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The role of HRM in intra- organisational knowledge sharing

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Abstract

A company's ability to share knowledge within an organisation is believed to strengthen its competitiveness since knowledge sharing provides a company with a fundament for developing employee competencies and thus with an opportunity to withstand market challenges. Although research on knowledge sharing has emerged in the last two decades, there is still a lack of exploratory research with focus on potential mediators and their contribution to intra-organisational knowledge sharing. This study views HR function as a mediator in knowledge sharing since HRM legitimately deals with employees across functional and hierarchical borders and possesses practices which can be used for facilitating knowledge sharing. Based upon qualitative research into HR practices, the study deepens an understanding of how HR function contributes to knowledge sharing within organisation. A case study based on semi-structured interviews with HR professionals and line managers was conducted. It revealed that HR function deals with both tacit and explicit knowledge and the processes of knowledge conversion and knowing. In order to support and facilitate knowledge sharing, the following HR practices are used: staffing with focus on internal recruitment, training, mentoring, intangible rewarding, and promoting. Both HR and line managers consider HR practices as contributive to intra-organisational knowledge sharing primarily at the individual level by selecting candidates with required knowledge and values, bridging knowledge senders and receivers, providing employees with learning opportunities and internal career growth.

Keywords: HRM, HR practices, knowledge, knowledge sharing

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1. Introduction

Researchers believe that company's ability of knowledge sharing is a fundament of its competitive advantage because knowledge enables the development of core competencies and gives an opportunity to withstand challenges, manage complexities, and sustain competitiveness (Blome, Schoenherr and Eckstein, 2013; Li, 2005; Noorderhaven and Harzing, 2009). However, knowledge sharing can be challenging due to hierarchical and professional attributes of participants and their reluctance to share knowledge as it might threaten their status and identity (Waring et al., 2013). Moreover, organisational attitudes towards knowledge and knowledge flows can be an obstacle to intra-organisational knowledge sharing. According to Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka (2000), an organisational paradigm can create a barrier to knowledge sharing if a company focuses on quantifying knowledge, is obsessed with measurement tools and characterised by the assumption that knowledge can be easily controlled and managed. Such approach roots in knowledge management concept which considers knowledge to be explicit and thus easily detectable and transferable.

If knowledge is considered as an asset, a company aims at detecting knowledge, storing it for later use, and manipulating it by using information technologies (Krogh et al., 2000). A company controls knowledge in order to deliver it to the particular people in particular time. Control becomes the main mechanism of knowledge management. However, knowledge can be seen differently - as a dynamic process which involves contributions from different people throughout the company (ibid.). In this respect, knowledge is characterised by tacitness and uniqueness rather than universality. Due to its tacit nature, knowledge can hardly be controlled and transferred as an object. It rather can be catalysed, coordinated and shared through communication and interaction between members of a company (ibid.). So, a company faces a dilemma – whether to control knowledge and manage it or to enable knowledge flows across intra-organisational boundaries and to provide employees with an opportunity to influence knowledge processes.

In order to meet challenges caused by tacitness and uniqueness of knowledge, a company should provide employees with means enabling knowledge sharing. Mediation is considered as one of those means (Waring et al., 2013). Since human resource management (HRM) is the function that deals with both the flow of people and the flow of knowledge (Scarbrough,

2003) across functional and hierarchical boundaries, HRM is expected to play an important role in intra-organisational knowledge sharing.

Theoretically, there is a range of roles that HRM can play in terms of knowledge sharing: relationship builder, developer of organisational processes and knowledge facilitator that assist knowledge migration, appreciation, and knowledgeable action between employees and units (Chivu & Popescu, 2008). However, only few researchers have taken systematic steps toward linking knowledge management and HRM. They mostly have focused on the theoretical analysis of how HRM should be involved in knowledge sharing (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Chivu & Popescu, 2008; Edvardsson, 2008). A very limited number of them have conducted empirical studies aimed at exploring the linkages between HR practices and knowledge sharing. Some of them focused on one specific practice (Foss et al., 2009; Hung et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2014), whereas others dealt with different practices but used exclusively the quantitative approach (Chen & Huang, 2009; Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013; Minbaeva, 2005; Simonin & Ozsomer, 2009) and, thus, were limited in their conclusions by initially chosen variables.

In other words, there is a lack of exploratory research into the role of HR practices in knowledge sharing within organisations. It is still under-discovered how HR practices add value to a company in terms of knowledge sharing, encouraging employees to gain and share knowledge, and contributing to a knowledge-transfer-friendly environment and the development of knowledge sharing culture in the company.

Moreover, discovering the relationship between HRM and intra-organisational knowledge sharing will give a deeper understanding of HRM as a strategically significant function which is able to demonstrate a valuable and unique contribution to an organisation's competitiveness (Wylie et al., 2013). Since HR function legitimately deals with people and their knowledge across organisational boundaries, it is reasonable to suggest that contributing to knowledge sharing might be such a 'competitive advantage' of HRM in establishing and defending its professional jurisdiction. Furthermore, the focus on facilitating knowledge sharing as one of the HRM capabilities to add value to the organisation will contribute to the understanding of how HR function can increase its occupational status and credibility. Therefore, the current study makes a contribution to the HRM and knowledge management literature and fosters an understanding of the role of HRM as a strategically significant function in a company.

1.1. Purpose and research questions

The main purpose of the thesis is to gain an understanding of how HRM professionals are involved in intra-organisational knowledge sharing and what the role HR practices play in this process. The main research question thus is: *How do HR practices contribute to intra-organisational knowledge sharing?* To answer this question, three objectives are formulated:

- 1) to identify types of knowledge that HRM deals with in terms of knowledge sharing;
- 2) to identify practices that HRM uses in intra-organisational knowledge sharing; and
- 3) to describe how identified practices contribute to intra-organisational knowledge sharing.

1.2. Outline

On the first stage of the study, the theoretical framework for the knowledge sharing process and HRM roles in it is produced. This framework is based on the literature review. The second stage includes carrying out the interviews with HRM specialists and line managers in order to collect data regarding the research question. The third phase of the research involves analysis of the collected data, a discussion about the contribution of HR practices to internal knowledge sharing based on the theoretical framework, and the suggestions for prospective studies in this area.

2. Knowledge, knowledge sharing and HR practices

2.1. Knowledge

A company is usually conceptualized as a network of units where knowledge is transferred from different positions but in a common social context provided by organisational embeddedness of units (Schlegelmilch & Chini, 2003). In order to be explored and exploited, knowledge should be shared across organizational entities (ibid.).

Knowledge can be understood as a set of “ways in which people categorize, code, process and impute meaning to their experiences” (Venzin et al., 2000: 35). Some researchers see knowledge as a commodity that can be made independent of time and place, whereas others emphasise its social character and dependency on the context (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Polanyi, 1967; Szulanski, 2003). The former case relates to explicit knowledge whilst the latter one describes the nature of tacit knowledge.

2.1.1. Explicit and tacit knowledge

Nonaka and Krogh (2009) state that knowledge is explicit and tacit along a continuum. This statement highlights the nature of knowledge: it ranges from tacit to explicit and vice versa that makes knowledge conversion possible (ibid.).

Explicit knowledge appears to be objective and tied to the formal organisation; it is accessible through consciousness. The universal character enables explicit knowledge to be utilised across contexts (Nonaka & Krogh, 2009). Due to its universality and independence on the context, explicit knowledge can be easily codified in words and products and transferred to others via formal procedures across organisational boundaries (Kogut & Zander, 1993). In the organisational context, explicit knowledge is often articulated and managed across organisational units through information technologies (IT) since they allow the low cost storage of codified knowledge that can be accessed when needed (Jonsson & Tell, 2013).

In contrast, tacit knowledge is based on procedures, actions, routines, emotions, and values. It is subjective and situational and is rooted in personal senses, intuition, and unarticulated mental models (Nonaka & Krogh, 2009; Polanyi, 1967). Tacit knowledge is about how to do something and is closely tied to someone’s experience as it is created within a particular context (Makela et al, 2007; Polanyi, 1967; Szulanski, 2003). Polanyi (1967) suggests that

tacit knowledge is impossible to communicate to others by articulation due to the lack of its formalization by the means of the language. However, Nonaka and Krogh (2009) argue that tacit knowledge can be converted into explicit knowledge since these two types are considered as being along a continuum of knowledge and not as separate entities. As tacit knowledge moves along the continuum, it loses some of its tacitness through the process of externalisation. As it becomes more explicit, the opportunity to share it emerges (ibid.). Therefore, in order to be transferred, tacit knowledge needs to be disembedded and articulated. This is for example possible in a dialogue between parties played the roles of knowledge senders and recipients (Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2009).

2.1.2. Knowledge as an object and as a process

In order to understand how knowledge can be categorized, developed, shared, and utilised, it is necessary to reveal its epistemological roots (Venzin et al., 2000). According to Venzin et al (2000), research in the area of knowledge transfer has been conducted from three main epistemological perspectives: cognitivistic, connectionistic, and autopoietic. All of them treat knowledge in different ways.

Cognitivists see knowledge as an asset that can be codified into units of information which can be easily moved. Knowledge is hence considered as an object, an event or a state which can be perceived in an objectivistic way. Specific knowledge characteristics are not seen as critical in terms of knowledge sharing because cognitivists view both the human brain and the organisation “as a “machine” of logic and deduction” (Venzin et al, 2000: 38). In contrast to the cognitivistic view, the autopoietic approach treats knowledge as non-shareable because knowledge is absolutely context-dependent and might be thus meaningless in a different situation. Finally, in the connectionistic approach, knowledge is created by people and their relationships and concerned with the behavioural aspects of organisational life (ibid.). This knowledge can be shared. The rules for processing are not universal, as they differ locally. Such factors as shared understanding, nature of connections, social ties and team relationships can influence knowledge sharing. Though knowledge processing can be tough due to the contextualized nature of knowledge, it still can be stored, retrieved and utilized in a certain way (Hamid & Salim, 2010).

So, cognitivistic epistemology refers to knowledge as to an object whereas connectionistic and autopoietic approaches consider knowledge as a social practice or process. Cook and

Brown (1999) use the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘knowing’ to identify approaches to understand knowledge. ‘Knowledge’ is about possession; it is abstract and static and can be used as a tool of further knowing. ‘Knowing’ is about relations; it focuses on people’s interactions with issues of the physical and social world. ‘Knowledge’ is an object and reflects epistemology of possession, while ‘knowing’ is a process and refers to epistemology of practice (ibid.). In Shultze and Stabell’s (2004) terminology, distinction between knowledge as an object and knowledge as a process are captured in the questions “*what* is knowledge?” and “*when* is knowledge?”. The first question considers knowledge as an object-like possession, whereas the second one refers knowledge to activities and structures. Considering differences between knowledge as an object and knowledge as a process, it is necessary to think in terms of “and/and” instead of “either/or” because ‘knowledge’ and ‘knowing’ are interrelated concepts: knowledge is a tool of knowing and also one of its outcomes (Cook and Brown, 1999).

