



HR TRANSFORMATION IN A PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATION.

The Emergence of new roles and competencies

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore new HR roles and competences in a public sector organisation after a reformation process in a local HR department. The study follows a qualitative research approach based on semi-structural interviews. The findings suggest that HR roles and competencies within the public sector will continue to evolve, while the role of functional specialists will increase, leading the function towards specialisation. The study does not provide generalisable findings, since it is based on a single case study and more research is required.

Key words: HR roles, competencies, organisation, HR professionals, public sector

1. Introduction

Change has become a frequent phenomenon in organisational life. The majority of companies have undergone through structural and systemic changes in the last years, with organisational change to be more common in businesses owned by the public sector (Sinclair et al,2008). This fluidity in the business world has also affected Human Resource Management. The HR function is under constant reorganisation, reviewing its structure, working practices and its role in service delivery (Harris 2007). Even from the beginning of 1990s researchers used the term “transformation” in order to refer to the reorganisation of HR structures and working procedures (Schuler, 1990; Yeung et al., 1994; Beer,1997 in Boglind, Hällsten and Thilander, 2011).

The most influential model of HR transformation was developed by Ulrich (1997). In his theoretical model Ulrich (1997), claims that HR roles should be redefined in order to face future organisational challenges driven by economy, globalisation, technology and etc. Therefore, in his model he proposes four HR roles: the strategic partner, the administrative expert, the change agent and the employee champion. Ulrich’s four-role model emphasise in

service delivery and it has been influence the concept of HR transformation in a global scale. Many companies have transformed their HR department by introducing shared service centres, involving line managers in HR work and restructuring HR roles (Hennessy & McCartney 2008).

In such reformations, HR departments are under constant pressure to prove how they add value to the organisation (Truss & Gill, 2009). In line with Caldwell (2003) the past two decades, changes in managerial work have had an impact on the roles of HR professionals. New trends about organisational flexibility, information technology and continuous cost pressures have also influence changes in occupational structures and functional roles. Moreover, the attempt to link HRM with business strategy has exposed HR professionals to a new set of role demands, challenges and expectations. According to Purcell and Ahlstrand (1994) HR managers have been constantly reinvent and reinterpret their roles as a way to maintain their professional status in a changing business world. Organisational complexity and the pressure for continuous development have resulted in increasing role change for HR professionals. Furthermore, the associated pressures for lower costs, value contribution and service delivery have resulted in the fragmentation of the HR function. HR work has been sub-divided into different specialists tasks assigned to managers or to other external partners.

This paper seeks to investigate possible changes and new trends in the roles of HR professionals. By mentioning the role of the HR professionals the study refers to the daily activities undertaken by staff members during their work and the expected behaviours related to particular job positions within an organisation (Mullins, 2005). In the following sections, I attempt to clarify the purpose and the objectives of the study. Secondly, there is a review of previous research, following by the theoretical framework with a focus on the concepts of HRM, HR roles and competencies. Later on, in the methodology part it is described the design of the study and its context. Finally, it is presented an analytical overview of the research findings following by the discussion part.

1.2 Problem of investigation

The modernisation of public services has been accompanied by changes in the HR functions. In particular the HR division in such sectors are required to review working practices and the way in which they provide their services (White, 2000). However, it is argued that in public sector organisations there are not sufficient evidence proving substantial changes in the role of the HR function, most of those evidence are either partial or inconclusive (Boyne et al. 1999). It seems that in reality the HR functions owned by public organisations have reduced its resources by introducing models of shared services and by devolving HR work to the line management (Whittaker and Marchington, 2003). As a result of those changes and due to limited resources HR departments have to select its priorities and make a contribution to the most crucial parts of the organisation. The roles undertaken by HR professionals have been characterised as service provision, focusing exclusively to the managerial team (Harris, 2007). Consequentially that makes public organisations an interest field to study such issues. Therefore the particular study strives to reveal emerging patterns of role changing within the HR function. Additionally, the paper focuses on how the adoption of specific roles enables the function to support effectively its stakeholders.

Moreover, regardless of the co-evolutionary theory and forces like common environmental pressures, organisations tend to develop unique solutions and ways of doing things (Colbert 2004). The interest of the study lays in presenting the development of a “unique” solution regarding changes in HR roles. The present study is also interesting because it does not present changes in HR roles in a descriptive and independent manner, but it seeks to place those changes in a context. This is achieved by presenting the factors that influence the adoption of the particular roles and by involving attitudes and perceptions of the key stakeholders on how they experienced the reformation process.

1.3 Purpose of the study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to explore changes in the roles and competencies of the HR function after investigating the outcomes of a reformation taking part in a local HR department of a public organisation. The study aims to build a corresponding picture of the transformation process. Therefore it provides information regarding the structure of the department and the organisation of work before and after the transformation. Moreover the study involves employee perceptions, which enables to compare the previous way of working with the present one.

The study seeks to answer the research questions stated below:

- How HR work has been organised before and after the transformation?
- How the present structure of the department look like?
- How HR professionals perceive the newly transformed function?
- Which roles appeared after the reorganisation and how these roles developed further and became more specialised in terms of strategic, operational and administrative contribution?
- What are the emerging competences required by HR professionals?
- How the newly revived HR function makes a contribution to the organisation, and what are the managerial views regarding the function?

In order to identify new trends in HR roles and competencies I will compare research findings with recent theoretical concepts in HR literature. For this purpose, the main theoretical models used in the study are those of Ulrich and Brockbank, (2005) and Ulrich, Younger and Brockbank (2012). Finally, the aim of the study is to make a scientific contribution in the literature, in regard to HR roles and competencies within public sector organisations.

2. Previous Research

There have been significant attempts to capture the changing nature of HR roles, due to workplace transformations. Capturing role changes among HR professionals presents difficulties, due to continuous new pressures and factors at the workplace (Truss et al., 2002). The studies described below present an interesting view on how the concept of HR transformation shaped HR roles, in both public and private organisations and within different countries. The studies show that the adoption of HR roles do not always follow the same pattern, but are affected by different factors such as the type of the organisation and other external influences. This body of previous research describes successfully the complexity of HR roles and it benefits the present study since it recognises the existence of various organisational conditions that can shape HR roles. Similar to the study, the new structure and roles created by the function were developed with the purpose to correspond to organisational needs and not as an outcome of a memetic process.

According to Caldwell's study (2003) the role of HR professionals has altered in a way that it has become more complex and multifaceted. In the study Caldwell made a survey and interviewed HR managers in major UK organisations. In order to capture the process of role change he used Storey's (1992) fourfold typology of HR roles and compare it to Ulrich's (1997) model. Storey's typology consists of four personnel roles based on two bi-polar dimensions or axes: intervention versus non-intervention and strategy versus tactics. The four roles are: "Advisors", "Handmaidens", "Regulators" and "Changemakers". Ulrich's model also consists of four main HR roles. These roles are also explained and presented along two axes: strategy versus operations and process versus people. The four roles are: Strategic Partner, Administrative Experts, Employee champion and Change Agents. In his study Caldwell compared Storey's typology with Ulrich's framework with the expectation to find changes in the roles of HR professionals. The findings suggest that Ulrich's model acknowledges the complex and flexible nature of HR roles, but still it offers a more prescriptive vision of the future HR and it promises more than it can actually delivers. Also the roles defined by Ulrich overlap with Storey's typologies, reproducing old tensions from the past. For instance the Strategic Partner presents common characteristics with the role of the Advisor, similarly the role of Change Agent with the role of Changemaker. The main difference between the two concepts is that Ulrich's model promotes an image of collaborative partnership, where managers, employees, external partners and HR

professionals are working together with the purpose to deliver value to the business. In contrast, Storey's typology is more rhetoric, drawing attention to the historical legacy of pragmatism and opportunism in relation to the HRM in UK, without corresponding to the changing business concept.

