manager and 8 - 14 HRBPs). Before the reorganisation of the HR function there were around 110 employees in HR while there today are around 90 HR professionals in HR.

Within the HR field there are four councils working with overall and strategic HR issues. One council deals with employer issues, one with work environment and health, one with leadership, co-workership and equality while the last council deals with strategic competence development and education. The council members consist of HRBPs, HR specialist and HR managers.

#### **4.4 Data collection**

The first step was to get to know the company, the HR structure and identify existing career patterns. A senior HR professional still employed and working during the reorganisation was interviewed at both companies. A succession planner was interviewed to gather information about conditions for career development in the organisation. This was only conducted in company A since there was no such position in company B.

The second step was to identify HR professionals for the interviews and conduct the interviews. The selection criteria for of interviewees were HR professionals that worked at the time of HR reorganisation (either in service center, center of expertise or as HRBP) and still working at the company (in the same unit or another, with some sort of movements). A list of names with HR professionals meeting the selection criteria was supplied by the HR managements at both companies.

Invitations to participate in the case study were, via e-mail, sent to the persons on the list. For the persons accepting to participate semi-structured interviews of 40 - 90 minutes were conducted. In total 21 interviews were held, 14 in company A and 7 in company B.

The author is aware that the field is changing in time. Thus, this study reflects answers in a snapshot of time. The interview data was supplemented with organisation charts and presentations supplied by the companies.

#### **4.5 Data analysis**

The obtained empirical data, the interviews, were transcribed into text and analysed using qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic step-by-step text analysis, following rules of procedure and creating categories with similar meanings from a text (Mayring, 2000). An inductive category approach was chosen to accomplish the analysis.

The main idea is to formulate criteria based on the theoretical framework, Bourdieu's theory of practice. Following the criteria field, habitus and capital the material was carefully examined and statements were collected to the criteria. The statements collected under each category were summarised and the results from the two companies was evaluated.

#### **4.6 Ethical considerations**

Diener and Crandall (1978 in Bryman & Bell, 2007) highlight four ethical principles to take into account during research. The principles concern whether there is harm to participants, whether there is a lack of informed consent, whether there is an invasion of privacy and if deception is involved.

In order not to harm to participants in this study, confidentiality of records and anonymity of accounts were provided. Identities of persons and companies are masked by pseudonyms. Potential respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, research design, duration of an interview, anonymity, the form of the final result and the where the final report will be published. Participation was voluntary. When interviewees declined to answer a question, this was respected without exploring reasons for that choice. In addition, personal information revealed was kept confidential and excluded from publication. The respondents were informed that some parts of the study may change. However, at the end it is still a comparative study of two cases as initially intended.

#### **4.7 Reliability and validity**

Validity and reliability are two measures to evaluate the quality of a research study. Reliability is a measure about whether the results of a study are repeatable in another study (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This is particularly important in a quantitative study but may also be of interest in a qualitative study. Reliability can be separated into internal and external reliability. Internal reliability concerns whether a research design can be replicated. External reliability describes how a researcher has interpreted the gathered data. External reliability in qualitative research is often hard to achieve due to dynamic social contexts.

In order to keep high internal reliability, open questions were asked to avoid potential preconceptions. To ensure external reliability, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Validity is a measure for evaluating if the conclusions made from a study can be judged as coherent or not (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Similarly to reliability, the validity can be divided

into internal and external validity. Internal validity is about issues related to causality while external validity concerns whether results can be generalised outside the setting.

The author of this study acknowledges the issues related to external validity due to the choice of research design and the few numbers of respondents. This is reflected under limitations. The internal validity is achieved through interviewing HR professionals from various levels. Bryman and Bell (2007) talk about credibility as an important element for internal validity, for this reason some follow up-questions were asked when something was unclear. Moreover, additional clarifying questions were asked after the interviews.

#### **4.8 Limitations**

The main limitation of this study is that the findings in this research cannot be generalised to broader populations. The results are limited to careers of HR professionals in two specific settings: a public healthcare company and a private manufacturing company. Another limitation is the unequal distribution of respondents among the two companies, that is, 14 interviews with HR professionals in company A and 7 interviews in company B. The few number of interviews conducted at company B are explained by the availability of respondents and interest. Translations can also cause some limitations, since the interviews at company B were held in Swedish.

## 5 Results

The presentation of empirical results is divided into three parts, field, habitus and capital.

At company A 14 interviews were conducted. The average employee had made three career moves after the HRT. The career moves were both within the sub-fields and between the sub-fields. At company B 7 interviews were conducted and there was only one career move after the HRT. This move was between two sub-fields.

There was only one career move at company B and as a consequence the results on habitus and capital will mainly be focused on company A, where there were many movements to analyse. Some aspects from company B will though be presented as potential factors for decreasing the mobility.