Thus, the focus and character of knowledge management can be different depending on the nature of knowledge. Jonsson and Tell (2013) suggest that two conceptions of knowledge management – KM 1.0 and KM 2.0 – are used to handle knowledge in organisations. KM 1.0 reflects dealing with knowledge as an object that can be captured, stored and transferred to others mainly by using IT tools. KM 2.0 focuses on knowledge as a process embedded in social practices and available through communication and personal interactions.

KM 2.0 emerged later than the KM 1.0 as an answer to the criticism of the KM 1.0 for having static perspective of knowledge and ignoring the role of social issues of knowledge (Jonsson and Tell, 2013). So, the criticism caused a shift from capturing knowledge and one-way knowledge transfer to focus on knowledge sharing and motivating people to share knowledge with others (ibid.).

2.2. Knowledge sharing

Knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing are the key terms of knowledge management, aiming at spreading and making knowledge accessible throughout the organisation (Paulin & Suneson, 2012). While some authors use these terms synonymously, others argue that knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing are different processes (Jonsson, 2008; Paulin & Suneson, 2012) and terms should be used appropriately.

Paulin and Suneson (2012) suggest that knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing are not interchangeable. First, these terms are related to the different levels of analysis. Knowledge transfer is usually used for the description of knowledge processes at the level of groups, departments and organisations, whereas knowledge sharing focuses on the individual level. Second, in the literature regarding knowledge management, authors usually use the term of knowledge transfer while analysing knowledge as an object, while those who consider knowledge as a process more often use the term of knowledge sharing.

Therefore, knowledge transfer is more appropriate to use with KM 1.0 perspective and for analysis at the macro level, whereas knowledge sharing is suitable for analysis at the micro level and in terms of KM 2.0 perspective. Since this study focuses on the HR practices which mostly deal with individuals and their knowledge and, presumably, social aspects of knowledge, knowledge sharing seems to be the appropriate choice.

2.2.1. Cognitive, institutional and organisational factors of knowledge sharing

Based on the review of the literature related to knowledge sharing, Kalling (2007) identifies three groups of factors which are believed to influence knowledge sharing: cognitive, organisational, and institutional factors.

Cognitive factors include issues such as the nature of knowledge, recipient's absorptive capacity, and causal ambiguity (Kalling & Styhre, 2003). Knowledge can be 'sticky' (Szulansky, 2003) and thus difficult to imitate, costly to acquire and use in a new location (Kalling & Styhre, 2003). Absorptive capacity refers to the knowledge recipient and means the ability to evaluate, absorb and then apply knowledge received from the outside (Wijk et al., 2008). Casual ambiguity emerges from the knowledge tacitness, specificity and complexity and means an inability to predict effects of knowledge apart from its context and sources (Kalling & Styhre, 2003; Wijk et al., 2008).

The strategy of organisation as well as environment and the internal norms and values refer to the institutional factors which can influence the way how that knowledge is shared (Kalling, 2007). In terms of knowledge sharing, institutional factors have an impact on both organisational context and how knowledge is perceived. Organisations with no or little attention to developing new products, services and technologies and low status of innovation are characterised by a tendency to exploit knowledge rather than to explore. Under these circumstances, knowledge and experience do not flow between employees; it causes poor

knowledge sharing (ibid.). Kalling (2007) suggests that perception of knowledge and environment is closely tied to organisational norms and values that result in a strategy. If norms and values support the status quo and do not include risk-taking behaviour, the strategy does not consider knowledge sharing as an essential component of organisational processes.

Since an organisation can be seen as a knowledge system and understood as a social community primarily focused on the creation and transfer of knowledge (Kogut & Zander, 1996), organisational context includes the components which are fundamental for knowledge sharing: the degree of centralisation, mechanisms of control, attention to innovation, and communication channels in the vertical and horizontal dimensions (Kalling, 2007). Too high degrees of decentralisation, short-term oriented control, a lack of attention to innovation can be obstacles for knowledge sharing within the organisation (ibid.). As for communication and knowledge channels, they are embedded in social networks and determined by them (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

2.2.2. Social aspects of knowledge sharing

According to Nonaka and Krogh (2009), knowledge is created through the interactions between people with different experience. In this respect, knowledge and knowledge sharing are socially determined. While sharing knowledge, individuals become members of social practices constituted of complex networks of people, artefacts and activities (Nonaka & Krogh, 2009) that are composed of relationships and driven by communication (Venzin et al, 2000). These networks create a system that carries knowledge to those who need it at the time they need it (Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2006).

Social aspects of knowledge sharing are also discussed in the social capital theory. Here, social capital is defined as actual and potential resources which are embedded within, available through and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or a social unit (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). According to Inkpen and Tsang (2005), social ties between employees create the common ground that facilitates shared vision and collective goals and develops stable basis for knowledge processing. This increases employee interdependencies and helps to deliver knowledge to relevant people. It also provides a base for developing trust which is important for knowledge sharing, and creates a platform for transferring ideas and know-how across functional and hierarchical boundaries (Lengnick-

Hall & Lengenick-Hall, 2006). Social capital developed in one context can be transferred from one location to another that can create a new knowledge network and provide access knowledge (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Networks of individuals are characterised by three dimensions: structural, relational and cognitive (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). The structural dimension involves configuration of relationships between organisational units (Wijk et al., 2008). It is argued that a large number of relations facilitates access to relevant knowledge and increases knowledge sharing. Various ideas, interests, and experience enables participants to reflect on different insights and situations and acquire new understandings and knowledge or new ways for problem solving (Nonaka & Krogh, 2009; Wijk et al., 2008). Burt (2004) argues that networks do not act; they are a context for action. People with broader networks have an opportunity to see more broadly and act across groups.

The relational dimension is linked to the nature of relationships and strength of relations. Relationships have four key characteristics. First, they are based on a history of interaction since they develop over time. Second, they involve mutual influence. Third, relationships range from one-dimensional to multi-dimensional. Finally, relationships are embedded in a wider social network (Lengenick-Hall & Lengenick-Hall, 2006). One of the most discussed relational aspects is trust that appears to have a positive effect on knowledge sharing (Wijk et al, 2008). Trust is considered to be crucial in sharing tacit knowledge rather than explicit (Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2009) as it fosters collaborations and reduces uncertainty (Zanini & Musante, 2013). Trustful relationships provide a company with more equalitarian, interdependent and cooperative conditions that makes an access, storage and distribution of information more effective (ibid.).

Finally, the cognitive dimension includes attributes referred to the shared vision, values, and common understanding of collective goals (Wijk et al, 2008). Shared vision and values foster mutual understanding and provide mechanisms for integrating knowledge that helps in intra-organisational knowledge sharing (ibid.). Shared vision is an important condition for knowledge sharing as it facilitates cooperative relationships between employees (Li, 2005).

Noorderhaven and Harzing (2009) claim that knowledge flows are possible only if individuals or units are engaged in social interaction. Knowledge sharing is linked to a certain organisational context where learning opportunities are offered to employees and channels

for knowledge sharing are created. In order to facilitate knowledge sharing, a company should provide infrastructure and tools for supporting both formal and informal interactions between individuals (Hamid & Salim, 2010). Even if employees are highly-skilled and motivated, but a company is unsuccessful in building the infrastructure supporting learning environment, knowledge-related outcomes are difficult to reach. It is crucial to build communication bridges between people and to create opportunities for dialogue across functional boundaries to make capturing and sharing knowledge possible and effective (Minbaeva, 2005).

2.3. The role of HRM in knowledge sharing within organisation

The core assumption in the relationship between knowledge sharing and HRM is that the organisational capacity to create new knowledge and obtain a competitive advantage lies in the employees and their ability and motivation to learn and share their knowledge within a company (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013).

The HR function is responsible for staffing, evaluating employee performance, rewarding and retaining, training and development of employees according to the business strategy (Edvardsson, 2008). In terms of knowledge management, there are a few roles that HRM can play: relationship builder, developer of organisational processes, and knowledge facilitator that assist knowledge migration, knowledge appreciation, and knowledgeable action between employees and units (Chivu & Popescu, 2008). HRM should be more involved in design of knowledge management goals and other activities such as promotion of a knowledge-sharing friendly climate, stimulating proactive sharing behaviour, emphasising the innate knowledge-sharing nature of daily work (by including specific knowledge management duties in jobs), giving feedback and suggestions (Oltra, 2005). HR specialists should be information ‘gatherers’, which means gathering suggestions and feedback from line managers and core knowledge employees in order to share this knowledge with senior management. Such information could be important for further knowledge management strategy design and development (ibid.).

In a wider context, HRM can play the role of a knowledge mediator that manages flows of knowledge across group and functional boundaries (Burt, 2004; Shaxson & Gwynn, 2010). Holzmann (2013) identifies the main approaches to mediating knowledge. The first approach sees mediating as a way of managing and facilitating the creation, diffusion and use of

knowledge. The second one presents mediating as an activity aimed at bridging senders and receivers of knowledge to foster links between them. In the third approach, the main task of mediating is to provide training to users of knowledge in order to enhance their access to knowledge. Therefore, knowledge mediators can act as ‘knowledge managers’, ‘linkage agents’ and ‘capacity builders’ (ibid.). Mediators should possess the legitimacy to deal with people and their knowledge across organisational, hierarchical and professional boundaries. HR units are considered to have jurisdiction over this area as well as a range of practices to mediate knowledge within organisation.

2.4. HR practices in intra-organisational knowledge sharing

HR practices represent the policies, procedures, systems and activities (Minbaeva, 2005) used to shape and influence behaviour, capacities and attitudes of employees to achieve organisational goals (Chen & Huang, 2009).

Gupta and Singhal (1993) identify the following HR practices: (1) HR planning which includes recruiting people, creating teams and team assignments; (2) performance appraisal which includes generating new tasks, peer evaluating, encouraging risk taking and other procedures aimed at developing individual innovativeness and team performance; (3) reward systems which include pay raises, career tracks, promoting and other methods of employee motivating; (4) career management which includes development of employees’ career goals through continuing learning and training. Based on this typology, Minbaeva (2005) identifies staffing, appraisal, compensation, promotion, and training as practices affecting knowledge receivers’ absorptive capacity and motivation to share knowledge. Corporate socialisation mechanisms and working practices - such as flexitime, job sharing and part-time work – Minbaeva (2005) also considers as HR practices which are used for supporting learning environment where knowledge is determined, then shared, interpreted, and used collectively. Both types of practices were expected to influence “the degree of knowledge transfer”. However, the empirical examination indicated that only the effect of practices from the second group was insignificant (ibid.).