Research conducted by Boglind, Hällsten and Thilander (2011) compare Ulrich's "three-legged stool" model with empirical evidence from seven major Swedish organisations. In line with the research findings, regardless the type of the business, those organisations adopted the same model of HR transformation. However, the model has been translated and adapted to local contexts. Different trends, such as corporate governance seems to influence the type of such transformation. Moreover, such HR changes seem to be accompanied by redundancies and re-allocations of HR roles. The HR business partner role within the local context of the different organisations has been interpreted in a way that HR roles and practices appear to be less consolidated to the actual model.

A study by Truss (2008) in British public sector organisations shows that the role of the HR function has grown in complexity and contribution. Reforms within the public sector, aiming in the adoption of a more strategic role, have not change the traditional role of the function. In contrast, such reforms resulted in the appearance of mixed HR forms. In another study written also by Truss (2009), using the framework of institutional Isomorphism the researcher aims to analyse HR roles. The study argues that similarities within HR functional roles, in public sector organisations, can be explained by a combination of isomorphic factors, social capital, strategic choice and co-evolution. However, even if the theory of institutional isomorphism proposes that the sector forces organisations to adopt common tactics (Di Maggio and Powell 1983 in Truss) the research findings suggest that organisations that are sharing contextual similarities can develop differentiations in HR roles and forms.

Finally, a study by Kramar and Steane (2012) conducted in Australian organisations, explores current trends in HR roles and competencies under the concept of HR transformation. According to the study managers expect that HR professionals will have a strategic involvement within the organisation, but also it is expected that HR will encompass

traditional operational roles. The study claims that the need for different competencies and roles within the field of HRM will result in the role-segmentation of the profession.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Human Resource Management

In general the term Human Resource Management as defined by Boxall & Purcell (2011) is associated with a broad range of activities and it presents a variation, which it can be explained by hierarchical levels, occupations organisations, industries and societies. HRM covers the policies and practices used to manage work and people. These policies and practices are usually refer to managerial activities in recruitment, selection, training, development and etc. In addition, HRM includes processes for information sharing, consulting and negotiating with individuals or groups. The HRM function views these processes as vital for organisational success, trough them the function can improve employee performance and achieve strategic decisions, which can boost organisation's competitive advantage (Ulrich, 1997). In line with Boxall & Purcell (2011), large organisations usually have HR professionals offering their specialists skills to contribute to more practical aspects of HRM. In particular the roles of HR professionals encompass a variety of activities such as

designing selection processes, formulating policies about Equal Employment Opportunities and conducting employment negotiations. Moreover, there are many HR specialists who are working as consultants, providing executive knowledge and assistance. HR specialists are engaged to work in partnership and provide their services to line, middle and senior managers, in order to achieve the desired results for the organisation.

Different HRM models highlight the importance of HRM activities for contributing to business goals and adding value to financial outcomes through strategic involvement (Jackson and Schuler, 1995). Legislative changes, in the last two decades, have also enabled the adoption of a strategic approach to employee relations. Moreover, research indicates that HR is more involved in strategic decision making, while traditional HR tasks were assigned to line managers (Kramar, 2006). Even after these developments, the HR function is continuously transforming and new roles and competencies are emerging for HR specialists (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005).

3. 2 HRM Roles

There are different models describing how HR roles can contribute to organisational success. These roles are usually performed by the HR function in partnership with line managers, trade unions, governments and other external partners (Kramar & Steane, 2012)

The conceptualisation of HR roles has changed over time. At the beginning, different theoretical frameworks of Tyson and Fell (1986), Guest (1987), and Storey (1992) presented HRM from an administrative perspective with the form of “personnel management”, “clerk of works” , “contracts manager” and “human resource architect”. Afterwards, Ulrich (1997) identified four types of HR roles, the strategic partner, the administrative expert, the employee champion and the change agent role. Following this, the model has been further developed,

reflecting new trends in early 2000s. Four other roles were identified, such as the employee advocate, the human capital developer, the strategic partner and the functional expert (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

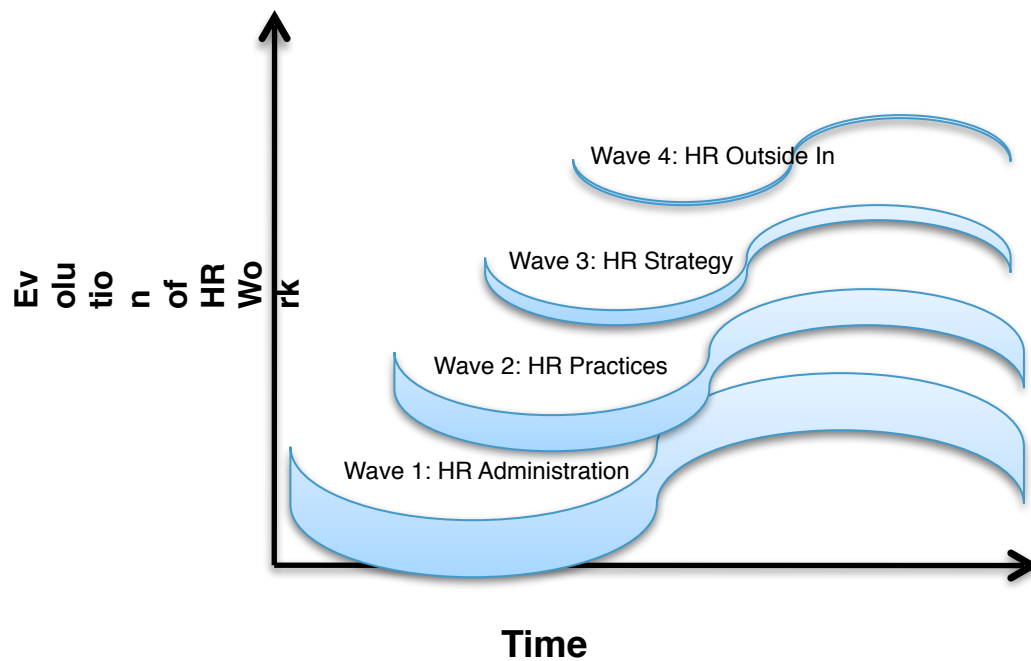
In accordance with Ulrich & Brockbank (2005) this typology of HR roles can explain how the HR function can add value to the organisation. Firstly, by performing as an Employee Advocate it requires to listen and respond to employee matters, as well as seeing things from employees' perspective and communicate different points of view. Being a Human Capital Developer is also a role which is closely related with employees and building the workforce of the future by offering opportunities to employees to develop their skills and abilities. In the third role of Strategic partner HR professionals are called to plan successive future strategies, by making the right decisions and having the right knowledge and an informed opinion on what is necessary for the business to do. Additionally strategic partners are responsible for executing strategic decisions. They are members of the management team, and their role is to advice and help the leadership to manage the workforce and change. Finally, in the Functional Expert's role HR professionals are required to have expertise knowledge within a certain area of HR. Accessing a body of knowledge will allow HR professionals to get specialised skills which will help them to deliver HR practices. Functional experts operate at multiple levels. First, they have to provide solutions for ordinary HR problems. Secondly, they have to make research on theory and best practices and turn HR knowledge into a program or process. Thirdly, HR professionals as functional experts should adapt to the business needs, identify problems at an early stage and provide solutions.