### 5.1 Field

This part provides a description of the characteristics of each sub-field at both companies, starting with the sub-field HRSC followed by HRBP and finally HRCOE. The field perspective is a way to take into account requirements on the organisational side. The characteristics used to describe the sub-fields include work tasks, capital requirements and movement possibilities.

#### 5.1.1 HR service centre

HRSC is a central function since it supports all business units within the company.

##### 5.1.1.1 Work tasks

Company A

From the interviews it appeared that in private manufacturing company the sub-field HRSC is run by "business services" which is a group function for shared services for the whole company. The HRSC consists of a frontline helpdesk and back office with different tiers and works according to a call center idea.

The work in the HRSC was described as quite administrative. One respondent expressed that there is a view of the HRSC as the *"lowest form in the HR hierarchy /.../ doing things that nobody else wants to do"*. However, another respondent said that this attitude has changed and now people from the HRSC are more wanted. Moreover, some respondents emphasised operations to a very detailed level and characterised the HRSC as focused on a quality and service delivery.

Employees or managers are, as the first option, supposed to search HR related information in a web based, self-service, HR portal. The second option is to call the front line helpdesk (T1). The personnel employed at the helpdesk are generalists since they are supposed to supply answers to a variety of common HR matters, for example vacation status, etc. More advanced questions can be directed to back office experts (T2) who have deeper knowledge in specific fields, for example, labour law. Finally, if an expert in T2 cannot answer the question, it is sent to a process development expert (T3). Additionally, the aim is to push down the

knowledge all the way to T1 making them able to answer the question themselves next time, thus updating the information in the HR portal.

#### Company B

At the public healthcare company the sub-field HRSC consists of several HR administrators. The department is described as open allowing a lot of discussion. However, the HRSC is not a typical call center where managers turn to HR administrators with questions.

Hence, the HRSC do not function in a general support role to answer general HR questions from employees and managers. Instead, the main task of the HR administrators is training and recruitment administration which is seen as rather limited and routine work. The HR administrators also support local HR managers and local HR departments with recruitment by setting up advertisements and taking part in application screening processes.

#### **5.1.1.2 Requirements**

#### Company A

The competence requirements for HRSC at the private manufacturing company are social capital in a form of service skills or customer oriented mindset and cultural capital in the form of analytical skills and practical knowledge of administration, especially for those who work with workforce administration and salaries. One respondent explains the view in the following way.

*“It’s very analytical and precise knowledge about the administration. It’s more administrative work and you need to be extremely good in quality of working. In HRSC you don’t need to understand the full business, you need to execute with a very good quality”*

In addition, cultural capital in terms of cost consciousness and project management skills is seen important, especially for projects within the business services. Cultural capital in the form of education is also valued but one respondent reveals that there is no need to have a degree in HR referring to own experience:

*“I don’t think you need to have a bachelor or master degree in HR related questions, because it’s quite basic. You have to have some education, if you want to move to next level”*

#### Company B

At the public healthcare company the sub-field HRSC requires first of all *cultural capital* in the form of education. However, the sub-field does not require a university degree in HR, secondary school is acceptable. In addition, *social capital* in the form of service minded skills and ability to create and maintain good relationships are wanted. In order to handle a lot of advertisements such *cultural capital* as ability to structure, organise, prioritise and IT skills are seen important.

### 5.1.1.3 Mobility possibilities

#### Company A

The HRSC at the private manufacturing company is seen as a base for starting an HR career. Within HRSC there is a possibility to move from a junior position at the front line help desk (T1) to expert positions in different tiers (T2 or T3). The respondents describe possibilities for moving within HRSC as diverse. Some say there are more movement opportunities after the HRT whereas some say opportunities have decreased. HRSC is also a possible platform to move to HRBP or HRCOE. Furthermore, business services, which run the HRSC, offer possibilities to work with different projects, to be a part of management team or work externally as a part of consulting services. Possible assignments within consulting services include working for HRBP at a certain unit, usually for a limited time period.

Despite possibilities to move within HRSC or to other subfields a majority of respondents employed in HRSC stated a need for an *arena or a stage* in order to be seen. The respondents claim not having an opportunity to show their capabilities and skills hinder movement to other sub-fields and other positions.

*“If you work in HRSC, your boss is not sitting there the whole time and not watching how you answer the phone...but on other arenas... Arena, it is like a stage and sometimes you are invited to play the role because somebody is willing to take a chance. If you play that role very well, there are a lot of people in the audience. They say 'ok, that is Sandra I have heard about her'. And then when they want a problem to solve or recruit, they think Sandra is not bad. Perhaps I should give a try to her. But that will never happen if you don't get that first role, so that you can actually be on that stage and the right people could see you”*

#### Company B

At the public healthcare company the HRSC is by the management seen as a platform to an HR career, from where a movement to an HRBP position (HR specialist) can be made after couple of years. However, the majority of respondents employed in the HRSC express that there are no clear paths or career possibilities for HR administrators. This recurring view is by one HR administrator described in the following way.