Further literature review revealed that researchers consider both employees’ ability to share knowledge and knowledge-friendly environment as crucial for effective knowledge sharing within organisation (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Edvardsson, 2008; Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-

Valle, 2013; Scarbrough, 2003; Simonin & Ozsomer, 2009). Therefore, the purpose of HR practices is to develop employees' ability and motivation and to encourage learning culture.

Cabrera and Cabrera (2005) use the term 'people management practices' to cover all the practices that a company can consider as appropriate to support and facilitate knowledge sharing. Among those practices are work design, staffing, training and development, performance appraisal and compensation, developing appropriate organisational culture which means creation of the knowledge-sharing norms and facilitating trustful, cooperative and fair relationships, and using technology to enhance existing social networks. Jimenez-Jimenez and Sanz-Valle (2013) pay attention to job design, staffing, career development, training, performance appraisal, compensation, and teamwork. Scarbrough (2003) discussed three HR practices which are related to knowledge management: selection methods, compensation strategies, and career systems. Like others, Edvardsson (2008) considers recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, and reward and recognition as the most influential HR practices in regards to knowledge sharing. Simonin and Ozsomer (2009) also identify practices that can be positively related to the learning orientation and thus to knowledge sharing in a company. They focus on critical thinking encouragement, supervisory encouragement, learning incentives, expatriation, training, and internal mechanisms and processes which include information processing and logistic, organisational, financial and communication capabilities.

The common ground for the studies above is that the authors consider HR practices as having a simultaneous effect on both employees' knowledge sharing ability and motivation and development of appropriate organisational culture. In other words, specific human resource practices can form a knowledge-oriented HR system (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013) that contributes to intra-organisational knowledge sharing at personal and organisational levels.

Based on the studies above and literature related to HRM and intra-organisational knowledge management, it is possible to identify the following HR practices which are expected to be the most contributive in terms of knowledge sharing: staffing, performance appraisal, rewards and compensation, training, and career development. In order to understand how these practices are involved in knowledge sharing process, further explanation of them is required.

2.4.1. Staffing

Scarborough (2003) stresses that in order to make a company able to integrate knowledge from diverse resources, the selection of prospective employees with appropriate skills and attitudes should be identified as a crucial activity. Staffing enhances knowledge sharing in a number of ways, though researchers argue which hiring practices – internal recruitment or external – facilitate it the most (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013). On the one hand, external recruitment provides organisation with new knowledge possessed by new employees (Lepak & Snell, 1999). On the other hand, internal recruitment encourages employees to learn in order to be promoted (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013) and therefore supports the development of knowledge-oriented culture.

Regarding selection, researchers have an almost unanimous agreement that it should be based on fit between individuals and organisational culture since in this case employees will share similar values and beliefs, for instance, the importance of leaning and developing knowledge (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). Specific skills and knowledge beyond employees' functional expertise are also suggested as a criterion of selection because employees with a broader perspective are able to actively participate in knowledge sharing throughout the organisation (Currie & Kerrin, 2003).

2.4.2. Performance appraisal

Performance appraisal, compensation and rewards are interrelated and complementary practices designed to encourage employees' performance and desired behaviour (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Hung et al., 2011). However, researchers divide those practices in terms of knowledge transfer and sharing (Edvardsson, 2008; Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013; Minbaeva, 2005).

Performance appraisal can be used by a company to shape employee behaviour to meet organisational goals (Chen & Huang, 2009). Jimenez-Jimenez and Sanz-Valle (2013) state that in order to be a knowledge-driven practice, performance appraisal should be systematic, long-term, and group-performance oriented. It should be aimed at providing relevant feedback and designed to enhance the participation of employees in the process (ibid.). A feedback, included in evaluation process, can become a good motivator for employees to share their knowledge (Foss et al., 2009). Recognising knowledge-sharing behaviour is also seen as an important part of performance appraisal (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). It can help to

reduce the perceived cost of knowledge-sharing behaviour which is usually considered as time-consuming activity.

Employees are unlikely to demonstrate knowledge sharing behaviour if their performance agreement does not include it. Accordingly, knowledge sharing behaviour can be linked to employee performance and assessed in accordance with unified appraisal criteria (Chen & Huang, 2009).

2.4.3. Rewards and compensation

Rewarding particular behaviour provides employees with understanding of what is valuable for the organisation. Thus, to motivate employees to share knowledge, organisations should recognise knowledge-sharing behaviour through direct evaluation and reward since in this case employees are more likely to see knowledge sharing as an integral part of their job responsibilities (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005).

Since organisational reward systems and compensation strategies influence both employee satisfaction and effectiveness, they should be designed carefully in order to not be perceived as controlling or leading to competition between employees (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). If the reward system is inappropriate, rewards for some employees may cause dissatisfaction for others. This can lead to focusing on the rewarded behaviour rather than on performance and effectiveness (Scarborough, 2003).

A reward system should provide employees with appropriate incentives (Chen & Huang, 2009) which are expected to reward employees' commitment to knowledge transfer, encourage experimentation and learning, promote teamwork, and recognise individual and group performance (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013). Hung et al. (2011) identify four key motivators which have an impact on knowledge-sharing behaviour: one intrinsic (altruism) and three extrinsic (economic reward, reputation feedback, and reciprocity). They revealed that economic incentives, altruism and reciprocity do not influence knowledge sharing whereas reputation feedback increases it significantly.

Offering rewards based on group performance enhances cooperation and leads to increased trust that is crucial for the development of knowledge sharing friendly environment (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). Finally, to be successful in promotion knowledge sharing within organisation, a reward system should be oriented on long-term results and aimed at

maximising both current and future development (Currie & Kerrin, 2003, Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013).

2.4.4. Training

Training as an HR practice is an effective way of distribution and utilization of knowledge throughout the organisation since it provides employees with an opportunity to acquire and contextualise new knowledge (Zhao et al., 2014). It positively correlates with knowledge transfer effectiveness and organisational performance (Minbaeva et al., 2003) and enhances development of learning-oriented organisational culture and human capital through maintaining and developing individual learning capabilities (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013). Furthermore, any training, which is aimed at building relationships and encouraging cooperation, contributes to the development of knowledge-sharing behaviour (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2005).

Training tasks include strengthening employees' knowledge and skills in order to improve their daily work (Zhao et al., 2014) and develop their adaptation and anticipation capacity (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013). These purposes can be achieved through the following approaches. First, training helps to create, transfer and share explicit knowledge among employees and build learning-friendly environment in a company. Second, an effective training system promotes knowledge creating, sharing and transformation. Third, training facilitates the transformation from employees' tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Finally, training provides a company with an opportunity to build a learning organisation and create a platform for the development of organisational knowledge capital (Zhao et al., 2014).

During the training, knowledge is transferred from a trainer to trainees through instructions and diffused among participants through communication and personal interactions (Zhao et al., 2014). In this way, knowledge transfer can be seen as a spiral process that started from personal tacit knowledge, which is gradually transferred into personal explicit knowledge, then into collective explicit knowledge, and finally into new collective and new personal tacit knowledge (ibid.). Thus, the new knowledge can be integrated into the recipients' context and then used appropriately (Schlegelmilch & Chini, 2003).

2.4.5. Career development

Scarborough (2003) emphasises that organisational career systems can determine the character of knowledge sharing and acquisition. On the one hand, organisational career systems may promote individual acquisition of knowledge by only key employees ('stars'). On the other hand, they can be designed to support knowledge transfer among wider network. The former strategy refers to knowledge acquisition only while the latter strategy supports knowledge sharing throughout the organisation. Thus, knowledge sharing can be enhanced by appropriate career system.

It has been proposed that if internal career opportunities are available for employees, it increases their knowledge sharing attitudes since they have motivation to learn in order to develop and apply their skills (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013). To be effective in terms of knowledge management, promotions should be based on criteria of creativity, openness to innovations and knowledge-oriented behaviour (ibid.).

Internal promotion also encourages mobility of employees. Currie and Kerrin (2003) claim that mobility allows employees to extend their networks and gain new contacts required for effective knowledge sharing. Based upon relationships, employees have an opportunity not only to obtain knowledge but also contextualise it with the help of their peers.

A job rotation – movement between functions – supports sharing of knowledge as well. When enter other function, employees bring their knowledge and ideas with them, use different functional perspectives and transfer them to their colleagues (Currie and Kerrin, 2003).

It is apparent that HR practices can affect knowledge sharing within organisation. However, the assumptions above were drawn from either theoretical discussions or quantitative studies hold on a macro-level. The purpose of the current study is to find out which HR practices *actually* contribute to knowledge sharing, on what level and in what way. The theoretical framework for the study is formed by connectionistic epistemology and social capital theory discussed earlier in the theory part.

3. Methodology

Individuals are considered as primary actors in knowledge related processes. In order to provide a deeper understanding of organisational-level phenomenon like knowledge sharing, exploration should start at the individual level (Minbaeva, 2013). The mechanisms underlying HRM contribution to knowledge processes are still partly understood because a majority of previous research regarding links between HRM and organisational knowledge processes has been conducted at the macro-level and based on a quantitative approach (ibid.). Therefore, in order to answer the research question, the qualitative research design was used.

3.1. Qualitative approach

Qualitative research aims at understanding phenomena in context-specific settings (Golafshani, 2003). It is designed to grasp an understanding of individuals' behaviour, perception, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings, the meanings and interpretations given to events and things (Hakim, 2000). People's own definition of the situation is an important element of the qualitative approach which is generally been recognised by social science and business studies theories (ibid.). Thus, a qualitative study enables exploration of the processes which people involved in, and to generate data that can be used to gain in-depth knowledge of how HR practices contribute to internal knowledge sharing.

The research is built in a way that, on the one hand, considers the predetermined theories and concepts in terms of knowledge transfer and on the other hand allows exploration of the categories emerged during the process of data analysis. This approach combines both deductive and inductive approaches and is defined as abductive one, which has both logical and innovative features and is used to gain new and valid knowledge (Reichertz, 2010). Therefore, the abductive approach is most suitable for this study since it gives an opportunity for logical inference that means identifying and developing new themes and categories while being based on the specific theoretical framework. In connection to the chosen approach, the overall research process is identified as iterative, "going back and forth between theory and empirical data" (Bergenholtz, 2011: 80). Collected data have been coded and categorized into different themes emerged along the coding process, although the findings are discussed in terms of established theoretical frameworks.

To explore the complex phenomena of knowledge sharing and the role of HR practices in it, the case study design was used. Case study is one of the most flexible research designs. It takes as a subject one or more selected examples of a social entity (Hamid, 2000). Case study is a useful design for research on organisations because it provides a richly detailed picture of a particular social phenomenon, especially if there is relatively little previous research in the existing literature on the topic (ibid.).