In the last 20 years the priority has been given to strategic HR roles and how HR work could be linked to business strategy, broadening HR practices from talent recruiting and development to make a contribution to the organisation's culture and leadership (Ulrich et al, 2009). This shift toward strategic HR work led to an HR transformation system, aiming to upgrade professionals and reform HR departments. However, recent changes in economy, globalisation and technology have changed the scenery in HR. Due to those changes in the business environment HR departments are facing again the need for change. Some organisations have turned back to traditional HR, managers and HR professionals are asked to perform traditional tasks and acknowledge future expectations. On the other hand, other

organisations are taking another approach, shifting towards adopting an “outside in” perspective (Ulrich et al, 2012). This new trend in HR has been identified by Ulrich, Younger and Brockbank (2012) and it challenges HR work to respond to outside business conditions and expectations. This new approach is called “HR from outside in” and it goes beyond strategy, its purpose is to combine HR work with the organisation’s business context and stakeholders. The particular approach defines future and successful HR professionals, those who look outside into costumers, investors and communities.

This developmental process of HR roles can be successfully represented with the figure used from the theoretical framework of Ulrich, Younger and Brockbank (2012). The figure 1.1 presented below shows the evolutionary process of HR work in four waves. In the first wave HR roles are presented as administrative and transactional, in the second wave the focus is on HR practices and creating innovating processes. The third wave emphasise in joined HR practices and the adoption of a strategic role. Lastly, in the fourth wave HR professionals are called to respond to the external business context and their stakeholders. In order for this to be achieved HR professionals should develop a range of new competencies, described in the next part of the study.

Figure 1.1 Source: Ulrich, D., Brockbank, W., Younger, J., & Ulrich, M. (2012), p.6



3.3 HR Competencies

Seeing the business from an “outside in” perspective requires a deep knowledge of the entire business network (Ulrich et al, 2012). HR can create value for organisations by gaining knowledge of the whole business environment. In order to achieve this, it is important to understand the context in which the business operates and try to identify external factors and general trends that can affect the organisation internally. Such general trends may derive from the continuously shifting societal, technological, economic and political landscape. Therefore, HR professionals should be constantly aware of those external conditions, since those trends can influence the organisation’s position in the future. Moreover, transitions in HR departments have not only accompanied by a new set of roles, but also by a new range of skills or competencies (Sheehan et al., 2006). In line with Ulrich, Younger and Brockbank (2012), HR professionals need to develop six competencies which will enable them to respond to the

changing landscape and will help them to manage change, innovation, integration and organisation capabilities. These competency categories challenge HR professionals to work as strategic positioners, credible activists, capability builders, change champions, human resource innovators and integrators and technology proponents.

Firstly, a strong strategic position will empower HR practitioners to shape the organisational culture by expanding the scope and include its crucial stakeholders. This can be done by reframing the stakeholders, their roles in the business, identify what kind of value are they deliver and what are their expectations in return. Important to the business stakeholders can be customers, communities, partners, line managers and employees. Combining the knowledge offered by the external environment and the stakeholders, HR professionals can contribute to the organisation's strategic position. This implies the execution of strategic knowledge and the creation of strategies which define the way on how companies respond to stakeholders' expectations.

The second competence is being a "credible activist", meaning that HR professionals should focus on issues that are important to the organisation (Ulrich et al, 2012). Find a way to build trust and respect between the HR department and the line managers, create effective communication and meet business objectives and commitments. The implementation of an evidence based approach can help the HR function to create better working conditions for its people and build trust between them, this can be practiced by interviewing the different shareholders and learn what are their expectations, needs and problems (Boudreau & Jesuthasan, 2011).

The third competence is about being a "capability builder". Study organisation's capabilities and learn those areas which the organisation is known for and performs best. Interview employees, partners, line managers and investors and learn about the organisation's image. These capabilities differentiate the organisation from others. Building the right organisation requires a culture assessment which will help to redefine values, norms and patterns (Cameron and Quinn, 2011)

The fourth competence is about being a “change champion”. Organisations should consider change as a continuous phenomenon and embrace it instead of resisting to it. Promote the need for internal transformation by choosing change methods that fit in the organisation’s culture, instead of imitating best practices from other firms. Moreover, according to organisational research companies that change are more likely to survive comparing to those that resist in change (Foster and Kaplan. 2001). The growing pace of change and interdependence has created the need for agile organisations and leadership agility has become a required competence (Joiner, 2007). The term “agile organisations” is referring to the need to anticipate and respond quickly to changes in a way of controlling technical and stakeholder complexity. For a sustainable advantage companies need to develop a level of agility that fits the level of change in the business environment. Therefore it is crucial for employees to experience the real organisation, in order to face uncertainty and respond rapidly to change. Agility can be achieved with the knowledge of existing relationships and networks inside and outside the company, consequently robust and flexible social networks within the organisation can build an agile culture (Gobillot ,2007).

The fifth competence is seeing HR as “Innovator and Integrator” (Ulrich et al, 2012). This capability refers to the development of the right talents and leaders that will influence the organisation’s future success. In order for HR professionals to manage innovation and integration they have first to look for the people, who work for the organisation and create conditions which will motivate them to contribute to the organisation.

The final competence is about utilising technology knowledge and use it as a tool for creating a communication and learning network that connects the HR department with the internal and external stakeholders. With the use of technology HR can work both administrative and strategically (Ulrich et al, 2012).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

The purpose of the study is to explore the emergence of new HR roles and competencies after a reformation taking part in a local HR department of a public organisation. Therefore, the study follows an exploratory case study approach (Yin, 1993) supported by a qualitative research. Particularly, the study relies on two scheduled meetings, one with the HR manager and one with an HR specialist and seven semi structural interviews of six HR practitioners and one area manager. The data reflect the perceptions of these practitioners about the reformation and their perspectives on the HR roles and competences required to increase HR efficiency and deliver value to the organisation. The main purpose of the HR reformation was to provide the managers with better support. Therefore an interview with a manager was necessary in order to encompass managerial views regarding the transformation of the function. The area manager participating in the study confirmed that she was also transferring the views and perceptions of managers in the area that she was responsible for.

The adoption of a qualitative research allows to explore participants' meanings and interpretations of the situation and to understand the way people experience social reality (Hennink et al, 2011). As a qualitative research, the study follows an interpretative approach, with the purpose of studying changes and events in their natural settings and attempting to make sense of these phenomena in terms of interpreting things through the meaning that people give to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008)

4.2 Data collection process

The main source of data collection were in-depth interviews and information gathered during meeting procedures. The participants taking part in the interviews were chosen with the condition that they were working in the function before and after the reformation. Most of them were females with the exception of one male. The ages of the participants were between

35 to 62 years old, with most of the interviewees to have more than eight years of experience working as HR professionals. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, before the interviews were arranged two meetings, the purpose of those meetings was to explain the context of the change and to provide me with information relevant to the study.

