"IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO REDUCE HR WORK TO JUST BEING A SIDE FUNCTION IN ORGANISATIONS"

A qualitative study about HR managers work with employee well-being and reconciliation concerning demands from line-managers and employees

Paula Salman

Abstract

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Purpose: The aim of this study is to investigate and analyze the individual experience of HR managers, in their work with employee well-being, reconciliation with demands and maintain their professional status.

Theory: The theoretical framework used for this study includes concepts borrowed from the theory of professions by Abbott (1988) namely: Client differentiation, Abstract knowledge and Internal stratification.

Method: This is a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. The data is gathered from eleven HR managers working in different sectors and organizations. The data analysis was based on thematic coding.

Result: The analysis demonstrate that HR managers reconcile demands from employees with those from line-managers by having two strategies, choosing who they work for and what type of work they do. They experienced it as challenging to claim their place in their organizations and these strategies are a way for them to maintain status. Further, the study demonstrates that HR managers' daily work with employee wellbeing is about working strategically and with decision making at the top-level of the organization. It is also about taking the employer perspective and working as a direct support to line-managers and thereby distancing themselves from employees. These strategies are experienced as important for HR managers in order to make a difference in the area of wellbeing and being acknowledged as an obvious part in the organization.

Foreword

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1. Introduction

The Swedish working authority implemented a new set of regulation in 2016.04.16 that states that employers and managers need to be working more proactively and systematic in order to improve the working environment and employee's well-being in Sweden (Middleman 2015:4). Employees that feel satisfied and healthy at their work increases their effort and have a significant impact on the overall performance and survival of organizations. It is therefore an important consideration for organizations to be working actively with employee's well-being (Grant & Christianson et. al 2007). Employee well-being can be defined as the quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work (ibid). Research have found that managerial practices in employee well-being often results in trade off, where one aspect is improved for the employee while undermining another. Although it is beneficial and important for organization to work with employee health, according to researchers, it is still a complex task to manage (ibid).

HR-managers take part in working with employee's health, as one of their main tasks. The practice of human resource has its ground in a humanistic approach and to begin with the focus was on the working environment for the employees. Today the function of HR has transformed. The HR transformation has led HR professions to work more strategically and focusing on the efficiency in the company (Boglind et al. 2003). By emphasizing the strategical work for human resource, this mean to connect the human resource managerial practice with the organizational economic value such as efficiency focus and productivity in organizations (Beer & Brewster et al. 2015).

The idea of the HR transformation was to connect human resource with management and making the function of HR in to a high valued business partner. This was a way for HR professions to be legitimatized by the board and the managers in order to gain higher status as well as receive acknowledgement in the organization (Boglind et al 2003). With focus on efficiency and productivity human resource managerial practice can therefore neglected the employee perspective and their well-being in the organization (Beer & Brewster et al. 2015).

The legislation (Middleman 2015:4) places an importance of working with employee well-being. At the same time the working with employee health is a complex task. Based on the efficiency focus in human resource strategic work and the case of employee well-being, this could cause an opposition between the managers and employees in their demand on how the practice should be performed by human resource managers.

As human resource manager, one of their role is to support managers as well as the employees (Liljegren 2016). Boglind et al (2003) states that the risks with this transformation of the HR function is that the humanistic approach will be set aside due to the increased strategic work. This raises the reflection if human resource managers are losing their relationship with their employees and contact with the soft values (Beer & Brewster et al. 2015) in order to maintain their status in organizations. The aim of this study is therefore to further investigate and analyze the individual experience of HR managers, in their work with employee well-being, and how they reconcile with these demands and maintain their professional status.

In order to contribute to the human resource management research, this study uses theory of professions by Abbott (1988) as the theoretical framework with focus on three strategies for professions to maintain their status. Those strategies are use of abstract knowledge, client differentiation and internal stratification. Since this study aims to capture the HR managers individual experience, this study uses a qualitative methodological approach by interviewing 11 HR managers from different sectors and organizations.

1.1 Research questions

This study aims to answer following research questions in the area of employee well- being:

1. How do HR managers describe the demands and their ways of handling this in their daily work?
2. How do HR managers describe their strategies for professional status and claiming jurisdiction?
3. What is the implication for HR managers, board members and employees in the struggle of HR professional status?

1.2. Disposition

This study begins by demonstrating previous research on the topic of human resource managerial practice. Further three themes have been identified in the previous research, those are 1) The role of managerial consultants, 2) Distancing from employees and 3) Issues to do with the status of HR profession.