*“In general, they [HR management] have said that this [HRSC] will be a platform, the first base for new graduates who have studied HR. After 1 - 2 years they are going to be HR specialists [HRBPs]. I am insecure if it is that platform...right now there are no career paths for HR administrators who work here”.*

The manager of HRSC express a need for gradual movement into a management team and confirms the problem of no clear paths and a possibility of too high requirements for business partner roles.

*“The jump from HR administrator to specialist is big. One is expected to participate in a management group when one enters a field. I think there should be a softer transition. When recruiting new specialists we could lower the demands and let them grow in the role, first in a*

*specific field and later expand the role and participate in a management team when they know a bit more.”*

## **5.1.2 HR business partners**

### **5.1.2.1 Work tasks**

#### **Company A**

At the private manufacturing company the work tasks in HRBP are related to manager support and coaching. The HRBP are generalists, “*from hire to fire*” as one respondent explains. Specific tasks involve negotiation with unions, participation in management teams and implementation of HR strategies decided in the management teams. Furthermore, the HRBP positions are described as “*those who add value, the change agents*”. Three respondents describe the HRBP role in the following ways.

*“If you want to work with HR questions, with people and business, you want to work as business partner /.../ for me a business partner role is a little bit more prestigious and the salary.”*

*“I actually think that the whole HR community looks upon business partners as enablers, because they are there doing what we really need to do, really adding value.”*

*“We [business partners] have more information /.../ we know more about the business. We [the company] can put service centres in which country we want but the business partners needs to be where the company is.”*

#### **Company B**

At the public healthcare company the employees at HRBP are called HR specialists. However, in this report they are referred to as business partners though their function differs in some areas. Most business partners at the public healthcare company are generalists but some also have a specialist role in a specific field, for example, recruitment, rehabilitation or labour law. The employees with specialist roles are members in one of four strategic councils. The general matters of business partner employees involve manager support, coaching and to ensure that HR policies and guidelines are followed. Other tasks include rehabilitation, budget and salary questions as well as some administration. The respondents express the work as rewarding because of the close contacts to the line managers (doctors) and the daily activities.

The HRBP is described as a hierarchic field but open for discussions and with an emphasis on fairness. One respondent expressed the culture as follows.

*“There is a willingness to discuss things, decisions or orders. Sometimes discussions can be too long. Since I came from a private organisation, I could feel that here is a very clear hierarchy.”*

Interview data reveals that the HRT has changed some of the work within HRBP. Especially, the respondents say that the attitude towards work and the work style has changed. However,



most respondents state that “*we already worked like this before the HRT*” claiming, that in general, their work has not changed much nor their career possibilities.

#### 5.1.2.2 Requirements

##### Company A

One requirement at HRBP is *cultural capital* like coaching skills, broad HR knowledge, listening skills and ability to handle criticism. To handle conflicts is seen as very important skill as one respondent explains:

*“[In HRBP] there are conflicts, you need to be able to deal with that. You need to be able to say no, you need to be smooth, to coach. A feeling for when you need to push and when you need to go back and support.”*

Another HRBP requirement is *social capital*, for example social skills, communication skills, building trustful relations and openness. Also needed is *cultural capital* of a university degree. It can be a degree in HR, organisational development, psychology, sociology, labour law, finance or economics. However, one of the business partners did not have a degree, but some university education, arguing that most of her knowledge was gained from working as line manager. Finally, cultural capital of business awareness is emphasised, exemplified by one respondent.

*“You need to have a business feeling, otherwise you will come out with HR tools that are excellent in theory but they will not work in practice”*

##### Company B

At the public healthcare company a requirement at HRBP is *cultural capital* of a university education corresponding to a bachelor degree in HR or similar. *Social capital* like social skills, openness and ability to work in teams are also important. As is *cultural capital* of having some years experience in HR, possessing analytical skills and being goal oriented. For specialists there is also a requirement of experience from an immerse field, like rehabilitation or labour law.

The importance of understanding different people as well as interact and communicate with them is highlighted by all respondents. Especially listening skills and an ability to handle criticism are important, described in the following way.

*“You need an ability to understand different individuals and understand how you are going to work with them, with different managers. You have to do it in different ways. Some managers need distinct responses; some demand that you explain more. Ability to read what managers want, it can be very different things. How you are going to interact with managers, with some you need to be proper, with other you need to be more as a buddy”*

### 5.1.2.3 Mobility possibilities

#### Company A

HRBP offer the possibility to move between three sub-roles. Though, some respondents reveal that it could be hard to see the movements between the different HRBP roles. The first role is described as a junior or a light HRBP role and is a support function. One respondent explained the role as “*you do what you are told to do*”. The second role provides more influence and is a part of a management team. The third role is described as having a lot of power and ability to influence. This role may lead to the title senior vice president. However, the roles can differ depending on the business unit and the possibilities it has. One respondent having moved through the first, second and finally reached the third role describes it in the following way.