A list of questions was initially prepared and sent to the participants before the interview. The semi-structured interview guide helped to gain insight into how HR practitioners and managers experienced and perceived the changing HR roles. Two different interview guides were used one for HR practitioners and another one for the area manager (See Appendix 1). The guide consists of opening questions, allowing the interviewee to start speaking for the change in general and what initiated it. The key questions were mainly focused on the HR roles and competencies, how their work tasks changed after the reformation and what kind of support provided to the managers. During the interviews, allowance was made for further discussion and comments, especially in the closing questions the interviewee had the freedom to make further comments and add any relevant or irrelevant information. All the interviews were face to face, arranged in individual sessions with a duration between 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed word by word, as to ensure accuracy and validity.

Another source of data were archival records, some records were acquired by the organisation during meeting procedures and some other were found on web for public use. Web based records were used in order to construct the general image of the organisation for the purpose of the case study. On the other hand organisational documents describe the internal structure of the department after the change and the area of work assigned to each HR practitioner. These internal records helped to understand the structure of the department as it is now and were analysed and presented in a descriptive way. These kind of data were also used in conjunction to the data acquired from the interviews, as to capture the whole picture of the departmental transition in roles, competences and structure.

4.3 Data analysis process

During the data analysis procedure I followed an interpretative research approach based on the theoretical concept provided by Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011). First, the data were analysed through code development, most of the codes were emerged inductively in line with the data. Examples of such codes are: “managerial support” “differentiation of HR roles”, “specialisation”, “new responsibilities”, “personal skills”, “general experience”, “changing perspectives”, “qualified support”, “attempt to adapt”, “focusing” and etc. Following the coding process the data were described and compared to similar topics. Subsequent to data comparison, similar codes were conceptualised and grouped into general and more specific categories. The creation of different categories enabled the emergence of different themes. Such themes are: “Organisation of work (before and after the transformation)” “Perceptions about the transformation”, “HR roles”, “Consultants”, “Strategic work”, “HR specialists” and “Competencies and contribution”. Finally, the emerging categories were used to interpret the findings of the study.

4.4 Ethical considerations and study limitations

During the interviews participants were informed that their data will be handle with sensitivity. All the participants agreed in interview recording. Also, the study ensures confidentiality and the observance of ethical procedures by anonymising the name of the organisation and the extracts taken from interview transcripts. Moreover at each stage of the developmental process feedback by the representative of the function was required, in case the study referred to something inappropriate or unfitting to the organisation or the function.

Issues that may be considered as limitations in the methodology part are firstly, that the participants taking part in the study were not chosen by the researcher, but from the representative of the function. Secondly, the translation of various documents from Swedish into English did not yield the correct and exact designation of certain terms.

4.5 The case

The study takes part in an organisational context and in particular in the context of a major public organisation. The organisation is operating in Sweden, it is owned by the municipality and it employs approximately 50.000 employees. The municipality is divided in ten districts, each district has its executive committee and distinct council. The distinct councils are responsible for implementing decisions, taken by the politicians and the executive committees. Moreover, the distinct councils have to manage and provide services to publicly own sectors such as pre-schools, compulsory schools, individual and family care, leisure activities and social care for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Each distinct council has its own HR department, with a central HR function to perform a more strategic role, supporting the local HR departments. Specifically, the present case study is referring to one district, in which the organisation functions, and its locally and currently transformed HR department. The function occupies approximately 15 HR professionals, offering consulting services to all local level managers operating to the different public sectors.

5. Results

5.1 The HR transformation process

5.1.1 Organisation of work before the transformation

Before the reorganisation each sector was represented by a very small number of two HR specialists. Even if those HR practitioners were named HR specialists they were working as HR generalists supporting and consulting the managers within all HR processes. The structure of

the department was following the structure of the different sectors. The sectors are divided into areas and each area has its own area manager and the lower level managers operating within the institutions. For instance, if a sector was divided in two areas, with a total number of 25 managers, each HR specialist was supporting approximately 10 to 15 managers of a particular area.

HR specialists were supporting the managers through consultation, answering all type of questions. They were working 60% operational (advising the managers), 30% strategic and 10% administrative. Moreover, every two weeks each HR specialist was taking part in managerial meetings, supporting and advising “their” managers in person. Those specialists had to have knowledge of the sector that they were operating, its managers and employees. As HR professionals, they did not have a defined HR role, but they were working as generalists within a wide spectrum of HR issues.

Unfortunately this way of working generated a climate of uncertainty, regarding the effectiveness of the HR department within the organisation. In the interviews, HR specialists mentioned that due to the previous structure HR specialists were working with all the processes. They did not had a common approach in the same HR issues, as a result they were giving different answers to the same questions or they were agreeing on different things during negotiation procedures. HR specialists describe the previous way of working as “messy” and “chaotic” and that the previous organisation was not driven by a corporate strategy and vision.

“The disadvantage before was that there was no strategy and vision at all. The way of working was kind of messy each one of us was obliged to do everything” (HR generalist)

"The previous organisation was lacking in focus. For instance, all were involved in wage negotiation procedures. There are many unions that we have to communicate with, set meetings and establish agreements. We were about ten people doing our things and no one knew what the other was doing. So we did not had coherence and the situation became chaotic. Some specialists were working with the unions in one direction and the others were working in a different direction, agreeing on different things”. (HR controller)

“Before the reorganisation i was doing almost everything. I was working alone and i was working only for one sector, but it was my sector and i didn’t had to discuss with the others what i was doing i didn’t had to inform them. But, in a big organisation it is not that wise

having people working with everything because the quality goes down everyone cannot work with everything” (HR generalist)

Another disadvantage with the previous structure was that HR specialists were working in the same way for quite a long time, even if the external or internal conditions were changing the structure remained the same. The main reason for resistance to change was the lack of knowledge and experience to adapt in new ways. Remaining stuck in the old way of working did not provide the organisation with the right competencies to deal with changes, therefore a reformation was required.

“Three years ago there was a change, three small parts of the organisation were merged within the same distinct. The organisation became much bigger and for an HR manager to switch from the small organisation into a bigger one, like now it required big effort and it was necessary to have someone new in order to start something new. It was difficult to have a part of the old structure and start something new, so before the main weakness was the lack of experience and competence in managing change”. (HR controller)

Furthermore, as mentioned before each HR specialists was operating within a sector and was responsible to support a specific number of managers within that sector. In case an HR specialist was on a leave her or his work was impossible to be replaced or transferred to another HR specialist, due to increased overload. The way that work was structured was characterised by rigidity. Moreover, the above reasons combined with managerial complains and a change in leadership led the department to change its internal structure and roles. The department started to implement and follow an approach towards specialisation.