Secondly the theoretical framework will be presented. The theoretical framework used in this study is the professionalization theory by Abbott (1988). Three strategies and concepts have been identified and those are, abstract knowledge, client differentiation and internal stratification.

Further section will demonstrate the methodological approach used in this study. This is a qualitative study and it will provide description of what study sample is used, the sampling method, collection of data and how the analysis was conducted. Lastly ethical considerations will be presented.

After the methodological section this study will present the empirical findings together with the analysis from the theoretical framework. This section will present the data by illustrating quotes and further connect this to the concepts of professionalization theory by Abbott (1988) in the analysis.

Following part will demonstrate the discussion. Based on previous research and empirical findings this study presents the theoretical contribution in the discussion. Further the discussion present practical implementation for HR profession and limitations and further research. Lastly the conclusion will be presented based on the empirical findings, analysis and the discussion.

2. Previous research

Following section will present the previous research divided in different themes. I have chosen these studies in order to highlight the HR professions and their identification with their role and how this affect their relationship with their employees and the HR professions as whole. The three themes that I have identified in these studies are 1) The role of managerial consultant, 2) Distancing from employees and 3) Issues to do with the status of HR profession. The chosen studies have displayed the difficulties for HR managers in reconciling with practices concerning employee well- being while maintaining the status of the profession. Overall the work of supporting line-managers seems to be dominate, because of the focus on profitability and effectiveness, rather than prioritizing working directly with employee well-being and creating relationship with their employees.

2.1. The role of managerial consultant

Based on the theoretical framework of professionalism, Wright (2008) studied HR managers' interpretation of their roles and how this results in their professional identity. In background of the HR transformation, where HR managers have gone from being welfare officers to gaining a strategic position in the business. Wright's (2008) findings showed that HR managers identified themselves as internal consultant's due to the fact that they treat their line-managers as clients. In their role as an internal consultant they emphasize the importance of their influence on the line-managers in order to establish HR policies in the first place. However, in identifying as internal consultants this can created problematic situations for the HR managers in cases where they needed to support employees as well. Another study by Turner & Huemann et. al 2008 identified that human resource managers had two roles to fulfill: being a support role to the line-managers and a support role to their employees by caring for their wellbeing.

Turner & Huemann et. al 2008 showed that in larger project orientated organization, the line-managerial support role dominated HR-managers work, leaving the role of being a support for employee well-being behind. The focus on profit and responding to client demands for human resource managers took the focus from employee's well-being. It was also a matter of efficiency for the organization and therefore, the well-being was not prioritized.

In order to understand the background of human resource managers leaning towards being line-managerial support it is further interesting to highlight line-managers perception of HR work. Whittaker & Marchington (2003) studied line managers' perception of HR managers' responsibilities. From the study, Whittaker & Marchington (2003) identified that the line managers had received more operative responsibilities concerning employee activities such as the day to day activities. The line managers thought this was a positive development. For the line managers, it was crucial to work with HR professionals who worked as partners with them in order for them to receive support and advice for their actions as managers. The line-managers expressed that the function of HR was important for them due to the fact that their function added the value of employees in the organizational culture and making the line-mangers not only focusing on hard values such as efficiency and business.

However, even if this development is perceived as positive for the line managers, Whittaker & Marchington (2003) highlighted the risks with this development for the HR profession. Since practices concerning operative HR has been delegated on the line managers in order for the HR to be working more strategically this in turn puts the line managers in difficulties if they don't have the knowledge and competence that it takes to perform HR practices. If the line managers and HR department should work more as partners, HR department should have more specialists in order to help the line managers with specific operative issues. Because the risks will be that if line managers are expecting to do all the operative work that they won't manage it since HR might be the ones with the competence in it.

2.2. Distancing from employees

As previous section highlighted the development for HR managers towards being internal consultant and how this can affect the practice of employee well-being and the perception from the line managers, it is further important to emphasize how this affect the relationship between HR managers and employees. De Gama et al (2012) studied the concept of human resource management and what this meant to HR professionals in Canada. The study referred to previous literature that stated that HR professionals are encouraged to have a distanced relationship towards their employees and are therefore dehumanized in their view of employee relationships in order to work towards a human resource business partner instead. De Gama et al (2012) study showed that there was an awareness of the dehumanized relationship towards employees by the interviewed HR practitioners. This action from the HR practitioners was displayed as being neutral towards the employees, not creating a further relationship with them. This was a concise act from the HR practitioner's due to focusing on fulfilling the company`s efficiency by staying neutral towards their employees. These findings displayed HR managers difficulties in implementing practices concerning the employees interest due to the fact that HR professionals need to be neutral and have a dehumanized relationship with their employees.