The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. Such type of interview enables guiding the interview process, and at the same time provides an opportunity to build a follow up discussion to gain deeper understanding of the situations and processes. It also provides respondents with an opportunity to control the conversation that creates a feeling of security which helps to establish trustful relationships between a researcher and participants (Hamid, 2000).

3.2. The case

In order to answer the research question, a case study has been carried out. The case company is a Russian manufacturer of personal care products. Though the company operates locally, it seems to be an appropriate example of the organisation that faces challenges of a permanent development of knowledge in order to survive and gain competitive advantage since there are a range of companies producing personal care products in Russian market. Highly competitive market forces the company to pay particular attention to knowledge sharing far beyond the boundaries of R&D department. Therefore, it could be suggested that HRM with its focus on people and their knowledge may play an important role in facilitating knowledge sharing within the company.

3.3. Collecting data

In this study, 12 interviews were conducted. The respondents are employed in the case company on a permanent basis; 5 of them are HR specialists, 7 of them are the line managers. HR specialists are represented by HR Director, 2 HR Business Partners, and 2 HR managers with focus on recruitment and organisational learning respectively. The line managers work in the following departments: research and development (2 managers), production (2 managers), sales (2 managers), and organisational development (1 manager).

For the interviews with line managers, the participants were chosen with assistance of the HR department. They proposed what units are considered as crucial in terms of knowledge sharing. Therefore, the line managers from R&D, production, sales, and organisational development were invited to take part in the study.

Since Russian was the native language for all the interviewees, the interview questions were initially formulated in Russian and then tested in pilot interviews with an HR manager and non-HR line manager to ensure that all the relevant aspects of the study are covered. After that, some questions in interview guides were modified and adjusted in order to be less directive and more relevant. The interviews lasted from 50 minutes to 65 minutes. During interviews, questions from interview guides were followed-up by additional questions when required. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Transcribed interviews then were e-mailed to the respondents for verification.

Nine interviews out of twelve were face-to-face interviews and were held during the trip to Russia, whereas three interviews were conducted via Skype after coming back to Sweden. A Skype interview is considered as an appropriate alternative for face-to-face interview because Skype interview allows overcoming issues around access and distance; it is believed to come the closest to the advantages that face-to-face interview has, namely the synchronous nature of real-time interaction (Hanna, 2012). Compared to a telephone interview, an interview via Skype provides visual and interpersonal issues of the interaction (Evans et al., 2008). Moreover, Skype enables a researcher to record an interview that makes Skype a relevant choice in cases where face-to-face interview is problematically held (Hanna, 2012).

Before each interview, respondents were briefly informed about the topic of study and its purposes. The questions were not given to the respondents until the interview. It was done in order to avoid prepared answers and thus reduce the risk of biased results.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Interviews were conducted after prior appointment and approval from the participants. Participants' permission was taken before interviews, and the aims of research were explained. Since the case company claimed that the topic of the research is closely linked to the competition-sensitive information, confidentiality was maintained. It was declared that the research would not cause any psychological stress or discomfort to participants and would

affect neither company nor participants in any other negative way. Audio recording was used after gaining the participants' permission. The results of the research are used in accordance with the aims of research only.

3.5. Data analysis

The empirical data were analysed by the procedures of the thematic analysis as it is a flexible research tool that provides a rich and detailed, yet complex analysis of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The techniques of the thematic analysis are similar to the procedures of the grounded theory but unlike latter thematic analysis does not require creating plausible and grounded in the data theory (ibid.).

The main purpose of the thematic analysis is identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data. As the research is based on the abductive approach and linked to the existing theories regarding knowledge sharing and HR practices, thematic analysis is an appropriate method as it considers an active role that the researcher plays in identifying themes, comparing them with existing concepts and revealing new trends (Joffe, 2011).

An analysis involved the constant moving back and forward between the data and categories, described in the literature, and includes such steps as transcribing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, describing themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

During analysis, the interview notes were transcribed and then coded. The coding was based on a semantic approach rather than interpretative approach that means that there was no intention to find anything beyond what participants were talking about. On the first stages - the stage of generating initial codes, searching for themes, and reviewing themes - the data were coded without trying to fit emerging themes to the existing theoretical concepts because the main purpose was to identify those HR practices that *participants*, not researchers, considered as contributing to knowledge sharing. In other words, the coding was data-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Later, on the stage of defining and naming themes, the existing concepts were considered in order to make themes aligned with the commonly accepted business terminology and research questions. Finally, worked-out themes were discussed in terms of theoretical framework.

3.6. Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are considered to be crucial concepts for evaluating the quality of both the process and the product of research (Golafshani, 2003). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there is no validity without reliability, and reliability is a consequence of validity.

Validity is the extent to which the research gives a correct answer (Kirk & Miller, 1986). In other words, valid research measures what a researcher intends to measure and is thus characterised by trustworthiness and confidence in the findings (Golafshani, 2003). There are some procedures that aim at increasing validity in the research: triangulation, disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, member checking, prolonged engagement in the field, collaboration, the audit trail, thick and rich description, and peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In accordance with the purposes of the study and availability of resources for using certain techniques, the following procedures were used to strengthen validity: member checking, and thick and rich description.

Member checking is considered as one of the crucial procedure for increasing validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking means taking data back to the participants in the study for verification and confirming the credibility of information (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In the current study, the transcribed interviews were emailed to respondents to view them and comment on accuracy where relevant. Only minor comments were received that can be seen as an indicator of a good level of accuracy.

The second technique – thick, rich description – means describing of a phenomenon in details (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It gives a researcher an opportunity to see the participants and concepts studied in the particular context which enables a researcher to avoid biased outcomes. In order to get thick and rich descriptions, the respondents were asked to provide details and examples where it was relevant since the semi-structured interview offers such an opportunity. All the examples and details were taken into account while analysing data.

Reliability means the extent to which a study gives the same answer however and whenever it is conducted again (Kirk & Miller, 1986). In order to make the research reliable, some rules were followed. First, the same set of interview questions were used for both HR managers and line managers in order to gain consistent results related to the knowledge sharing. Second, the main steps of the collecting data were thoroughly described in order to make the

process of study transparent. Finally, since the reliability is considered meaningful by reference to some theory only (Kirk & Miller, 1986), the results were discussed in terms of the particular theoretical framework which was based on the literature review and established before collecting data.

3.7. Limitations

The current research has a few limitations. First, the qualitative approach used for the research makes the results difficult to be generalized to other organisations. However, partial generalization is still possible to similar populations (Myers, 2000). Second, there was no much time for conducting interviews with a larger number of respondents. This fact limited an opportunity to reveal other possible trends related to intra-organisational knowledge sharing that potentially exist. Finally, the line managers represented four departments only. It also limited the study in providing alternative opinions towards contribution of HR practices to knowledge sharing that managers of other departments may have.

4. Results

There are 4 major themes to be discussed in relation to the role of HRM in intra-organisational knowledge sharing: knowledge as possession and knowledge as a practice, sources of employee knowledge, intra-organisational knowledge sharing, and HR practices involved in intra-organisational knowledge sharing. These themes emerged as a result of the thematic analysis of the empirical data and were labelled in accordance with the theoretical framework and research questions.

4.1. Employee knowledge as possession and as a practice

Analysis of the interviewees' answers has revealed that both HR specialists and managers distinguish two types of knowledge. First, knowledge is seen as an asset and relates to the formal organisation. Here, knowledge can be easily received, remembered, and articulated. In this respect, knowledge is considered as someone's possession. Information about organisational vision and mission, rules, norms, policies, and instructions refer to this type of knowledge which is stored in documents and shared among employees with the help of the company's information technologies.

The second type represents knowledge that can be acquired through practice and experience. Interviewees emphasise the active and conscious role of participants in gaining such type of knowledge. Here, a recipient of knowledge is expected to "*listen and watch, and analyse what [has been] received, and then put it in a practice*" (HR Business Partner 1) in order to absorb and internalise knowledge. Hence, compared to the first type of knowledge, the second type - knowledge as a practice - requires a joint practice for senders and recipients of knowledge, and particular efforts made by them towards knowledge transfer and acquisition. A sender of knowledge should possess both relevant experience and ability to express the knowledge in a proper and understandable way whilst a recipient should possess an intention and an ability to acquire knowledge. The quotation above also shows that knowledge as a practice can be shared successfully if a recipient is able to make analysis of knowledge and a judgement about its appropriateness in terms of practical application.

Both types of knowledge are important for employees to perform. However, the second type is crucial as it is considered a fundament for work. In order to be valuable and useful, knowledge should be linked to practical experience:

“If you just read or watch something about making anything, you may think that you know how to perform it. But you don’t until you try it. For example, you cannot be a good operator if you have never tried before to put this internal screw on that pin.” (Line manager 2, Production)

As it is seen from the quote above, how-to-do knowledge is a prerequisite for the development and improvement of employees’ skills and competencies. In this connection, knowledge as a practice is considered as a necessary condition for the professional growth of employees. Since this type of knowledge is underlying job performance, knowledge as a practice is organisationally recognised and thus considered worthy to be shared within the company.

Knowledge as a practice is also seen as a context-dependent issue. *“If your knowledge is appropriate here, it does not mean that it would be appropriate there, under the different circumstances. For example, you know that these techniques are good for making presentation for 10 people. But when you try to use the same methods for the presentation for 100 people, they may be useless. So, your knowledge should be updated.”* (HR manager 2)

It means that particular knowledge can be used in particular situation. However, the quote also points out that knowledge can be modified and developed. Here, context is closely linked to the experience that allows people to see the gap between the level of their current knowledge and its desirable level. In order to be ‘updated’, current knowledge should be reflected and evaluated. Such ‘inner work’ gives employees an opportunity to modify their knowledge to make it appropriate to the new context. Experience followed by reflection can also help to externalise knowledge that makes it more autonomous and independent and, as a result, more shareable.

“People develop their knowledge all the time. If you do not know how to do something, the best way is to ask someone who knows. They will teach you how to do it. I always say people working in my department “If you know something that can help us to perform better, please don’t forget to share your knowledge.” (Line manager 1, Sales)

This example shows that knowledge is developed constantly and often through communication and interactions with others, especially in terms of knowledge as a practice. It is stressed out that one of the ways of acquiring new knowledge is learning from other people

who have appropriate experience. It is apparent from the quote above that in order to gain or share knowledge employees are expected to be pro-active and demonstrate clearly their intention to learn or teach.