5.1.2 Organisation of work after the transformation

The HR department initiated its reorganisation in the 1st of September 2014. The reformation followed after a change in leadership, as a new HR manager became in charge of the department. At this point it is important to mention that before the transition the new HR

manager conducted a survey, asking all the managers in the distinct in what way the department can offer better services to them. As a result the function was transformed with the purpose to provide managers with better and more specialised support regarding HR issues. In particular, the change is aiming to renew the department's image within the organisation, in order to be perceived as a competent function with the skills and expertise knowledge required to support effectively the managers. The function clarified its mission and goals internally and strengthened its strategic involvement within HR processes.

After the reformation HR roles and work tasks were clearly defined. The department was divided into two sections, the HR Team and the Specialised support section (See figure 1.2). The HR team is responsible for performing administrative tasks through the organisation's joined intranet and IT systems. The team consists of three HR specialists, which they are operating within all the sectors of the distinct, offering administrative support to the managers. They support the managers in using the organisation's IT computer systems. The computer systems are including HR processes like recruitment, employer branding, occupational safety and health, payroll, wage settings, rehabilitation and internships. Those systems are available to both HR specialists and line managers. The role of the HR team is to support the managers in using those IT systems and implement the processes on a local level.

“Now we have a clear division of work in the department. The HR team is doing most of the administrative work so I can focus more to help the managers with rehabilitation, law and other processes”. (HR generalist)

The specialised support section of the department is divided in two groups, the elderly care and people with disabilities sectors and the education sectors (pre-school and compulsory school). The elderly care and people with disabilities group is supporting in total 60 managers with 1500 permanent employees, while the education group is supporting in total 46 managers with 1350 permanent employees. Both groups are structured in the same way and work with the same HR processes. Within the groups have emerged three different types of HR roles, the HR controllers, the HR generalists and the HR specialists. The HR controllers are having a

strategic role, they are taking part in the executive committees, planning strategies, make statistical monitoring of the sector and offer internal training programs.

“Now i have a special task in this department and it is a new task, our HR manager decided to have two persons that work 100 per cent strategic one on the educational sector and one in the elderly care sector and the sector that offers support to disabled people. We have similar tasks but in different parts of the organisation”. (HR controller)

The HR generalists are responsible for supporting the first line managers in areas such as employment law, rehabilitation, competence management and etc. They are acting as employees’ representatives and they are responsible for monitoring staff ratios in each sector. Finally the HR specialist role is something new for the organisation, even if the title is the same the HR specialist are now performing as experts in certain HR processes, their work tasks have been narrowed and specialised within a specific area of HR. Each HR specialist is offering expertise support in processes relevant to, recruitment, working environment, wages and rehabilitation. For each process there are two HR specialists operating in different sector groups, but still communicating with each other and fill each other’s position if it is necessary. Moreover, HR generalists use HR specialists as personal support.

“In the specialist role we are two who are negotiating in salaries and i think that this is the main advantage, having two persons that are working with the same processes. Before we were six or five working with this process and that didn’t work out very well i think” (HR specialist)

However, the paradox with the present organisation is that even the roles of HR employees have been clearly defined and as it seems the present structure promotes a role in towards specialisation, more experienced and skilful HR professionals are expected to perform more than one role, acting simultaneously as HR controllers, HR generalists and HR specialists.

5.1.3 Present structure of the department

Figure 1.2

HR-Team

3 HR Specialists: IT Support
Administration

HR-Specialised Support

Group 1

Sectors for elderly care
and people with disabilities

1 HR Controller
1 HR Generalist

Recruitment
Introduction
HR Specialist: Employer Branding
Managerial Supply

HR Specialist: Working Environment
Health

HR Specialist: Wages

Readjustment
HR Specialist: Rehabilitation
Personnel Matters

Group 2

Sectors for Education

1 HR Controller
1HR Generalist

Recruitment
Intoduction
HR Specialist: Employer Branding
Managerial Supply

HR Specialist: Working Environment
Health

HR Specialist: Wages

Readjustment
HR Specialist: Rehabilitation
Personnel Matters

5.2 Perceptions about the Transformation

All the interviewers agreed that the department has changed and organised in a better way. Having HR specialists that are being exclusively responsible for particular HR processes is perceived as the greatest advantage of the present organisation. The new division of work helped HR professionals to have a focus in their knowledge and work tasks. As a consequence HR professionals mentioned that they can plan their work in a better way, be more efficient and offer more qualitative support to the managers. The main advantages for the managers on the other hand are that now they know better how to use HR they and seek guidance from different specialists, depending on the issue that they need support with. Moreover, the current structure of the department allows to all managers to have access to HR support. Managers that did not had before their own HR specialist can now contact the department for consultation.

Even if the function has undergone through significant changes in both roles and structure, so as to provide the managers with better support, HR professionals mention that they are still in a phase of transition and they need more time in order to work according to the new way. Factors that have been identify to delay the process of transformation are: the lack of time, new HR specialists, spending more time in supervision, resistance to change and delay in establishing a team.

Firstly, after the reorganisation there were hired new HR consultants. The new staff need time to gain experience and knowledge of the organisation. Some of the new staff were working in the private sector and they may have to deal with issues of cultural differences between the private and the public sector. Furthermore, more experienced HR staff, and in particular HR controllers have taken the role of being supervisors, educating the new HR consultants, a fact that may delay their involvement in more strategic issues.

“many of my colleagues are new, I interact with my colleagues mostly when I am supervising them, but I think that 6 months is quite a short time to evaluate the effectiveness of the reorganisation and we have many new colleagues, when this colleagues will become more experienced in working here then I think that we can be more efficient and work accordingly to the new way” (HR controller)

In the department HR professionals are still trying to adjust in their new roles. The old way of working has become a habit and changing from one way into another it is a process that requires effort. Even if the work has been divided some of them are still acting as in their former roles, being HR generalist. This attitude characterised by an “unconscious” resistance to change has been also promoted by the managers, where they still contact “their own” HR specialists. However, HR professionals acknowledge this situation and try to cope with it by emphasising in the right kind of tasks. Additionally, another important obstacle is that HR specialists, who are operating within the same sector groups have not yet become a team, but instead they are still trying to build a team. Furthermore, after the reorganisation the expectation got higher and HR professionals have to deal with the increased workload and higher levels of stress. Nevertheless, as stated by the HR representatives in the newly transformed function the advantages outweigh the weaknesses and within the near future they will be able to work in accordance with the goals and mission of the new organisation.

5.3 HR Roles

5.3.1 Consultants

The transformation of the function is aiming at increasing the level of consulting services provided to the managers. All the interviewed HR practitioners and area manager confirmed that the HR function provides consulting services to the managers, they offer advices in recruitment, employer branding, occupational health and safety, working environment, wages, readjustment, rehabilitation, personnel matters and etc. HR practitioners describe their consultancy roles as being part of their operational routine.

“This department has set as a goal to give better support and guidance to the managers, give the support that the line managers need in order to reach the goals that are political decided” (HR controller)

“Managers contact us for consultation, we discuss their problems and try to see a way through, and if they have done everything in order to achieve the desirable results” (HR generalist)

By mentioning “better” or “qualified support” in their interviews HR practitioners mean to be better consultants, provide the managers with more precise and professional solutions to a problematic situation. Managers usually contact HR specialists, asking for help and guidance, in order to manage their employees. They also seek consultation for individual cases. According to HR practitioners managers need a lot of support in employee issues, therefore it was necessary for the function to strengthen its consultancy role.