By being neutral towards employees this could reduce the risks for HR managers of having problematic situations when dealing with line-managerial support. However, in cases where HR managers need to solve conflict at work and engaging in ethical behaviors concerning the employees this could lead to difficulties in managing those situation (Van Gramberg & Teicher (2006). In the study by Van Gramberg & Teicher (2006) HR managers displayed difficulties in adjusting to the role as a strategic business partner but at the same time work as an employee's champion (Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2006). The problematic situation was displayed when HR managers needed to stay neutral to their employees but at the same time taking on the role of being able to solve conflicts at work concerning the employees.

From these studies, one can identify that the managerial consultant role makes the HR managers distance themselves from employees in order to work for the efficiency of the company. However, there is an identified problem in the fact that human resource managers are still expected to engage in conflict at work between line-managers and the employees and in those cases, being a line-managerial support puts them in a problematic situation.

2.3. Issues to do with the status of HR professions

The identification of internal consultant and dominating managerial support role have shown the dilemma of having a close relationship with their employees. Following studies will describe the issues with maintaining status of HR profession, based on the HR professions identification and role in organizations.

The lack of feeling solidarity for HR managers as a profession is showed in a study conducted by Ulfsdotter Eriksson (2017). In this study Ulfsdotter Eriksson (2017) showed how HR professional's valued global HRM standards and what they perceived as important for their work and profession. Based on the theory of professions Ulfsdotter Eriksson (2017) explored if the implementation of HRM standards could strengthen the human resource status as a profession, since implementing standards in organizations could be beneficial for occupations with a weaker status as a profession.

Ulfdotter Eriksson (2017) findings showed that the implementation of HRM standards in organizations was perceived as important for HR professions and lead them to be more recognized and enhanced their status. These standards were able to give HR professions more of an expert role in line with the business in order to perform the HR practices. One of the standards concerning health and security had been an important implementation of highlighting the HR work of environmental issues and employee's health. The respondents believed that implementing HRM standards leads them to raise their professionalism and contribute to the professional status for HR. The HRM standards allowed the HR profession to stand on a common ground and unify themselves.

However, the findings also showed that there is a problem for the organizations to realize the importance of HR professions and the importance of these standards due to lack of prioritizing this in the organization. This further leads to the challenges for HR professions to maintain their status.

Another study done by Wylie, Sturdy & Wright (2014) highlight the problem for HR professions gaining credibility in British organization and having more status. The study explores if the change towards taking on a strategical role and managerial support role by the HR profession have reduced the ambiguity of receiving more status within the profession. Wylie, Sturdy & Wright (2014) central aspect has been the that HR professions have taking on a change agency role, where they establish themselves in strategical positions in order to create changes in organization and thereby receiving and gaining more status. By looking outside of the HR professions context, the study aimed to understand the characteristics of other professions working with similar managerial consulting and change agency in order to apply this to the HR profession.

Wylie, Sturdy & Wright (2014) suggested that the change agency role that HR have based on analyzing other professions, are not necessary improving the status and the impact of HR in organizations. The findings show that being a change agent is about demonstrating how the profession can create and add value to the organization. In order for the profession to do so they take up on a strategical change agency role and distancing themselves from traditional HR responsibilities, as previous studies (Whittaker & Marchington 2003) has shown as well. This further creates challenges for the HR professions such as establishing credibility among clients and other relationships in the organizations in order for them to add value which leaves the HR managers still struggling with their status and acknowledgement.

2.4. Summary

The role of being managerial consultant for HR managers are displayed in Wrights (2008) findings were HR managers identified themselves as internal consultants towards their line managers. This identification is important to them in order for the HR managers to being able to establish HR policies in the organization. This identification of being firstly the support for the managers have as well displayed difficulties for the HR managers to support the employees and their well-being in the workplace due to focus other prioritization in the organization and efficiency focus (Turner & Huemann et. al 2008). This development is as well confirmed from line-managers and was perceived as positive, but Marchington (2003) highlight the risk of this development. The risk could be that HR profession might lose their status since the line-managers does not always have the competence for the operative tasks as the HR profession have.