Thus, knowledge, even if it is embedded in a practice, can be shared. However, some particular conditions should be met. Among those conditions are joint practices for senders and recipients of knowledge, the relevant experience that can be reflected and evaluated in order to be then externalised, ability of recipient to comprehend knowledge in terms of practical application, active and conscious role of participants in knowledge sharing process.

4.2. Sources of employee knowledge

HR specialists claim that employees need to possess a minimum set of specific ‘hard skills’ to get a job since the company has a “grow within” philosophy which means that company aims at promoting employees within the company and provides employees with opportunities of training and development. However, since all the jobs require some skills, formal education is seen as the first source of knowledge. As one of the HR managers explains:

“We are ready to accept employees with basic knowledge that they received at schools and universities. It is enough for initial job placements. Their knowledge may be latent and practical skills may be under-developed, but they just should be” (HR Business Partner 1)

This quote indicates that employees are expected to have both knowledge gained from school and ability to adjust it to particular work. Prospective employees do not need to have as deep knowledge as current employees do; though they should have knowledge about core business processes and relevant technologies to be able to deal with them in a proper way. What is more important, they should demonstrate potential to gain new knowledge and apply it to work. Here, the role of intra-organisational learning in making knowledge suitable for the work is emphasised. Knowledge is valuable when it matches job tasks and responsibilities. Hence, it can be gained at the company through practice and work experience. Therefore, organisational learning is an important source of knowledge.

Organisational learning system is specially designed for making employees’ knowledge tailored in order to fit company’s specific needs and requirements. It includes training and development programmes that are considered as an important tool for developing and ‘polishing’ employees’ knowledge. Knowledge, adjusted to company’s needs, is believed to

be essential in reaching organisational goals. However, knowledge cannot be developed further if there is a lack of employee motivation in terms of learning. It is important that *“employees also should have intention to develop their knowledge. Otherwise, all the efforts and initiatives will be in vain.”* (HR Director)

Interviewees emphasise that people are considered to be the most important asset in the company. Following the strategy “grow within”, organisation focuses on intra-organisational learning. However, participants state that self-education also plays a significant role in the employees’ development. In the company, self-education means employees’ self-initiative in gaining new knowledge from various sources such as voluntary trainings and workshops, external programmes and courses, distant learning and other forms of voluntary learning. Some of the HR and line managers stressed that positive attitude towards learning and proactive behaviour in terms of gaining knowledge is as much important as knowledge itself.

“If employees try to learn something new, they find opportunities and involve other people into learning process. They thus create knowledge environment.”(Line manager 1, R&D)

This quote shows that intention to gain new knowledge motivate employees to search for learning opportunities and, as a result, to look for those people who are able to share required knowledge. By involving other people in this process, employees build knowledge networks and facilitate the development of knowledge-friendly environment that is considered to be essential for intra-organisational knowledge sharing. In this context, organisational learning and employee self-education are tied closely and interrelated.

4.3. Knowledge sharing within the organisation

The theme of intra-organisational knowledge sharing is one of the core categories in terms of this study. The analysis of the data reveals that knowledge sharing within the company is considered as an important issue related to the knowledge retention and competitiveness of the company. Employees are seen as the main participants in intra-organisational knowledge sharing while line managers and HR professionals mostly play the role of mediators in knowledge related processes. Interviewees also mention some factors that can affect intra-organisational knowledge sharing.

4.3.1. Significance of knowledge sharing

Both HR specialists and line managers see knowledge sharing as a process of knowledge distribution among organisational members. Exchange of experience is seen as a part of knowledge sharing that occurs among individuals, principally in a joint practice:

“Knowledge sharing is an exchange of experiences. It is a process of mutual teaching and learning that is possible due to the interactions between people.” (Line manager 2, R&D)

This quote highlights the importance of mutuality in knowledge sharing. In this respect, providing and gaining knowledge occurs simultaneously. The quote also gives an understanding of knowledge sharing as a multidimensional process rather than one-way knowledge transfer.

Knowledge sharing is possible because it is important for people to consider their knowledge valuable and worthy to share. Respondents believe that people usually seek for the opportunities to share their knowledge because it increases their feelings of self-worth and involvement in a community.

According to the interviewees, employee knowledge is organisationally recognised since *“companies themselves do not have knowledge. People have knowledge and apply it according to their job responsibilities and the company’s goals”* (HR manager 1). Hence, knowledge sharing is essential for organisation because it enables knowledge flows and knowledge retention within the company. Unshared knowledge belongs to the particular person and can be lost if the employee leaves the company. Shared knowledge becomes autonomous to a certain degree and can be employed by different employees. It provides the company with an opportunity to retain valuable knowledge.

Knowledge sharing is also considered as essential for creating new products and technologies because this process includes consideration of various ideas and concepts that can be examined from different angles, modified, and then developed into a new concept. The diversity of ideas, skills and experiences allows emerging innovations during knowledge sharing process that provides the company with an opportunity to increase its competitiveness.

4.3.2. Participants in intra-organisational knowledge sharing

Employees are considered to be the key participants in intra-organisational knowledge sharing since they act as both knowledge senders and knowledge recipients. Employees possess different pieces of knowledge related to their work. Together they are able to create a massive knowledge system that can be used for solving tasks which require complex solutions. Both HR managers and line managers declare that employees should share their knowledge to reach the following purposes: to create opportunities for other employees to gain new knowledge, to improve their own job performance by gaining access to others' knowledge, and to reflect and analyse knowledge they already possess. As one manager says:

“When we share knowledge, we start to understand it even better than before because when you explain something to others you try to find the most suitable words to describe it in the most appropriate and simple way.” (Line manager 2, R&D)

This quote points that knowledge sharing benefits both knowledge senders and recipients. Recipients gain new knowledge that can be used for the development of their competencies and professional growth while senders get an opportunity to evaluate their own experience and grasp a better understanding of what they already know.

Some HR managers see employees as those who generate and share not only knowledge, but also attitudes towards organisation. Therefore, senders of knowledge can also influence other employees' engagement and loyalty that makes knowledge socially significant. Respondents claim that knowledge of new employees is developed through interactions with senior and experienced employees. In this respect, an appropriate mentor can do more than just share knowledge and experience. They can transfer norms and values of the company since newcomers consider senior employees as credible and trust them.

Interviewees' answers show that employees are seen as *participants* of knowledge sharing, rather than mediators. However, one line manager suggests that some employees who have been working in a company for a long time and are aware of who possesses what knowledge can help in bridging people in terms of knowledge sharing:

“She always knows who can help you with any question. She has been working here for more than a quarter of a century and learnt a lot about people working here.” (Line manager 1, Production)

4.3.3. Mediators in intra-organisational knowledge sharing

Compared to employees, both line managers and HR specialists are considered by interviewees as knowledge mediators, rather than participants. In accordance with this approach, the main role of line managers in knowledge sharing is to identify people who need particular knowledge and those who can help them in obtaining required knowledge.

“Managers usually see who can share knowledge. Often, it is those who have been trained recently. In this case, a manager usually asks them to make a presentation or hold a workshop for other employees. Thus, instead of one we have several people with updated knowledge.” (HR Business Partner 2)

The quote expresses the general opinion that managers should be able to organise knowledge sharing process by bridging senders and recipients of knowledge. It also indicates that one person can share knowledge with a group of employees. For this, special events such as presentation or training are required. A line manager is considered to be responsible for both creating opportunities for sharing knowledge at the level of unit and encouraging employees to take part in the process. Respondents believe that knowledge sharing can hardly be successful without line managers because *“people sometimes do not realise that they have valuable knowledge until someone tells them”* (Line manager 2, Production). Therefore, one of the tasks of line managers is to help employees to realise that they possess estimable knowledge and convince people to share it with others.

HR managers see themselves as playing an important role in intra-organisational knowledge sharing by influencing knowledge sharing processes both directly and indirectly. They state that HR function has the legitimacy and the required tools to deal with people and their knowledge:

“We focus on employees all the time; on their roles, needs, performance, everything. We know how to recruit people, motivate them, teach and develop. We have various tasks and responsibilities, all of them are related to employees and their knowledge.” (HR Director)

This quote shows that employees and their knowledge are considered by HR managers as their target issue. Respondents claim that work with employees' knowledge is one of the HR tasks and responsibilities. The HR Business Partner also states that HR aims at managing employees' knowledge at different stages:

“When we hire people, we evaluate their knowledge and experience; when we hold trainings, we develop people’s skills; when we choose someone to be a mentor, we encourage them to share their knowledge with mentees” (HR Business Partner 1)

This demonstrates that HR practices are considered to be the main tool for dealing with employee knowledge. Like other managers, HR professionals are seen as those who mediate in knowledge sharing by providing employees with required information, sources of knowledge, conditions, and support. The main difference is that line managers are responsible for knowledge sharing at the individual and department levels, whereas HR managers can act at different levels – from individual to organisational. HRM is described as valuable actor in inter-departmental knowledge sharing:

“Sometimes employees need knowledge about different processes including those which are not closely related to their core activities. For example, people in sales need deeper knowledge about specific characteristics of a particular product. [...] the best way is to contact people from production unit. In this case, HR department can definitely help.” (Line manager 2, Sales)

It is apparent from the quote above that access to the departments and units across the company gives HR managers an opportunity to bridge recipients of knowledge with knowledge sources across functional borders. In terms of knowledge sharing, HRM activities are characterised by a wide coverage of employees. Being aware of employees’ competencies, capabilities, expertise, as well as knowledge needs, HRM is able to channel knowledge in the appropriate directions.

However, line managers express the opinion that HRM should be more involved in knowledge sharing. They emphasise that HRM has a potential to be more initiative in identifying learning needs and knowledge gaps and proactive in filling them by developing collaborations with managers and employees. HR professionals are perceived to have resources and tools to drive and support knowledge sharing. They are expected to affect knowledge sharing more directly and purposefully through systematic work and in cooperation with other professionals throughout the organisation.

Few respondents also mention top managers in connection to the organisational strategy which determines knowledge sharing processes. They argue that since employees follow organisational rules and policies established at the top level, knowledge sharing depends on

top-down decisions. Top management thus sets the framework for intra-organisational knowledge sharing. So, both line managers and HR managers deal with employee knowledge within established framework.

4.3.4. Factors affecting intra-organisational knowledge sharing

The analysis of the data revealed two main groups of factors affecting knowledge sharing within the company. Respondents claim that some of those factors can be developed and modified through the organisational procedures while others are “embedded” in people and hard to work with. The former factors include organisational culture whereas the latter refer to the individual characteristics of employees.