5.3.2 Strategic Work

After the reorganisation HR practitioners claim that they are working more strategic. In the department there are three HR controllers, focusing in strategic planning. Two of the HR controllers are working within different sector and support group, while the third HR controller is working closely with the HR manager. HR controllers are working strategic having both a short-term and a long-term perspective.

Firstly, HR practitioners are working strategically by providing the managers with the right information through consultation. With an emphasis on strategic thinking the department is aiming to develop leadership capabilities and competencies. During the interviews HR controllers mentioned that the managers keep asking the same questions that they have been answered to them. This repetition consumes a lot of time that could be spent in more

meaningful procedures. Therefore the department has decided to take a more strategic action to deal with the problem in the long-term. HR controllers have identified in which issues managers need more support and they offer educational workshops within the department. Moreover, they encourage managers to attend educational seminars or programs offered by the central department of the organisation.

“There is a central department within the organisation, where HR professionals, line managers and newly employed can attend some educational programmes. But we also offer to them workshops twice a month before the salaries are paid out” (HR controller)

Furthermore, the department is aiming to take strategic action in order to deal with seek leaves. According to statistics the number of seek leaves have significantly increased during the last three years.

“We have an increasing figures in seek leaves. Until now we deal with such issues giving short term solutions and not really dealing with the problem. So we are going to have a discussion on that about the results and also get the process leader from “lending kontoret” and some specialists in the area maybe the research institute “Försäkringskassan” in order to get some suggestions on how we can deal with the problem, that is one way I think on how to deal with the problem to use experience and knowledge”.(HR controller)

HR controllers acknowledge the fact that strategic work requires a lot of information sharing and knowledge, they try to work strategic by having both a proactive and reactive approach. They are trying to strengthen the functions strategic involvement by creating a broader communication network and taking more active part in the executive committee meetings. HR practitioners describe strategy as having a “helicopter perspective”.

“We have both reactive and proactive strategic approach, in some processes the managers in the first line they don’t see it at all we have to remind them things. With some processes we are working ahead, planning for a few years, there we are working proactive, for example in wage negotiation processes we have created a long term strategy, planning forward until 2017, there we are working proactive and in many other processes and reactive I should say when i participate in the executive committee of the education, I am sitting and listening to those managers and then I can give my perspective to their issues when I am listening to their

discussion and come with some input on their questions, so it is both I should say and it must be both, that is our assignment”. (HR controller)

“We are trying to work more strategic. When I go to their monthly meetings I suppose to deliver figures, ideas and give answers that match their problems” (HR controller)

Strategic work involves tasks like looking at employee ratios, statistics and conducting analysis. After performing the necessary procedures, HR practitioners have to inform the managers about issues that need immediate attention and make the necessary suggestions on how to deal with them, for instance such issues can be the relocation of employees in more suitable positions. This kind of work often requires collaboration with the financial department, since most of the budget is spent on employee salaries, and HR controllers have to check the available budget for each unit and inform the managers for any kind of discrepancies.

“We have to remind the line managers to have control over their budget, and think about their employees, those who are employed and those who are on a leave. We look at the computer different data and inform the line managers for issues that need special attention and they have to keep in mind”. (HR controller)

“In schools, if one teacher has not enough students, like in Spanish language course, then we transfer the teacher to another school. And we usually do the same with kindergarten teachers”. (HR controller)

“In collaboration with the economic department and the line managers we see how the money are spent. Now I am working on a project where I have to evaluate the efficiency of computer systems, if the employees are using them and if it was worth it to spend money on them. It is a task which is about internal control. You must analyse and describe why and where did you spend the money, considering the available budget”. (HR controller)

For the function strategic work is also closely related with political decisions. Being a public organisation means that they should think about strategic ways that are in line with political decisions and the implementation of strategic plans should aim in the achievement of political goals.

“This work is strongly connected to political goals. For instance if the goal is to motivate people to work 100% percent then we have to adapt to it and transfer more work to employees that are working 50% or 75% ,so as to work 100%, of course if they are willing to”. (HR controller)

5.3.3 HR Specialists

The role of an HR specialist has been focused on one group sector and within a specific process or processes. For instance as shown in the figure 1.2 in each group there is one HR specialist responsible for questions and consulting in recruitment, Introduction, employer branding and managerial supply. Another HR specialist is responsible for the working environment and health. There is one specialist in wages and another one in processes regarding readjustment, rehabilitation and personnel matters. HR specialists are responsible to educate themselves and gain a more expertise knowledge of the processes that they are working with. They are also responsible to develop appropriate measures which will evaluate the effectiveness of each process and its impact in the sector.

“Now we are looking in that specialised areas more, we are getting more education for it, we have evolved and our standards are higher than before. We get more knowledge in HR processes that can benefit the different business sectors. The managers need it more support in those specific areas. I believe that I support the managers in a better ways concerning working environment issues I have studying for working environment in my spare time and here at work, so I am getting much better at it”. (HR controller)

In addition, HR specialists are responsible to participate in different educational meetings provided by the organisation. During those meetings HR specialist can join the process leaders learn about new trends and ways and communicate the information back to their managers in the district and to their colleagues.

5.4 Competencies and Contribution

In the competence area most of the HR practitioners agreed that in order to perform well in their tasks and roles they need certain qualifications, those qualifications include knowledge, skills and abilities.

HR professionals mentioned that they should have a general knowledge of the organisation and the sector that they are operating. The most common areas of knowledge mentioned were labour law, IT knowledge and talent management. Moreover, each HR specialist is obliged to have not only a basic knowledge of the different HR processes, but also a more expertise and advanced knowledge of the HR area or process that she or he is working with as a specialist.

“I must have a general knowledge of the sector that is important to understand them. For instance in the education sector is important to know the labour law but it is also important to know the laws that applied in the education for schools and pre-schools”. (HR generalist)

In their work HR professionals have to cooperate with different people, managers, co-workers, union representatives, employees and etc. Therefore, it is essential for them to develop good communication skills, provide the right counseling, give feedback, be persuasive during negotiations, build teams, have the ability to change perspective, create relations of trust, manage diversity and change. HR professionals mentioned that they have to cope not only with differences within the sectors but also with differences in individual characteristics. According to them each manager has its own personality, competence and knowledge and they need support with different things. Trying to build a relationship with managers is a process that requires time and constant effort from both sides. Moreover, HR practitioners highlight the importance of listening to their partners, understand the problems that they are facing in work and provide solutions to them. In particular both HR specialists

and managers mentioned the area of rehabilitation as the most difficult part of HR and in order to deal with such situations they have to acquire special skills and spend more effort and time. Another area that requires their constant attention and the managers need help with, is when employees show an inappropriate behaviour in their work, in such incidents managers are usually call for HR assistance.