In background of this identification of being managerial support this leads to HR managers distancing from the employees in organization. As De Gama et al (2012) display that distancing from employees is an action where HR managers stayed neutral and does not engaged in a relationship with their employees. This strategy was used by them in order to focus on fulfilling the efficiency of the company. However, as Van Gramberg & Teicher (2006) display, HR mangers perceived this approach of being neutral as a role conflict in situations where they were expected to be engaged in conflicts between the line-managers and their employees. Further, Ulfdotter Eriksson 2017 and Wylie, Sturdy & Wright (2014) displayed the challenges for HR professions to claim status in the organization and having a solidarity within the profession.

In conclusion, these studies have displayed the difficulties in the role of HR manager, there is a need for the profession to claim status and solidarity within the profession. It is also demonstrated that the managerial support role has positive effects on the organization but it can also put HR managers in role conflicts concerning the well-being of employees. These previous studies demonstrate extensive research on this topic but without the individual experience of HR managers in a Swedish context. This study is therefore relevant in order to research further on the individual experience of HR managers in reconciling demands in working with employee well-being and describing their strategies for professional status in the organization.

3. Theoretical framework

The theory of professions has its aim to explain when we use experts and how we structure and control expertise in our society. Professions are impacted by how society structure expertise and this model have its aim to explain professions status and positions (Abbott 1988). By using this theory this helps me to explain the HR managers own experience and take part of the expressed strategies that the HR managers use in order to achieve their status as a profession. The theory is further useful for analyzing and describing the strategies that HR managers use when they consider employee well-being and in order for them to use their knowledge. On one hand professions have their aim to provide their service and gain trust but on the other use their knowledge and power in order to gain control and monopoly over their working tasks (Evetts 2003). Therefore, this theoretical framework will be presented here as a tool to further analyze how HR managers deal with this regarding the practice of employee well-being where they need to consider both their manager and the employee demand.

3.1. The theory of profession

Abbott (1988) main focus in the theory of professions is to highlight in what way the society structures and controls expertise and how we use experts. In his own words Abbott (1988) explains professions as exclusive groups of individuals that applies abstract knowledge in particular cases. In line with Abbott (1988) Brante (2009:19) defines professions as organized, relatively autonomous carriers and intermediaries of abstract knowledge that gives them the ability to perform actions that is perceived valuable by the society. Professions are affected by the forces in our society in how their work is perceived. Professionals are vulnerable to external and internal forces within the workplace such as technology or internal changes were other professions that can influence their position. This is one of the base in Abbott (1988) theory that professions are constantly engaging in inter-profession rivalry where each profession need to claim their position in order to maintain the status. Therefore, the term professions cannot be definitively explained since they are impacted by our society that is constantly changing (Abbott 1988).

In order for professionals to do their work and perform it as they see it fit, they need to be legitimized. Abbott (1988) defines claim for jurisdiction as a way for the professionals to be recognized and legitimated in order to perform their work. Jurisdictional claims can be done in the legal system, public opinion and the arenas of the working place. To claim jurisdiction, it is a process where professions pursue, develop and maintain the closure of the occupational group in order to achieve status, this is what Evetts (2013) defines as the professionalization process. In order for the professions to claim jurisdiction, it is done by negotiations to divide the working tasks. In the negotiation processes, it is important to display their competence in order to be recognized and not replaced (Abbott 1988). As Evetts (2013) suggests, in the professionalization process the profession use their professionalism that include the quality of their service and knowledge in the best interests of both customers and the practitioners. In return, some professionals are rewarded with authority, privileged reward and high status (Evetts 2011).

For professions claiming jurisdiction in the legal system, the public arena and the arena of workplace can be complicated and can generate contradiction between each other. In a working place, the division of work is often pre-understood due to the expectations and obvious tasks that needs to be done. This makes the claim of jurisdiction in the working area harder to see and realize since it concerns the professionals taking up on specific working tasks and rejecting others that does not belong to the profession. Therefore, the reality of the division in the working tasks might look different then first expected (Abbott 1988).

When it comes to HR, Brante (2009) refers to human resource professions as semi professions, meaning that these have lower autonomy in comparison to the classic professions and to politics which makes them more controlled. This definition together with the HR transformation highlight the vulnerability HR managers might have in claiming jurisdiction and monopoly over working tasks. Therefore, it might be harder for them to claim their jurisdiction especially in the case of employee wellbeing because there are several jurisdictional areas they need to reconcile with in order for them to be recognized.