Individual issues can influence knowledge sharing both positively and negatively. Respondents express the opinion that for effective knowledge sharing the personal readiness and willingness to do so are important. Employees usually share knowledge because they realise that it contributes to team work and overall performance. However, some employees keep their knowledge and avoid knowledge sharing. Respondents point out a few reasons for such behaviour. First, people do not realise the importance of knowledge sharing. Second, they have poor developed communication skills. Third, employees are not sure that their knowledge is valuable or relevant in a particular context. Forth, they do not intend to share knowledge since others are perceived as potential competitors. Thus, employees use their knowledge solely as a personal competitive advantage.

“The main reason why people do not want to share knowledge is that they are afraid of competitors. The logic is simple. If you have something that other people don’t, you are valuable and thus safe and secure. It is especially relevant if a company faces an organisational transformation.” (Line manager, Organisational development)

This quote reflects the value of knowledge for employees. In order to remain competitive, employees do not share their knowledge. At the same time, they can keep participating in knowledge sharing process as recipients of knowledge. In this respect, knowledge sharing loses its mutual character and multidimensional approach. This can lead to dissatisfaction of employees, disruption of trustful relations and, as a result, unsuccessful knowledge sharing. In order to avoid such negative effects, HRM is expected to pay particular attention to individual characteristics of employees. Along with this, organisational culture should be developed in a way that encourages employees to share knowledge.

Interviewees, whether line managers or HR specialists, state that organisational culture is essential for knowledge sharing. The company can facilitate knowledge flows by creating knowledge-sharing friendly environment which is characterised by learning-supportive climate, positive attitudes to diverse opinions and views, and mutual respect and trust.

“Organisational culture is about shared norms and values. It is also about relationships and feelings. It should be felt by employees and managers that the company appreciate them, their knowledge and contributions. If people trust the company, they will share their knowledge.” (Line manager 1, R&D)

This quote shows that organisational culture is determined by shared vision and organisational norms. The company’s philosophy and values underlie all the organisational processes including knowledge sharing. It also influences relationships between members of organisation. If employees feel secure, they create trustful relationships that are crucial for knowledge sharing. The openness of the top management and its transparency in decision making enhances employee loyalty which stimulates knowledge-sharing behaviour. Organisation’s positive attitude towards creativity and innovative ideas also engages personnel into knowledge sharing.

To be facilitative in terms of knowledge sharing, organisational culture should provide members with opportunities to communicate and interact across group and hierarchical borders. HR function is perceived as being able to support knowledge-sharing friendly environment by selecting ‘right’ people, providing employees with learning opportunities, introductory sessions, employee conferences, team-building, training, and corporate events. However, some respondents stressed that it is hardly possible to have an absolute control over knowledge sharing in the company. Though, it is possible to support *“alive and constantly evolving culture that stimulates people to collaborate, produce new ideas, and take up the challenges.”* (HR Business Partner 1) Thus, in addition to applying particular HR practices, HRM is expected to contribute to the development of organisational culture by creating in the company appropriate conditions aimed at supporting trustful relationships, facilitating employee collaborations, and stimulating creativity.

4.4. HR Practices involved in intra-organisational knowledge sharing

There is a range of HR practices used for facilitating and supporting knowledge sharing within the company. Some practices such as training and mentoring were described by all the respondents as they are obviously related to knowledge sharing. Other practices are linked to knowledge management indirectly and were thus mentioned mostly by HR managers.

4.4.1. Training

Training is described as a practice aimed at gaining new knowledge by training participants and developing their skills. Training is held in a particular place at the particular time that helps participants to focus on learning. Practice-oriented training is perceived as a valuable source of knowledge. Training has little effect if it does not include practical exercises. Knowledge should be understandable and applicable to the employees' experience in order to be then interiorised and shared with others when it is necessary. Some interviewees also claim that training should include updated theoretical information that is related to trained skills to make them more meaningful and comprehensible.

Problem-solving-focused training is preferred since it encourages participants to appeal to their knowledge and experience and share it with others in order to find an appropriate solution. Knowledge, acquired during problem-solving focused training, enables employees to perform work tasks in an innovative way.

“Training gives an opportunity to face challenges in a safe environment. Nevertheless, knowledge and experience gained in the training are real, and being tested in training, they can be successfully applied in the real work.” (HR manager 1)

This quote expresses the opinion that training creates a special knowledge-friendly environment that enhances employees to focus on learning and knowledge sharing. This environment provides training participants with an opportunity to evaluate and test acquired knowledge under supervision of the trainer and experienced colleagues. It also enables employees to get feedback which makes knowledge sharing more effective.

Training also stimulates collaborative relationships which then can be transferred beyond the training context and further developed. In this respect, HR managers emphasise that trainers should pay attention to communication and interaction between participants, especially if training aims at soft skills development. If relationships are trustful, knowledge sharing runs

easier and smoother. Training enables knowledge sharing by building new networks and facilitating trustful relationships.

In accordance with the company's "grow within" philosophy, most of the training is delivered to young employees and those who are expected to be promoted. A few respondents express an opinion that all the departments and employees should be covered by the training programmes that match their goals and run regularly and quite often.

"Usually, those who came recently as well as people from sales and marketing have a lot of learning opportunities, while others can take part in seminars and trainings only twice in a year. It is a bit unfair because all of us need new knowledge and updated skills." (Line manager 2, Production)

This quote demonstrates the significance of training for all the employees regardless of their job roles and responsibilities. It also stresses the importance of equity in terms of providing employees with learning programmes and development activities. In order to enhance knowledge sharing process, everyone should be considered as a prospective and valuable participant; whether as knowledge sender or knowledge recipient.

4.4.2. Mentoring

Like training, mentoring is identified as a core HRM practice that supports and facilitates knowledge sharing. Mentoring is perceived as a way of transferring knowledge through communication and interaction from experienced employee to less experienced one, usually a newcomer. During mentoring, a mentor transfers corporate rules, norms, and values, along with knowledge. In other words, mentees acquire both knowledge and corporate culture that makes them feel loyal and committed to the company.

"We pay particular attention to mentoring and mentors, since they are the main resources of knowledge about the company for new employees. We teach and train mentors because their work enables development and professional growth of young employees" (HR manager 2)

Here, interviewees consider mentors as a valuable source of the company's values and norms. Also, mentors are seen as those who affect employees' both professional development and loyalty to the company. Respondents state that it is important to match mentors and mentees. The relationships between them are crucial for smooth and effective knowledge sharing. It is not enough to have strong skills for being a mentor. In addition, they should possess personal

qualities and characteristics that will help them to build trustful relations with mentees since it is important for an effective learning process:

“An appropriate mentor is able to create a safe and secure environment for learning. You would prefer to be taught by a person who [...] you know pretty well to ask stupid questions. You trust this person and thus learn with pleasure and without fear to make a mistake.” (Line manager 2, Sales)

HR professionals and line managers see mentoring as an opportunity of knowledge sharing for both mentors and mentees. While transferring knowledge to mentees, mentors also receive some new knowledge from them, usually related to the latest theories, concepts and innovations if a mentee is a recent graduate, or about other work-related issues if a mentee already has work experience. In this way, mentoring provides a mutual learning for the participants and results in updated knowledge and skills of both mentors and mentees. Feedback given to mentors is also seen as a form of knowledge that mentees share with mentors in order to support their development in this role.

4.4.3. Recruiting

The staffing practices are considered by HR managers as contributing to knowledge sharing since they are aimed at selecting people who have both required knowledge and skills and motivation for learning and development. In order to recruit people who match certain jobs and the company's vision, HR specialists first 'draw a picture' to highlight core competencies, attitudes and personal qualities of the prospective employees.

“Information about candidates' education, skills and experience can be drawn from job applications, CVs and supporting documents. Having an idea of what employee we are looking for, during job interview we focus on their values and perspectives.” (HR manager 2)

This quote stresses that personal values and perspectives of employees are as much important as their skills and experience. Some respondents also mention that employees' attitudes and values should match organisational values in terms of knowledge sharing. If candidates have strong knowledge and developed skills but believe that their knowledge shouldn't be shared since it can damage their competitiveness, they can hardly be involved in knowledge sharing. In order to be a valuable employee, candidates are expected to demonstrate both knowledge and positive attitudes towards knowledge sharing within the company.

“We want employees to share their knowledge and we always let them know about it. [During job interview] we want to gain particular information about candidates and their experience. At the same time, we inform them about our company, its mission and values to enable them to make a right decision.” (HR Business Partner 1)

It is obvious from the quote above that the company is interested in recruiting employees who have an intention to share knowledge and able to analyse and reflect on their decisions. An ability to reflection means that prospective employees will be able to analyse their experience as well. This skill is considered to be important in terms of knowledge sharing.

Interviewees draw attention to the fact that external recruitment is usually used for hiring candidates for initial positions. For managerial positions, internal recruitment is used since it is aligned with the company’s “grow within” philosophy and knowledge sharing approach.

4.4.4. Promoting

Career development practices are closely tied to the company’s “grow within” philosophy. The organisational career system is designed to provide career opportunities to all the employees in accordance with their competencies and career goals. HR managers state that the company is interested in employee internal promoting since it increases an employee commitment and engagement and makes knowledge constantly distributed at the different hierarchical levels.

“From the very beginning we invest in employees a lot to enable them to occupy higher positions in the future. While they move through the career stages, they consistently gain knowledge, revise and expand it. At the same time, they share their knowledge at the each stage. Such knowledge is valuable, and we consider people carrying it as one of the core assets.” (HR Director)

This quote emphasises linkages between internal promotion and knowledge sharing that appear in two ways. First, promoted employees acquire knowledge at each new career stage from their colleagues and new business situations and tasks. At the same time, they share knowledge that has been gained at the previous stages. Second, knowledge-sharing behaviour enables employees to draw employer’s attention and thus demonstrate their contribution to the company’s goals. In that respect, promoting is considered as a sort of reward for knowledge-sharing behaviour.

“People can make a career by sharing knowledge and teaching peers. Being able to deliver knowledge in a simple and understandable way, they are perceived as being able to interact with people effectively that is essential for managerial positions.” (HR manager 1)

Here, respondents point out that well developed abilities to share knowledge and teach others are crucial for career growth since they make an employee a valuable member of organisation. Employees who are able to teach others and successfully provide them with required information are seen as prospective managers. In this respect, initiative and proactive behaviour in terms of knowledge sharing are rewarded with promoting.

4.4.5. Rewarding

Both the line managers and HR professionals argue that the question about rewarding employees for knowledge-sharing behaviour is controversial. They clearly divide compensation and non-material rewards. On the one hand, economic rewards can facilitate knowledge-sharing behaviour because they clearly demonstrate that the company appreciates this behaviour and its outcomes. In this respect, the material compensation should be pretty substantial, objective and immediately following the required behaviour. On the other hand, the following questions emerge. What does knowledge-sharing behaviour mean? How to evaluate it? What outcomes are seen as desirable and worth paying for? How to measure them? Respondents claim that if the questions cannot be answered, it is *“better to use other forms of reward because money used inappropriately may do more harm than good”* (HR Business Partner 1).