*“Today I am sitting in a position where I have a lot of power, can influence a lot of things that I couldn’t do when I started. Today, I think that is most important, that you can influence, and have power”*

Besides moving within the sub-field HRBP, the business partners can also move to the HRCOE, HRSC, become an HR manager or manager at another field outside HR.

#### Company B

At the public healthcare company one movement possibility for those who work at HRBP is to move to HRCOE (HR strategic department) and specialise in a specific field. Another possibility is to become an HR manager in the area department or move to a regional office. However, such movements are rare and an interview with an HR manager of HRCOE reveals that it can be related to low numbers of turnover and the age of the business partners.

*“Most HR professionals who come in, stays. We have high average age. It [the age of employees] is around 40 and up /.../ persons, who worked at the time of reorganisation are still working at the same department /.../ many of those who work as business partners, they think it is more interesting to meet managers. When you sit here in strategic center, you do not meet managers.”*

Furthermore, one respondent explain that a movement to the HRCOE is not seen as a career move but more a change to work other types of HR questions. Another respondent said there are few career possibilities in the sub-field and sees no career opportunities within the company.

## 5.1.3 HR centre of expertise

### 5.1.3.1 Work tasks

#### Company A

At the private manufacturing company the HRCOE consists of experts and specialists in fields like labour law, compensations and benefits and talent management both locally and globally.

The work within the sub-field can be described as working with regulations, policies, guidelines, strategies and finding solutions for common problems.

#### Company B

At the public healthcare company the HRCOE consists of HR strategists. Each HR strategist has a specific responsibility, for example, labour relations, negotiations or recruitment. The tasks are varied and include participating in councils, producing long-term plans, creating governing documents, policies and reports. Moreover, the work entails supporting local HR departments, supporting implementation of HR processes and management of development work.

#### **5.1.3.2 Requirements**

##### Company A

In HRCOE at the private manufacturing company *cultural capital* of experience in a certain area like talent management, work environment or negotiations are highly valued. The experts need to be a “*guru*” in a certain area. In addition, strategic thinking, business awareness and experience outside the sub-field are important.

*“Those who work in the center of expertise need to understand not only the specific field but also what kind of questions HR business partners are dealing with, so that those in center of expertise can deliver on the right level.”*

##### Company B

At the public healthcare company the *cultural capital* in a form of a university education corresponding to a master degree in HR or another relevant field is seen as important. However, most valuable is the experience in a specific area, like labour law, and 5 - 7 years of strategic HR work. Other required competencies are willingness to express opinions, capability to handle criticism, courage, building trustful relations and creativity. Finally, social capital in the form of a large network within the company is highly valued:

*“[you need] a broad network, you need to know with whom you need to talk in different situations”*

#### **5.1.3.3 Mobility possibilities**

##### Company A

At the private manufacturing company employees at HRCOE can either move to HRBP or to HRSC. Some respondents express a worry that the small size of HRCOE limits the opportunities for movement within the sub-field.

*“The center of expertise does not employ so many people, only few, and there are quite limited opportunities to move /.../ that is what I felt when I was with the center of expertise- ‘ok, now what? What should I do now? I am the specialist, but what is next?’ I got a bit restless.”*

However, other respondents identify global opportunities and claim that local movements indeed can be limited some areas but movements outside the own unit are possible, exemplified with movement to talent management.

## Company B

At the public healthcare company there are opportunities for mobility within HRCOE. However, movements made by the respondents were often related to broadening of knowledge in neighbouring areas and not always seen as career moves. Another identified possibility is to become HR manager of a strategic department.

## 5.2 Habitus

Empirical data from the private manufacturing company could be characterised in terms of habitus and two distinctive categories was found to be of importance. It appeared that having an appropriate personality and personal drive were key factors to facilitate mobility in HR. The public healthcare company was only considered to minor extent due to lack of movements.

### 5.2.1 Appropriate personality

At the private manufacturing company, the respondents revealed that each sub-field required a certain type of personality. For all of the fields the comments appeared highlighting the need for having a specific habitus in order to work in the different fields.

*“You need to be a certain person who likes to work as an HR administrator.”*

*“If you are a more of technical functional expert, you will be more interested in staying in center of expertise.”*

*“If you want to work as an HR business partner, it seems to be like a passion, wanting to coach managers.”*

However, the habitus needed in the different fields seems to differ thus a cause for movements across the fields being more difficult than movements within the same field. A suitable personality in one sub-field may not be the right personality in another, as expressed by one respondent.