“In order to perform better except of the education in HR i think you need to have general experience from life, you need to review things, because you meet so many people in this work that they need help, the first line managers they often want help when they are going to have a conversation or a dialog with their employees, in case that those employees are not performing so well and have discipline problems maybe they are not healthy they have problems at home and problems at work and the managers need help from our department. In such cases we participate in the meetings listening to both managers and employees and try to approach the problem through a conversation or a dialog. In my work i think as an employer but sometimes you need to change your perspective and look at the problem from another point of view, that is very important in this type of work”. (HR generalist)

In terms of contribution HR professionals believe that they deliver value to the organisation mostly by providing coaching to the managers. Their coaching approach is aiming in developing more skilled future business leaders, with the necessary competencies to manage their employees. However, in order to fulfill their mission it is critical for the leadership to perceive HR issues as important. In line with the interviewers the managers do not always give the appropriate attention in HR matters and they are not prepared for HR to work strategically. HR practitioners mentioned that it is difficult for the function to make a contribution when the line managers “do not let them in” and participate as strategic partners.

“It is essential for the department that the line managers think of the HR issues as important and they are interested if they just interested in the economy its difficult for us, it is important for the managers to have a positive attitude towards HR issues, because that makes our work much easier” (HR controller)

“The leadership is not prepared for this, for HR to work more strategic so we have to fight for this, we have to fight to get in their world they do not understand they keep asking the same questions that I have been answered to them before” (HR controller)

From a managerial point of view, the HR department is perceived as a service oriented function. According to the area manager, HR practitioners are always listening to the managers and respond to their questions in a professional manner. However, managers require from the HR function to get also involved in process implementation and perform more traditional HR tasks. For instance, in the elderly care sector managers need more practical help with the processes of recruitment and rehabilitation. They believe that the HR function can make a greater contribution in their sector by being involved in interviewing processes and participant selection. Also, in the area of rehabilitation, managers believe that HR professionals have the skills and the knowledge required to deal with such incidence.

“We perceive the function as service oriented and that is something that we like in our HR, they listen to us and we always have so many questions in the stuff area some we come with some questions that are “silly” but they take us seriously, look back at the laws and come back to us, for them there are not stupid questions” and that is good service oriented policy” (Area manager)

“As an area manager, me and my managers in the houses. We are many managers and we all need support from the HR and we need more operative help, to do things, because now there is a lot of consultancy we ask for something and we get consultancy support but we need more operative help. I understand that the model in HR has change and that they have to work more strategic, and I believe that we need strategic HR, but I also do strategic work, we still need operative and administrative support it is not possible everyone to work strategic”. (Area manager)

6. Discussion

Although the study is based on a single case with a small number of participants, the findings provide a detailed picture of the HR roles undertaken by HR professionals after a reformation process. Firstly, it is obvious that there is an ongoing evolution on HR roles (Truss, 2008). HR professionals express a positive attitude towards the latest changes and confirmed that they

are prepared to make even more changes if that is necessary. Moreover, the nature of the particular reformation does not have the character of an episodic change, where it is characterised by discontinuity (Weick & Quinn, 1999). On the contrary, changes inside the function have a more evolutionary character. In the case study the roles of HR professionals have not completely changed, rather than evolve. HR professionals are still remaining counselors, but their roles have been evolved with the essence that are becoming more operational and strategic.

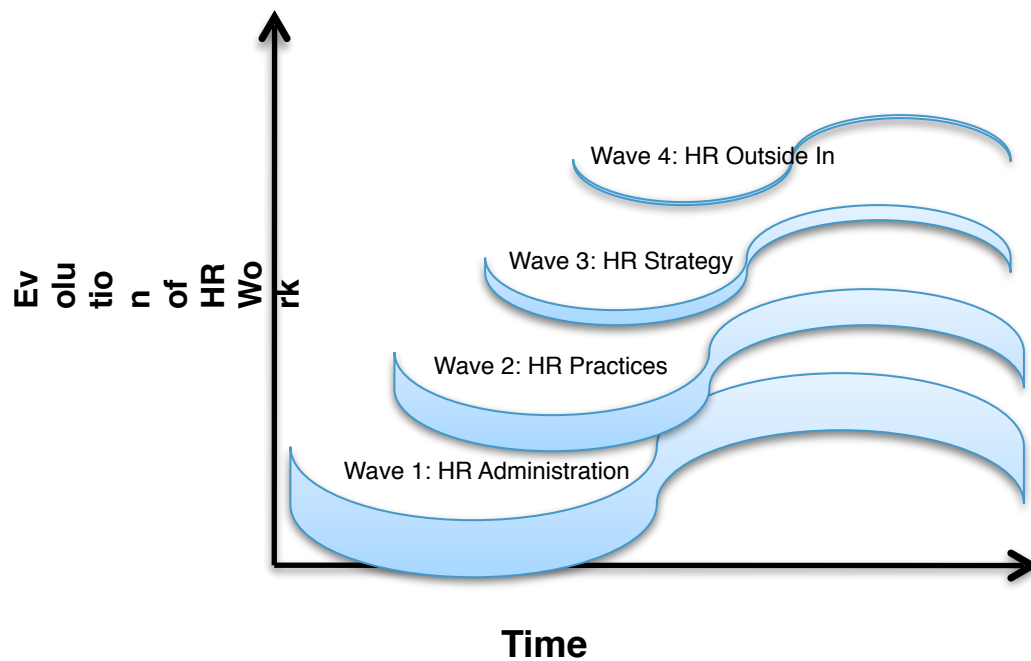
Taking into consideration the results of the study, it seems that the purpose of the transformation was twofold. To begin with, the department initiated the reformation in an attempt to offer better and more expertise support to the managers. Secondly it is evident that in their new concept of transformation HR professionals are trying to incorporate new trends in HR and learning new ways on how to become more competent and make a better contribution to their stakeholders.

To begin with, the role of HR specialists has been altered in a way that presents many common characteristics with the functional expert's role defined by Ulrich and Brockbank (2005). According to the authors the range of HR work continues to grow and HR professionals find it impossible to keep themselves updated with research and theory within all HR areas. Therefore, functional experts have to choose a specific domain and constantly renew their knowledge by reading relevant literature and attending conferences related to this domain. Functional experts are usually located into a consulting services organisation, as to offer solutions to the business. They are seen as practice leaders, who have deep knowledge in their area of expertise and they are working closely with line managers offering operational support, improving quality and adding value to the different groups of shareholders. Similar to Ulrich's and Brockbank's (2005) conceptualisation about the role of functional expert, HR Specialists in the case study are performing more as experts and process leaders as their tasks have been narrowed and focused towards certain HR processes.

Moreover, all the interviewees agreed that the function has taken a more strategic role after the transformation. HR professionals highlighted the importance of strategy and gave examples of both reactive and proactive strategic approaches in their work, as well as implementing strategies with a long term focus. HR professionals seem determined to strengthen their

strategic position by trying to form a relation of partnership with line managers and have a more active involvement during the meetings with the executive committee. Their perceptions about strategy seem to be close enough with the framework of Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) regarding the role of strategic partner. HR professionals acknowledge that in order to make a better contribution and add value to the organisation they have to work in partnership with line managers and help them to reach their goals by designing and implementing strategies useful for the organisational future. However, line managers do not seem to share the same views with HR professionals. Even if they believe that strategic HR is important, they argue that the function can make a better contribution and help them more by performing more administrative and transactional tasks. Therefore, the adoption of a more strategic role is described by HR professionals as a “fight”.