The quote above indicates that compensation may be a factor that interferes with knowledge-sharing behaviour if the mechanisms of a compensation system are not developed thoroughly. Some respondents suggest that compensation for the knowledge-sharing behaviour may cause the growth of competitiveness among employees that will have a negative effect on knowledge sharing:

“Frist, you see that people reject to share knowledge “for free”, and then you realize that there is no knowledge sharing at all.” (Line manager, Organisational development)

Intangible rewards are considered by the respondents as more effective and stimulative than material compensation. Line managers and HR specialists state that a constructive feedback, praise and recognition positively influence knowledge-sharing behaviour. The interviewees see both managers and peers’ evaluation as important for facilitating such behaviour.

However, some respondents say that peers' evaluation can be even more influential since managers' appraisal can be considered as managerial responsibility. Since co-workers usually do not have a duty to evaluate work and recognise contribution of colleagues, their feedback is seen as more significant for employees.

Some HR managers point out that an increased employee "visibility" also has a positive effect on knowledge-sharing behaviour. It is important for some people to become more "visible" and get their own "piece of fame". Providing them with such opportunities will enhance their involvement in knowledge sharing process.

Offering new challenging tasks is also considered as one of the intangible rewards since it demonstrates that the employee's previous contribution is recognised and valuable for the company and an employee is considered competent enough to fulfil new assignment. Challenges also encourage employees to collaborate with colleagues in order to find an appropriate solution. Such collaboration enables creating new knowledge networks and provides other employees with an opportunity to be involved in knowledge sharing process.

5. Discussion

This study examined the role of HR practices in intra-organisational knowledge sharing which is considered as an essential organisational factor for gaining competitive advantage. One of the findings is that both HR professionals and line managers see HR practices as contributive to intra-organisational knowledge sharing. It was found that HRM uses a set of particular practices aimed at supporting and facilitating knowledge sharing in the company mostly by providing employees with opportunities for social interactions and communication.

5.1. Types of knowledge and knowledge conversion

Most of the respondents clearly distinguish two types of knowledge; knowledge as information that is quite independent and related to the formal organisation, and knowledge as a personally attached construct which is closely linked to practical skills and personal experience. These results are aligned with the discussion about explicitness and tacitness of knowledge (Kogut & Zander, 1993; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Polanyi, 1967; Szulanski, 2003). The company deals with both explicit and tacit knowledge since “they are [...] two sides of the same coin” (Lee et al., 2010: 474).

Explicit knowledge is embedded in formal documentation like instructions, job descriptions, manuals, and information about organisational rules, norms and policies. This knowledge can be gained from the formal sources, e.g. the corporate site. However, the respondents mostly focus on tacit knowledge which is subjective, situational, and dependent on the context (Polanyi, 1967). Being embedded in skills and experience, tacit knowledge appears to be a basis for employee performance and a fundament for their professional and career development. The focus thus is on the sharing of tacit knowledge that can be done in a joint practice. This finding is in a line with the assumption that tacit knowledge can be shared between individuals in different activities through their participation in social practices (Nonaka & Krogh, 2009; Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2009).

Next, knowledge sharing within the company is considered as related to the ‘knowing’ in the terminology of Cook and Brown (1999), rather than static ‘knowledge’. Knowing enables employees to modify and cultivate knowledge in order to make it applicable to the different contexts. The respondents’ focus on ‘knowing’ rather than ‘knowledge’ can be caused by company’s “grow within” philosophy. It makes the company to concentrate on the

development of knowledge rather than knowledge itself. Again, there is no contradiction between knowledge and knowing; these constructs are interrelated and complimentary because knowledge is used in action and knowing is seen as a part of action (Cook & Brown, 1999).

Being perceived in a particular way, knowledge determines a character of knowledge sharing. Rather than focusing on transfer of knowledge which can be easily articulated in formal language, knowledge sharing within the company is linked to the *knowing in practice* through communication and interactions. Knowledge sharing is seen as a process of mutual teaching and learning that has a practical application and occurs mostly at the individual level. In this respect, knowledge sharing is linked to the process of converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge and vice versa (Nonaka & Krogh, 2009) and aims at supporting and developing knowledge through practice, rather than at capturing and controlling knowledge (Jonsson & Tell, 2013). Thus, the company aims at catalysing and coordinating knowledge sharing and enables employees to influence knowledge related processes.

As it becomes apparent from the discussion above, HRM deals with the certain *processes* rather than objects, namely with the process of knowledge conversion and knowing that includes both explicit and tacit knowledge and their interactions.

5.2. HR practices used in intra-organisational knowledge sharing

In terms of intra-organisational knowledge sharing, HR practices at the company seem to be determined by the company's "grow within" philosophy and dealing with knowledge as a process, rather than object, that was discussed above.

The "grow within the company" approach means that the firm aims at providing employees with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in order to achieve higher level positions within the company. According to this approach, HR professionals focus on the following issues: identifying and selecting candidates with a potential to be developed within the company; learning and training employees in accordance to the company's business needs; rewarding those employees who contribute to learning and development; and identifying candidates to be promoted. In other words, the following HR practices are used in the company in the context of knowledge sharing: recruiting, mentoring, training, rewarding, and promoting.

Compared to our theoretical assumptions based on the literature review, we found out that the company's HR professionals do not separate performance appraisal from rewarding and compensation, whereas in the literature performance appraisal is considered as a practice in its own right (Edvardsson, 2008; Minbaeva, 2005; Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013). The other finding is that mentoring appears to be a valuable HR practice that drives and facilitates knowledge sharing and thus widely utilised within the company.

The target group for the HR practices are employees since they are considered as the main actors in knowledge sharing. The management level is represented by line managers and HR managers. However, both groups are seen as mediators in knowledge sharing process rather than participants. The top management has not appeared in the interviews except those with HR Director and one of the HR Business Partners who mentioned the ties between organisational strategy, organisational culture and knowledge sharing.

In order to match organisational goals and needs, employee knowledge should be tailored and developed by means of organisational learning which is also considered as the resource of knowledge, alongside with formal education and self-education. The role of organisational learning is crucial for knowledge sharing. It enables employees with different educational background and work experience to make their knowledge applicable to the certain job tasks. Knowledge captured from the external sources is shaped and modified during organisational learning and transformed in skills and capabilities required for the company. This outcome is achievable if only an individual has a motivation for learning. In this respect, proactive behaviour and a positive attitude towards learning seem to be important and thus are looked for in candidates applying for jobs at the company.

The company's philosophy determines staffing practices in two ways. First, HR function pays particular attention to internal recruitment; second, external recruitment aims at selecting candidates who possess the required knowledge and skills, and potential to grow within the company. In this respect, candidate's motivation for leaning seems to be more important than a broad range of specific skills and knowledge that was found by some researchers as a criterion of selection used in order to enhance knowledge sharing (Currie & Kerrin, 2003). Internal recruitment, which is closely tied to promoting, is considered as the practice which increases knowledge sharing in the company by making knowledge constantly distributed at the different organisational levels. In other words, promoted employees gain new knowledge

and experience relevant to the company's tasks at the each stage of their careers and then carry accumulated knowledge to the next level where it can be utilised and shared again.

Since knowledge sharing within the company is linked to the 'knowing in practice', training is considered as one of the core HR practices. Training has close ties with knowledge sharing; it aims at gaining new knowledge by those who need it from those who possess it. Knowledge sharing occurs during specifically designed training sessions. In order to be contributive in knowledge sharing, training programmes should be practice-oriented and focused on problem solving. It leads to the development of the particular employee skills and competencies needed for job performance. Transferred knowledge thus should be applicable to the employees' duties and responsibilities. In spite of practice-oriented character of the training, it should include a piece of theoretical information related to trained skills. This assumption seems to be related to the question about knowledge conversion from tacit knowledge to explicit (Nonaka & Krogh, 2009) and thus to Zhao's et al. (2014) view on training as a spiral model where tacit knowledge gradually becomes personal explicit knowledge, then collective explicit knowledge, and finally new collective and new personal tacit knowledge.

The similar processes run in mentoring that is considered as another HRM practice recognised as essential for enhancing knowledge sharing. Like training, mentoring directly aims at sharing knowledge and experience. The difference is that mentoring is hold in pairs – knowledge is transferred from an experienced employee to less experienced employee. Like in case with training, much of the knowledge that mentor possess is tacit and is not recorded in any database or training programme (Bryant & Terborg, 2008). Therefore, the process of knowledge sharing requires knowledge conversion that includes socialisation of knowledge, externalisation, combination, and internalisation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1996). According to Bryant and Terborg (2008), on the stage of socialisation, mentee gains knowledge from mentor by doing, observation, imitation and other forms of practice. On the stage of externalisation, mentors try to put in words their job-related thoughts and experiences. Combination stage includes learning by doing combined with explanations. Finally, during internalisation, a mentor helps mentees to embed knowledge in their own experience.

It was also found that mentoring provides *mutual* learning for mentors and mentees. Like mentors, mentees have knowledge and experience gained from their formal education or previous work placement that can be shared with mentors and internalised by them. Feedback

is also considered as knowledge that mentors receive from mentees. These results are in line with Bryant and Terborg's (2008) finding that feedback from those who were mentored can be seen as knowledge helping mentors to develop their mentor skills.

Rewarding is tied to knowledge sharing through recognising knowledge-sharing behaviour. Respondents unanimously agreed that knowledge-sharing behaviour should be rewarded as it motivates employees to be proactive in knowledge sharing. The nature of reward is considered to be an important issue. Monetary rewards or compensation are seen as having a negative effect on knowledge-sharing behaviour because it may cause the growth of competitiveness among employees that can result in decrease of knowledge sharing. This assumption supports Scarbrough's (2003) assertion that tangible compensation may make individuals to focus on rewarded behaviour and to put more effort in emphasising personal contribution to knowledge sharing than in team work. Our findings also indicate that intangible rewards are seen as stimulative knowledge-sharing behaviour. Providing employees with managers and peers' feedback as well as offering new tasks and "visibility" can facilitate knowledge-sharing behaviour. As for performance appraisal, it is seen as included in rewarding by default, and thus is not considered as a separate practice aimed at supporting knowledge sharing.

As other HR practices, promoting is tied to the company's "grow within" philosophy. It is declared that career opportunities are available to all employees if they learn and develop their skills and competencies. In this respect, the company's career system is designed to promote knowledge sharing among wider communities (Scarbrough, 2003) in order to make knowledge distributed along with employees' career progression. In the knowledge sharing context, promoting is considered in two ways; as a mechanism for knowledge sharing, and as a reward for knowledge-sharing behaviour. In the former case, promoted employees drives knowledge sharing across hierarchical and group borders, making knowledge available for others at the different levels. In the latter case, the company recognises knowledge-sharing behaviour as desirable and worth to be rewarded with promoting.