*“If you are very good in HR service center, it’s not the same as you will be good in HR business partner because there are different competencies and also personalities. /.../ It’s not just being strategic and business focused, you have to be the right person /.../ you have to like it.”*

At the public healthcare company, the need for a particular personality was not emphasised and acknowledge by many respondents. However, one respondent described that there are requirements in terms of having the “right approach”.

### 5.2.2 Personal drive

A majority of HR representatives at the private manufacturing company revealed that career progress depends much on the individual. This view was supported by a succession planner

who said that promotion in the company depends on personal drive and being responsible for one's own career. The emphasis on personal drive is also reflected by two HR professionals.

*“It's really about being active yourself.”*

*“The employee has to send out signs that he has the ambition to make a change, to take the next step.”*

At the public healthcare company, some respondents revealed that they were not willing to move or show an interest of doing so. However, many acknowledged the importance of personal drive in career development. Especially, the importance of personal drive is highlighted by the only HR professional that made a career move.

*“I am very ambitious /.../ I am curious, I want to learn more, I have a will /.../ when I have felt that I want to do something else or something more, I have requested it. Talked about it with my manager /.../ I consciously aimed for my current position already from the time when I was an HR administrator.”*

### **5.3 Capital**

Empirical data from the interviews could be characterised in terms of capitals. No specific resource was identified as being of key importance but rather a mix of different resources of social capital and cultural capital was found to facilitate career moves. Social capitals and cultural capitals of importance are presented below as well as some additional factors of importance.

#### **5.3.1 Social capital**

The respondents at the private manufacturing company revealed that networking within the company has been helpful in order to make career moves. Two respondents gave examples of the importance of networking.

*“If you don't have a network you will never survive. It is a must to have a network.”*

*“I thought ‘this is the person I need to get to know’ /.../ and in the end he was the one who was recruiting for this position that I applied for /.../ if I hadn't had that meeting, treated him nicely and welcomed him, I might not have gotten that opportunity as easily as I did.”*

The respondents at the public healthcare company also saw having a network within the company as important. One HR representative explains it based on the previous experience:

*“If you have been within the organisation for a certain time then you know which ways you should go. /.../ The power structure is important to know, with whom to talk or go to and with whom not to.”*

Social skills as a form of a social capital were also valued by respondents at the private manufacturing company as well as the public healthcare company. Though, at the public healthcare company the respondents mainly emphasised social skills as helpful in the daily work.

### 5.3.2 Cultural capital

At the private manufacturing company cultural capital in the form of trust was said to be important in relationships between co-workers and especially with an own manager. Two respondents exemplify the significance of trust in the following way.

*“I am good with people, people trust me which is very important...I think most people think they can talk to me about almost everything.”*

*“I was helped by a HR manager /.../ He was very confident about my next step /.../ he trusted me. The new manager maybe took a risk because I did not have an HR business partner background. I had done so many things before, and the trust was really there. I think it’s important to have trust.”*

At the public healthcare company some HR representatives stated that trust were important in relationships between co-workers, however, this was not emphasised in relation to career moves after the HRT.

The cultural capital of experience was seen as very important in order to move both within the sub-field and across sub-fields at the private manufacturing company. In order to move between the sub-fields HRSC and HRBP experience as a manager is seen as central. Moreover, a broad experience in HR is valued.

*“I have by now a lot of experience, so it’s useful in different areas and I have a good mix of experience as both HR manager and HR business partner.”*

*“My previous experience in the company has allowed me to work in a way where I can see a lot of different things and can provide different solutions and broad ideas.”*

In order to move to HRCOE one needs to have a specific interest in a certain area, for instance competence management. One HR representative moving from the sub-field HRBP partner to HRCOE the center of expertise explains the help of having a deep interest.

*“My true passion for talent management helped me to get this position.”*

In the public healthcare company the respondents claimed a couple of years experience and experience with managers to be an important factor to make a move from HRSC to HRBP.

Business acumen is another cultural capital which was emphasised by many respondents at the private manufacturing company. This was not only seemed important at the HRBP but also at HRCOE.

*“I have a business feeling, I have my finance background, I know what people talk about. For instance when I am sitting in a management team for Europe, I feel I can really go into dialogue with them.”*

*“I am very business oriented – a skill that helped me to get this job. I understand and support the business with my HR roll.”*

Neither business acumen nor strategic thinking was mentioned as important in order to move at the public healthcare company.

The last type of cultural capital that often appeared as important was performance. Almost all respondents at the private manufacturing company mentioned it and explained the crucial need to deliver results. The results make a person attractive and facilitate a career move independently on the employing sub-unit.

*“It’s all about proving yourself. If you have the ability to prove your competence, skill to someone who will need you, they will hire you”*

Performance was acknowledged by the respondents at company B as well. However, it was not specifically connected to career moves of HR professionals after the HRT.