While comparing the results of the data with the competency domains identified by Ulrich, Younger and Brockbank (2012) it is clear that HR professionals are trying to develop their competence area as “credible activists”, “capability builders” and being “Technology Proponents”. In particular, during their interviews HR professionals mention that they are trying to build relationships of trust with the managers and become their trusted advisors. In order to achieve that they devote time and energy in trying to get to know the managers better, listen to their problems and understand their situation. Their competence domain as credible activists is also confirmed by the area manager, as she describes HR employees as “service oriented” professionals. Additionally, HR professionals can be seen as capability builders, since they try to develop organisational capabilities through the managers. For instance, they try to create leaders with the required skills and competencies in order to manage their employees. Lastly, the function can be perceived as technology proponent due to their developed IT platform of computer systems. Within the department there is an “HR Team” specialised in supporting the managers with IT systems and administrative tasks.



Looking back at the figure, presenting the evolution of HR work in waves and compare it with the research findings. It seems that the HR function is in a phase of transition moving up from the second wave towards the third wave. In the second stage of the evolutionary scale HR professionals are focusing on innovative and integrating HR practices (Ulrich et al. 2012). Similar to the case study, HR professionals are focusing on finding new ways that will help them to develop more capable leaders, both line managers and general managers. Furthermore, the HR function has increased its operational role, new policies were developed based on the demands made by line managers. In particular, policies regarding recruitment, wages, working environment and rehabilitation were identified as important to all the sectors. As a result HR professionals increased the counselling services in those areas. Moving forward to the third stage, the priority is given to HR strategies, used to deliver strategic promises (Ulrich et al. 2012). In the study the HR function is striving to get more involved in strategic decisions and make a contribution in the organisational culture and leadership.

Finally, looking up at the fourth wave it is evident that the HR function in the case study has not yet reached the fourth level of the evolutionary process. Even if HR professionals present some competency areas relevant to the fourth approach, these competency areas are emphasise in a particular group of stakeholders, the managers. On the contrary, according to Ulrich, Younger and Brockbank (2012) an approach towards “outside in” involves different stakeholders, such as customers, investors, communities, regulators, partners, line managers and employees. HR professionals are being challenged to expand their focus beyond the HR department and take into consideration various stakeholders, which implicitly or explicitly influence the business. Aiming to a better business performance HR practitioners are called to enlarge their scope beyond strategy and beyond the business partnership experiencing the business as a whole and involving both external and internal collaborators.

Taking into consideration the results of the study, the “outside in” approach differs from the present HR line of work followed by the HR participants in the case study. Although, they are trying to respond to stakeholder’s expectations their main focus is the managerial group, affecting the rest of stakeholders at a minimal level. In addition, for a public organisation it may be difficult to follow this type of approach, since HR professionals within the public sector have a broader range of stakeholders and professional norms (Harris 2004).

6.1 A focus towards specialisation

The transformation of the HR function had as a result to upgrade HR professionals in their competency domain and to divide the work into specialised areas. Three HR roles were emerged, the HR controller, the HR generalist and the HR specialist. The role of the HR controllers is to get involved with more strategic decisions, HR generalist are supporting the line managers, while HR specialists have a more expertise role in supporting the managers with specific processes. While before the transformation HR professional were working as HR generalists now their work became more focused and organised. This clear segmentation of works, and the delivery of expertise knowledge perhaps may be beneficial for a large and complex organisation like the one investigated in the study. Moreover, as mentioned before the area of HR is getting broader and the emergence of new competencies create the need for

more specialised staff (Ulrich and Brockbank 2005). This view is also supported in a study by Crouse, Doyle & Young (2011), according to the researchers the field of HRM is growing in complexity and the need for specialists is getting prominent. Large organisations are employing specialists to support generalists at the head of the HR function. Nevertheless, the need for HR specialists does not necessarily mean a decline in the profession of HR generalists, since HR professionals require a broad perspective, in order to contribute in the senior management team.

Furthermore, as identified in the study of Kramar & Steane (2012) role segmentation will be followed by the emergence of different HR careers. In large organisations the role of the functional expert, supporting line managers it will be undertaken by junior employees, while more experienced employees will be more involved in organisational strategic decisions. Similar to the study the HR specialist roles are being performed by younger and less experienced employees, while the HR controllers in the department are having more years of experience working as HR professionals.

7. Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that recent literature in HR roles and competencies is moving forward, seeing the organisation from a broader perspective and incorporating different groups of stakeholders. Comparing this view to a real case in public sector organisation, it appears that the reality differs from the literature. However, there are substantial evidence showing that HR roles and competencies within public organisations will continue to develop gradually. Future views show that HR professionals will be involved in operational procedures, providing counseling to line managers, but it is also expected that they will play a more strategic role. Furthermore, the role of functional specialists would be increased in large public organisations. Such organisations will use both HR generalists and HR specialists, in order to encompass both a broader business knowledge and a more specialised view regarding HR

policies. Moreover, the increasing role of HR specialists implies a trend towards specialisation. It is possible that an approach towards specialisation and a clear division of roles may help public sector organisations to climb faster the different stages of HR evolution and follow new trends in HR work. In order to confirm that more research is needed on how functional specialisation and role segmentation of the HR function can benefit large organisations. In addition, an approach towards specialisation will also raise concerns regarding the roles of HR professionals and the need for a broader knowledge. This problematisation raise questions like would it be possible for HR professionals to work both as generalists and specialists? What about role conflicts? These issues need to be explored by further research.

Finally, the main limitation of the study is that the research findings are not generalisable, since they are based on a single case study with a limited number of participants. Another implication is that the period from when the change was initiated (September 2014) until the interviews (May 2015) was quite short. The changes were mainly noticeable to the main parts involved like HR professionals and line managers and less noticeable to other stakeholders like employees and trade unions, consequently the possibility of involving participants from different groups of stakeholders was weak.

8. Appendix 1

Questions for HR Professionals

1. Can you give me some general information about the change in the department?
2. What kind of work tasks you were performing before the reorganisation and what kind of work tasks you perform now?
3. Mention identified strengths and weaknesses of the present HR structure in comparison to the previous one.
4. How HR roles changed, in regard to Strategic, Operational and Administrative tasks?
5. What are the main differences between the roles of HR controller, HR generalist and HR specialist ?
6. What kind of competences HR professionals need to develop with the present structure?
(Knowledge, abilities, special skills)
7. How the organisation delivers value to the different business units?
8. What kind of assistance, ask the line managers for?
9. What kind of services do you provide to line managers?

16. What are the main and overall objectives of this HR-transformation?
17. In what way are the HR employees collaborate with the line managers?
18. How has the internal communication changed since the transformation?
19. What is your opinion, has the HR-transformation until today resulted in a more efficient HR work?
20. Thoughts on the future

Questions for the area manager

1. What are your perceptions of the HR department performance before and after the reorganisation? Compare the effectiveness of HR services before and after the change, mention some strengths and weaknesses.
2. What kind of services does the HR department provide to you?
3. How the HR department can support better your institution (Schools, Elderly care, etc.)?
4. What kind of competences HR professionals should develop, in order to provide better service to your institution?
5. In what way HR professionals can provide additional support through strategic involvement?
6. With what kind of tasks you need additional support with (administrative, operational)?
7. In what way do you collaborate with HR professionals?
8. Are you aware on how you can reach help from the HR department?

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