The focus in this study will be the HR managers experience of the current strategies they use to claim jurisdiction in the working place. I am interested in the HR managers daily work in organizations when working with employee wellbeing, therefore I will not focus on the HR managers professionalization process over time. In the following section I will present the theory of strategies and factors which can explain how professions maintain their status.

3.1.1. Abstract knowledge

The HR transformation have led the HR managers towards using more strategically competence and knowledge, working away from direct operative or administrative work (Boglind et al. 2003). In the light of this transformation it is further relevant to define from the theory how knowledge is valued and explained.

In order for professional to stand up to the external and internal forces and still be recognized, knowledge is one of the currencies of competition (Abbott 1988). McDonald (1999) refers to social closure that is explained when a dominant group have maintained their position in an area. However, the elite group does not always maintain the monopoly of truth and knowledge (McDonald 1999). According to this theory, professions are therefore in an inter-professional competition to claim jurisdiction and maintain status and their position. Abbott (1988) suggest that in order to claim jurisdiction and aim for social closure (McDonald 1999) professionals use their abstract knowledge in order to lower the competitiveness from other professions. Abbott (1988) claims that the ability for professions to maintain their jurisdiction lies in the power of academic knowledge since it is the origin for professions to being able to develop abstract knowledge.

As an example, Abbott (1988) illustrate the topic of alcoholism. In order to solve the problem, there are several approaches from different professions such as doctors or psychologists. With this example Abbott (1988) illustrate how professions need to use their competence in order to be have more credibility and claim jurisdiction from the public, in those cases abstract knowledge is then used to claim and classify a problem and then finding an effective solution for it.

As Brante (2009) claims that the abstract knowledge that professions have aims at creating and monopolizing new problem areas the professions status and prestige are based on their knowledge and in turn the knowledge is cultural based and always temporary. Therefore, the use of abstract knowledge makes professions not only legitimized but also vulnerable towards other professions since their abstract knowledge can be used as well to solve a problem but it depends on what knowledge is valued the most (Abbott 1988).

Additionally, professions need to balance their abstract knowledge because too much of it can as well weakened the jurisdiction and too little as well (Abbott 1988). Profession can adopt two strategies in order to maintain their status regarding the power of knowledge. The two strategies are growth and replacement of knowledge. Growth of knowledge means that professionals adds new knowledge by further education in order to meet the demands. Replacement of knowledge is to replace the current knowledge a profession has on their working tasks and replace it with new knowledge (Abbott 1988).

The force of knowledge and the professions strategies to maintain their status have contradictory effect on professionals. The growth of knowledge results in division within the professions, this means to create specializations in order to continue having the amount of knowledge they need to have. Replacement on the other hand pressures the profession towards further abstraction, since abstraction of knowledge will last longer than knowledge of specific facts and methods that risks being replaced. This can be resolved in internal adjustment, such as internal differentiation. Abbott (1988) explains internal differentiation as the division within the professions that can affect the professions position and status overall in the system. In the following section I will further explain how Abbott (1988) defines these terms.

3.1.2. Client differentiation

Professions can change the level of abstract knowledge but they can change in position internally as well. One way for professions to change within themselves is by having different clients as Abbott (1988) calls it client differentiation. It is a way of working with different clients depending on their specialization. This can change the hierarchy within the profession since some clients have more of a high status and can meet the specialized knowledge the profession has. Professionals that work with clients that have more status, receive more status and acknowledgement, therefore this could be one of the reason for this differentiation. Client differentiation can also occur in a workplace without the public knowing about this (Abbott 1988).

In the work of clients that have higher status in the organization, Abbott (19988) suggest that it might be easier for professionals to work with those clients because they can understand each other better. Those clients often recognize the problem themselves and creates a mutual base for solving the problem. This relationship can enhance the professions status in a working place. On the other hand, Abbott (1988) highlights that the problem with client differentiation is that when professions specialize in serving one of the clients, they become vulnerable towards the fate of their clients that is affected outside of the system.

Abbott (1988) further explains that differentiation in clients also affects the inter-professional relationship where professionals often specializes in serving one of the clients. The consequence of this is division *within* the professions. In this study, the clients that HR managers need to consider in their daily work are the employees and the managers since their tasks is to support them both.