### **5.3.3 Other factors**

The role of managers was acknowledged at both companies since the HR representatives normally are supposed to talk to a manager about their career development. In several cases managers were those who informed about a vacancy available or encouraged the HR professional to make a career move. Two respondents at the private manufacturing company described the manager’s role like this:

*“I think you have to have a manager who is speaking well about you.”*

*“I have been promoted within this unit by my own managers. Obviously, they felt that I was doing a good job and could take a larger responsibility”*

One respondent at company B gives a similar example based on own experience.

*“My managers have believed in me, they have recommended me.”*

At both companies the interviews disclosed that new titles was of little importance for career moves while interesting and challenging tasks was seen as a facilitator for mobility.

Some of the HR representatives from the private manufacturing company emphasised the importance of not staying in the same position for a long time. The respondents at the private manufacturing company expressed a fear of staying too long in one position hindering the possibility to move to other sub-fields. The respondents at the public healthcare company do not stress an importance of not staying too long at the same position.

Other factors like family issues, age and attractiveness of new position were mentioned as reasons for not moving to other positions. However, such factors can only be ascribed minor importance.

## 6 Analysis and discussion

The first part of this chapter is dedicated to what kinds of career moves the shared service model may promote for HR professionals while the second part concerns mobility factors in SSM.

The public healthcare company does not use the terminology of the SSM. This fact raises the question whether the company is actually using SSM. However, for the purpose of comparisons between the two companies functions corresponding to HRSC, HRBP and HRCOE have been translated into the terminology of SSM in the following discussion.

### 6.1 What are the patterns of movements in the shared service model?

The empirical data show that there are possible career moves both within and across different sub-fields. However, this is not the case for both companies studied in this research. The empirical findings show that there are differences in the number and a type of career moves between the two companies.

In the private manufacturing company there were career moves both within and across the sub-fields HRSC, HRCOE and HRBP. In comparison, at the public healthcare company there was only one career move taking place across two sub-fields. The different patterns in the two companies give reason to discuss the implementation of the SSMs. A possible explanation for the differences is that different companies adopt Ulrich's SSM differently, as studied by Boglind et al. (2011). The different fields of the companies as in company A being private and company B being public are in accordance to a study by Heaton & Ackah (2007) showing that those who worked in a public sector had made fewer job moves than those working in a private sector.

Further, CIPD (2007) found that only 18 percent of HR functions actually work according to all three elements of the SSM. In this study the private manufacturing company was found to do this but not the public healthcare company. This can perhaps be explained by the underlying reasons for the transformations. The collected data show that in the private manufacturing company the reorganisation of the HR function was performed with the aim to reduce costs and was inspired by the growing trend worldwide. While in the public healthcare company the re-organisation of HR function came after the re-organisation of the entire healthcare company by decrease of working areas. In addition, the respondents at the public healthcare company revealed that the work of HR professionals has not changed very much. This raises the question whether the public healthcare company has actually performed a reorganisation of the HR function.

The empirical findings indicate that the few career moves at the public healthcare company is due to low turnover and high age of HR professionals and an unwillingness to move to other units. Since a field is a historically embedded social context that changes over the time (Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004), there is ground to argue that the field of the HR function at the public healthcare company is static and getting old.

The consequences of the HR reorganisation can be seen by the career possibilities within each sub-field in each company. In the private manufacturing company the HRSC offers the



possibility to move from the front-line helpdesk operator (T1) to back office positions where experts are working (T2 and T3). The many possibilities to move within a sub-field do not exist at the public healthcare company. Within the HRCOE there is a possibility to work globally or locally and within HRBP there are three different levels. Because of the more opportunities at the private manufacturing company one can argue that the field SSM at the private manufacturing company is more flexible in comparison to the public healthcare company. This difference is supported not only by the HR professionals working in different sub-fields but also by the HR manager. Management at the public healthcare company said to be aware of the problem and claimed to work on it in a near future

Further, as the HRSC at the private manufacturing company is run by “business services” there are additional career opportunities and possible movements to project management, coordination or consulting services. However, the empirical findings show that in practice this is not an easy move, since it involves a transition from transaction based services to transformation based services, a difficulty acknowledged in previous research (Tamkin et al., 2006). One can claim there are relatively low boundaries to the sub-field HRSC requiring a university degree and social skills, compared to HRBP and HRCOE which require more experience and specialised knowledge. This is in accordance with CIPD (2006) showing the decreased requirements for HRSC but also finding that career moves out of administration more difficult. In order to overcome the boundaries, the private manufacturing company has created additional positions, called light business partners. Thus one can argue that the agents of the HR field have recreated the rules of the game by expanding the network of positions, as described by Bourdieu’s practice of theory (Bourdieu, 1986 in Iellatchitch et al., 2003).