5.3. Contribution of HR practices to intra-organisational knowledge sharing

Two of HR practices – training and mentoring – were identified by all the respondents as closely tied and the most contributive practices to knowledge sharing within the company.

Both training and mentoring are seen as aimed at encouraging people to share their knowledge by involving them in joint activities and interactions. They are also considered as directly affecting knowledge-sharing behaviour of participants since they provide employees with required space, time and communication channels. Cabrera and Cabrera (2005) claim that one of the reasons of little employee contribution to knowledge sharing is the reluctance to spend time on knowledge sharing since employees prefer to spend time on what they perceive to be more productive activities. Being participants in training and mentoring, employees gain a legitimacy to spend their work time on knowledge sharing activities.

By focus on knowing rather than knowledge, training and mentoring support and facilitate the knowledge conversion process. Joint practices enable employees to share knowledge through socialisation, whereas verbal instructions assist in externalisation which is converting tacit knowledge into explicit. Interactions and reflection embedded in training and mentoring can facilitate processes of combination and internalisation. In this respect, training and mentoring diminish 'stickiness' of knowledge and facilitate knowledge absorption.

Training also increases levels of structural, relational and cognitive social capital that stimulates knowledge-sharing behaviour (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). Relations, established in training, make networks broader and expand them far beyond the training context. Safe and secure atmosphere of training supports development of trustful relationships between employees that also has a positive effect on knowledge sharing.

Recruiting practices contribute to organisational knowledge sharing by selecting candidates with strong motivation for learning and development and potential to grow within the company. By 'drawing a picture' of an appropriate employee, HR professionals outline both knowledge that candidates should possess and attitudes towards learning that candidates are expected to demonstrate. In other words, HR professionals evaluate the probability of involving prospective employee in knowledge sharing, whether as sender or recipient of knowledge.

Internal recruiting is also considered as contributive to knowledge sharing. Going through the job positions within the company, employees capture new knowledge and experience relevant to the company's tasks and then carry accumulated knowledge to the next level where it can be utilised and shared again. Internal recruitment thus facilitates knowledge sharing between

individuals and the company and supports the development of organisational learning culture (Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2013).

Promoting is seen as the form of rewarding employees for knowledge-sharing behaviour since in this context engagement in knowledge sharing is considered as essential for career success. Such behaviour is crucial for the employees who aspire to hold a leadership position at the company (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). Rewarding facilitates knowledge sharing with motivating employees to be more proactive in seeking opportunities to be involved in the activities related to knowledge management. However, there is a risk of interfering with knowledge sharing if rewarding is mostly based on monetary compensation. In order to be contributive, rewarding system provides employees with intangible rewards rather than tangible. It allows the company to avoid a growth of competitiveness between employees and overemphasis on a rewarded behaviour (Scarbrough, 2003).

Being closely linked to the company's "grow within" philosophy and focus on knowing, HR practices are seen as the most contributive to knowledge sharing at the individual level. By using certain practices, HRM intermediates in knowledge sharing between individuals by providing them with opportunities for social interactions and communication. However, those practices appear to be able to contribute to knowledge sharing at the organisational level.

It was revealed that the practices facilitate distribution of company's values, norms and beliefs since employees transfer them along with their knowledge. In terms of social capital theory, shared values and norms, as well as collective goals and aspirations, form a shared vision that provides a fundament for sharing knowledge across functional and hierarchical borders (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Therefore, affecting shared vision indirectly, HR practices can contribute to knowledge sharing at the organisational level.

Moreover, HR function is seen as having a potential to contribute to knowledge sharing at the organisational level in more directive way, namely by being proactive in detecting knowledge gaps throughout the company, collaborating with management at the different levels including top level, creating new communication bridges between teams and departments, and facilitating knowledge-sharing friendly environment.

6. Conclusion

Organisational ability to share knowledge is considered as a platform for its competitive advantage. In order to gain this advantage, a company should possess practices aimed at supporting and facilitating knowledge sharing within the organisation. Since HRM has the legitimacy to deal with employees and their knowledge across functional and hierarchical boundaries, it was suggested that HRM can contribute to intra-organisational knowledge sharing as a mediator by using HR practices. It was discovered that a limited number of research has been done in this area; most of them are focused on theoretical analysis whereas others have a quantitative approach or deal with a limited set of practices. In order to fill the gap in the exploratory research of how HR practices contribute to intra-organisational knowledge sharing, the current study was conducted.

It was found that in terms of knowledge sharing, the HR function deals with the certain processes rather than objects, namely with knowing and the process of knowledge conversion. In this respect, both explicit and tacit knowledge and their interaction are in focus of HR practices. Hence, the HR function tends not just to capture and control knowledge, but motivate employees to share knowledge by providing them with learning opportunities and assistance in knowledge conversion and delivery. Thus, the company catalyses and organises knowledge flows that enables emerging new knowledge and innovations (Krogh et al., 2000).

The results also show that the following HR practices are utilised in the company in order to support and facilitate knowledge transfer: recruiting, training, mentoring, rewarding, and promoting. When dealing with personnel, the company follows “grow within” philosophy that means that organisation uses primarily internal recruiting to encourage employees to achieve higher positions within the company. Internal recruiting enables the company to retain and share knowledge by promoting employees. External recruiting is focused on the candidates who possess both required knowledge and a positive attitude towards learning and knowledge sharing.

It was revealed that mentoring appears to be a practice in its own right. Along with training, mentoring is considered to be crucial HRM practice to foster knowledge sharing processes in the company. During training and mentoring sessions, knowledge conversion occurs. This process facilitates tacit knowledge transfer and absorbing. Training assists in the development of trustful relationships between employees and expands networks far beyond training room

that stimulates knowledge sharing across group boundaries. Mentoring is considered as a mutual learning process rather than one-way knowledge transfer from more experienced mentor to less experienced mentee.

It was found that performance appraisal is considered aligned with rewarding and compensation. Rewarding enhances knowledge-sharing behaviour by providing employees with intangible rewards rather than monetary compensation. Peer feedback, increased “visibility”, and offering new challenging tasks are seen as relevant rewards for knowledge-sharing behaviour. Promoting is considered in two ways: as a reward, and as a tool for knowledge sharing across hierarchical boundaries.

HR practices contribute to knowledge sharing primarily at the individual level. However, facilitating distribution of the company’s shared vision enables HR practices to be contributive at the organisational level as well. Moreover, HRM has a potential to contribute to knowledge sharing at the higher level by being more proactive in detecting knowledge gaps, collaboration with top management, building communication bridges, and development of knowledge-sharing friendly environment. Development of this potential will provide HR function with an opportunity to defend its professional jurisdiction in knowledge sharing within the company and demonstrate a valuable and unique contribution to strategically significant business processes.

In order to further develop the understanding of how HR function can add value to organisation in terms of knowledge management, the following suggestions for future research can be proposed. Since the current study was a qualitative single case study, the future research can be quantitative to provide the analytical approach in order to test whether the trends found in this study are generalizable. The other suggestion is to expand the pool of participants by including employees as well as top managers. Analysis of results based on data from diverse sources will provide an in-depth understanding of the role of HR function in knowledge sharing. Next, since the case company has a strongly marked “grow within” philosophy that affects the way HRM operates with personnel, it would be worthwhile to examine HR practices and their contribution to knowledge transfer in the companies with different philosophies and institutional settings. Finally, the study was based on the data gained from a local manufacturing company. Research conducted in other business settings, for example in retail or service industry as well as at the multi-national level would further an understanding of HRM contribution to intra-organisational knowledge sharing.

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Appendix 1

List of interviewees

1. HR Director
2. HR Business Partner 1
3. HR Business Partner 2
4. HR Manager 1 (Recruiting Manager)
5. HR Manager 2 (Senior Manager in Training and Development)
6. Sales Manager 1
7. Sales Manager 2
8. Production Manager 1
9. Production Manager 2
10. Organisational Development Manager
11. Research and Development Manager 1
12. Research and Development Manager 2

Appendix 2

Interview guide for HR specialists

General questions/background

1. Age?
2. What is your job role in the company?
3. How long have you been working in this job role?

Questions about knowledge

4. What does knowledge mean? Please, give an example of knowledge.
5. What kind of knowledge do employees in your organisation need to perform effectively?
6. Where can they gain that knowledge?

Questions about knowledge sharing

7. What does knowledge sharing mean? Please, give an example of knowledge sharing.
8. Should people, working in the company, share their knowledge with others? Why?
9. What kind of knowledge do employees usually share?
10. How easy/difficult is it to share knowledge for the employees? Why?
11. When employees share their knowledge, how do they do it?
12. Who helps them in sharing knowledge?
13. How do they help them?
14. What does knowledge sharing usually result in?
15. What environment is important for knowledge sharing in the company? Why is it important?
16. Who creates such environment?

Questions about role of HR practices in knowledge sharing

17. How is HR function involved in creating such environment?
18. How are the HR specialists involved in knowledge sharing process? Please, give an example.

19. What HR practices and procedures are used to help people to share their knowledge with others?
20. How do those HR practices and procedures affect knowledge sharing? Please, give an example.
21. What HR practices and procedures motivate people to share their knowledge? Please, give an example.
22. Does HR function pay particular attention to sharing knowledge within the organisation? Why?

Appendix 3

Interview guide for line managers

General questions/background

1. Age?
2. What is your job role in the company?
3. How long have you been working in this job role?

Questions about knowledge

4. What does knowledge mean? Please, give an example of knowledge.
5. What kind of knowledge do employees in your organisation need to perform effectively?
6. Where can they gain that knowledge?

Questions about knowledge sharing

7. What does knowledge sharing mean? Please, give an example of knowledge sharing.
8. Should people, working in the company, share their knowledge with others? Why?
9. What kind of knowledge do employees usually share?
10. How easy/difficult is it to share knowledge for the employees? Why?
11. When employees share their knowledge, how do they do it?
12. Who helps them in sharing knowledge?
13. How do they help them?
14. What does knowledge sharing usually result in?
15. What environment is important for knowledge sharing in the company? Why is it important?
16. Who creates such environment?

Questions about role of HR practices in knowledge sharing

17. How is HR function involved in creating such environment?
18. How are the HR specialists involved in knowledge sharing process? Please, give an example.

19. What HR practices and procedures are used to help people to share their knowledge with others?
20. How do those HR practices and procedures affect knowledge sharing? Please, give an example.
21. What HR practices and procedures motivate people to share their knowledge? Please, give an example.
22. Does HR function pay particular attention to sharing knowledge within the organisation? Why?