## **6.2 Which factors can be identified as having enabled HR mobility in the companies?**

Mobility and movements are based on complex interactions which are not fully grasped within this study. However, some aspects stand out that describe different parts connected to mobility.

As illustrated in the results fields and sub-fields may differ including the availability of possibilities depending on the implementation of SSM. Yet, in order to move within or across different sub-fields the empirical findings point out a need a particular habitus and a combination of cultural and social capital. Other important factors were being a generalist rather than specialist, hard work, high performance and building and utilising networks. This is in accordance to previous studies show that such social capital as networking (CIPD, 2005) and social skills (Crouse et al., 2011) may facilitate the mobility in HR.

At both companies a university degree was seen as important for entering HR but not as much for movements within the field. The findings are in a line with a previous research (CIPD 2005) showing academic and professional qualifications as less important in HR careers in the future.

The empirical findings show that the habitus of “right personality” plays an important requirement for movement within a sub-field. This is related to the concept career habitus

(Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004) in the way that an individual needs to possess a specific habitus for a particular career field. However, movements across fields are not supported as much by this quality since the “right personality” may differ from field to field. Moreover, personal drive as a form of habitus was also found to play an important role.

The need for a particular personality can also be connected to the culture of the field itself. At the private manufacturing company the culture is dynamic and individual involvement and development is nurtured. In the public healthcare company the culture is more hierarchic and the field more static. This may cause smaller arena for where HR professionals can show their capital and decrease their ability to move to other positions within or between the fields. It could be argued that the flexibility of fields and different opportunities provided does not automatically give a chance for mobility in HR. Moreover, the empirical findings from the public healthcare company show that individuals may have the capital and habitus needed the fields do not provide many opportunities. Hence, it can be stated that mobility in HR requires a mutual relationship between the field, habitus and capital.

Previous research focuses much on boundary less careers and careers across different companies. However, as displayed in this study career moves also occur within organisations. Both companies reveal the internal mobility as appreciated and promoted. Thus, they put emphasis on the internal labour market (Baron & Kreps, 1999) for the retention and continuous development of HR professionals. This is in accordance to Farndale et al. (2009) that competencies of the staff in the shared service model are crucial to its success and training of staff is considered important.

## **7 Conclusion**

Based on empirical findings it can be concluded that there are possibilities for career moves both within and across different subfields. However, the movement possibilities are highly related to the nature of the field. Moreover, individual qualities as habitus of the “right personality” and personal drive as well as social and cultural capital in the forms of business acumen, networking, social skills and experience play a role in mobility. The findings are in close relation to the institutional context and support a mutual relationship between the field, habitus and different forms of capital. If HR professionals wish to move but neither the field nor the management supports movement it may lead to decreased levels of professionalism.

### **7.1 Contribution**

This study is an explorative study in terms of mirroring activities of HR professionals within the shared service model of different levels of HR professionals. The study gives a glimpse of how it is to have a career development within two different settings: private manufacturing company operating not only in Sweden but also globally and public healthcare company.

The use of Bourdieu’s theory of practise is unusual in the area of a career development of HR people and adds value by having a broader and more flexible approach compared to traditional studies without theoretical frameworks.

The use of Bourdieu theory is something that has not often been made in the area of a career development of HR people and adds value of such a rather unknown approach. Often the career studies of HR professionals are conducted without theoretical frameworks and are quite static, for example studies conducted by HR professional body Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in UK

### **7.2 Practical implications**

This study is mostly of academic interest of researchers, with some minor implications for companies. This study aims to describe the state at the companies and not to give any direct solutions.

### **7.3 Future research**

As continued research studies using a larger sample and including quantitative data is suggested. In addition, further research could be focused on the career possibilities for those HR professionals who are at the high positions already now. Moreover, research on how organisations create interesting and challenging work tasks for various HR professionals is needed.

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## 9 Appendix

### 9.1 Interview guide

Presentation of the student and the aim of the thesis

#### Background/experience

- What is your current position? How long have you worked in this position?
- Tell me about a typical day at work? What do you do?

#### Respondent's career history

- What kind of education do you have?
- Tell me about your first HR job!
- How many years have you worked in HR in total?
- Number of different organizations worked for in HR in total?

#### Career

- What does a career mean for you?
- How important do you regard promotion?
- Do you have a (specific individual) strategy in order to get a promotion?
- Do you have a career plan?

#### After HR Transformation (HRT)

- What kind of position did you have at the time of HRT and in which unit?
- Have anything changed since HRT concerning your job and career in HR (created more opportunities, made it easier to move between HR roles, etc.)?
- How many career moves have you had since HRT?
- Major career moves.

#### Theoretical concepts (field, habitus, capitals and organizational factors)

##### Field

- What kind of opportunities does exist with the HR SSM specific unit?
- Are there specific rules within the HR SSM specific unit? (Use the examples of career moves and let report what are core differences between the units!).
- What type of skills/competencies is seen important in the HR SSM specific unit?

##### Habitus

- What did you do to get a promotion? What helped you? What would people who know you well say about your qualities?

**Capital** (what was necessary to make a certain career move? Talk about all moves!)



- Economic capital (income). Time and effort spent on additional (voluntary education and training – money intensive activities).
- Social capital (social relations, networks, group membership).
- Cultural or informational capital (acquired skills and qualifications, academic titles and degrees).
- Other important factors (generalist/specialist experience, experience outside HR, experience in different organizations, personal drive).
- What was the reason for making a certain career move?

**Contextual conditions (organizational factors)**

- How would you describe the culture of the organization?
- What is the organization’s strategy or approach concerning the development or career moves of an employee? (In general and HR as a specific case).
- Does your employer/organization support your career? How?
- Is there anything you would like to improve? If yes, how do you do that?
- Do you know HR people in other organizations and if/how they make progress?

**Responsibility**

- Is it employee’s or employer’s responsibility for the career development? What do you think?

**Future (possible developments)**

- Do you expect any changes in future in the areas we discussed in this interview and why?
- What are the circumstances/conditions needed to create possible career paths?
- What are the main issues related to career development of HR professionals in future?

**Demographical data:**

- Age:            20-29            30-39            40-49            50>
- Length of service at the current company:
- Sex:            male            female
- Industry sector:

## 9.2 Career moves and demographical data

Private manufacturing = company A

Code	Sex Female (F) Male (M)	Age	Education	Years in HR in total	Nr of different organizations worked for in HR in total	Length of service at the current company	Current position	SD M*	Nr of career moves after HR T (2005)	Major moves
A1	M	30 - 39	Bachelor in sociology + courses	6.5	1	6.5	HRBP	SC	3	SC → competence and leadership development training → HRBP
A2	F	40 - 49	Bachelor in HR	11	1	6	HRBP, working with global projects	SC	2	HR manager (SC) → HRBP and different jobs in SC
A3	M	30 - 39	Bachelor in HR	6	1	6	Director HR Projects	SC	4	Within HR SC + consulting services
A4	F	40 - 49	Bachelor in HR + some courses in financing and accounting	18	10	9	Programme coordinator for "X" project	SC	6	SC → HR projects → SC → COE → SC (line manager) + COE
A5	M	50 >	Degree in social sciences	39	2	38.5	Director compensations and benefits	COE	1	COE → SC
A6	F	40 - 49	2 master degrees: 1 in political science and 1 in economy + specializ	22	3	13	SVP HR	COE	4	VP training and competence development in France (SC) → SVP HR (HRBP) → corporate HR (COE) → HRBP

			ation in HR							
A7	F	50 >	Bachelor in administration	27	4	5.5	Responsible for COE in Sweden	COE	2	HR director → director of COE.
A8	M	40 - 49	Master degree in OD and bachelor in business management +PhD courses in human and organization systems.	20	2	12	SVP organization development and HR strategy	COE	3	HRBP → director of Talent management → VP of COE → SVP of OD and HR strategy (current role), continued to lead the COE. From 2008 both roles until the beginning of this year.
A9	F	50 >	Degree in Business Administration	12	1	25	HRBP for global HQ /HR director, regional BP (competence development)	HRBP	3	Project leader → HRBP region → HR director global programmes (part of HRBP job).
A10	F	40 - 49	Bachelor in HR	18	1	19	VP for HR	HRBP	3	HRBP1 → HRBP2 → HRBP3
A11	F	40 - 49	Short courses from university	6	2	6	HRBP global	HRBP	0	-
A12	F	30 - 39	Master's in political science.	11	1	11	HRBP	HRBP	2	HR manager → HRBP

Public healthcare = company B

Code	Sex Female (F) Male (M)	Age	Education	Years in HR in total	Nr of different organizations worked for in HR in total	Length of service at the current company	Current position	SDM*	Nr of career moves after HR T (2009)	Major moves
B1	F	50 >	3 years gymnasium competence in social science, 2 years of economy + additional courses	23	1	23	HR administrator	SC	0	-
B2	F	30 - 39	Bachelor in behavioral science	5.5	4	3	HR specialist	SC	1	HR administrator → HRBP (HR specialist)
B3	F	50 >	Healthcare, psychiatry, psychology	32	1	28	HR strategist	COE	0	-
B4	M	50 >	Bachelor in Personnel administration.	28	4	25	HR strategist*	COE	0	-
B5	F	50 >	Healthcare administration + HR courses	26	1	27	HR specialist*	HRBP	0	-
B6	M	50 >	Bachelor in personnel and life issues	18	2	5	HR specialist	HRBP	0	-

SDM\* = Service Center (SC), Center of Expertise (COE), HR Business Partner (HRBP), HR specialist\* = HRBP, HR strategist\* = COE