3.1.3 Internal stratification

Internal stratification is explained by Abbott (1988) as tasks differentiation within the profession. The consequence of this differentiation is that professions tend to remove themselves from the working tasks that they claimed public jurisdiction, this process Abbott (1988) calls professional regression. Meaning that professions regress from their first claimed jurisdiction towards other tasks in the organizations that strengthen their position and status. The reason for this is because of the internal status ranking in order for professions to maintain status and their position in the organization. Abbott (1988) suggest that those professions that receive the higher status in the organization are those that who work in purely professional environment, where professionals work directly with other professions in the organization.

Abbott (1988) gives an example of academics that do not work with clients at all but still receive the highest status based on their abstract knowledge. Those professions that work directly with clients receive lower status because their professional knowledge must be compromised with client reality (Abbott 1988). However, the paradox in the internal stratification is the fact that professionals admire consultants and academics that work only with the knowledge but the public admires professionals that work directly with clients. The consequence of this can be the professional regression towards tasks that give the most status.

In conclusion, internal stratification is explained as task specialization within the professions and when the professions go from the public claims working tasks to others in order to maintain their position and enhance their status by using their competence and abstract knowledge more (Abbott 1988). These concepts will be used to analyze the HR-managers strategies as relating to others within their own profession, in a situation where their role when it comes to employee wellbeing is unclear.

3.2. Summary

In this study, the main theoretical concepts I have chosen to use are jurisdictional claim by the use of abstract knowledge, client differentiation and internal stratification. Professions need to claim jurisdiction in their workplace in order to be legitimized and they do that by using different strategies as presented above. There are no certainties for professions to maintain their status (Brante 2009), the status of professions is related to the cultural perception in our society and the value of knowledge is constantly changing.

Professionals aim at using their abstract knowledge in order to gain status and jurisdictional claim in their workplace. Abbott (1988) defines abstract knowledge as the power in having the latest academicals knowledge. By using this knowledge, it lowers the competitiveness from other professions. Professions receive higher status the more the profession can use their abstract knowledge and working purely with their competence (Abbott (1988). This leads to professions using client differentiation as a strategy to work with high status clients in order for them to use their abstract knowledge. Another strategy that is connected to client differentiation is that profession can change tasks within the profession in order to gain more status. Internal stratification is explained as tasks specialization within the professions where it is divided within the professions by some working with low status working tasks and other with higher status. In conclusion, these conceptions are all strategies for professions to claim jurisdiction and status in their workplace.

4. Method

Based on my research questions that aims to discover the individual experience of HR managers this study is done by a qualitative method approach. Following section demonstrate the study sample used in this study, the sampling method and collection of the data, the analysis process and lastly the ethical consideration for this study. By describing each category in detail, I hope to contribute to enhance the transparency (Bryman & Bell 2017) for this study.

4.1. Study sample

Based on my research questions I have chosen to select HR managers that work with employee's well-being in both the public and private sector. My sampling therefore consists of homogeneous purposeful sampling (Bryman & Bell 2017). It is purposeful by choosing HR managers from different companies both in private and public sector which will display variation but their work as HR managers are overall homogeneous by being HR managers that works with employee well-being. In line with my research question I chose to interview only HR managers and not their line managers or employees, since I am specifically interested of the HR managers strategies and experience in order to highlight their reality. Therefore, by doing a qualitative study I have gained a broad but specific description of the phenomena I am interested in (Hedin 2011). This strategy of using HR managers from different organizations enhances the credibility (Bryman 2002) in my empirical findings because of the different perspective that HR managers contribute with.

Regarding the number of interviews Bryman & Bell (2017) recommends around 20 on the other hand Hedin (2011) states that the usual is around ten to 20. Since there are no general guidelines on how big the sample should be in the qualitative method approach, this could be a limitation in conducting the research. However, in this study I hope to reduce this limitation by not aiming to generalizing since this is a qualitative study and instead aiming for data saturation. I considered the fact that I am using a qualitative approach were my aim with this study lies in investigating and analyzing the HR managers individual experience and not in the quantities of HR managers.

By taking these factors in consideration I stopped the data sampling when I reached data saturation (Bryman & Bell 2017). I reached data saturation when I realized that the respondents repeated the answers similar to previous interviewees. The number of interviews was eleven HR managers from different sectors and organizations. The HR managers experience varied between ten to 19 years in the profession. All of the respondents were women. Six of the respondent worked in the public sector and five of them in the private sector. Eight of the HR managers worked together in a team with HR consultants, administrators and specialists and three of them worked alone in the HR department.

Following table 1illustrates the HR managers in terms of years in experience, sector and size of the HR department. HRM stands for human resource managers.

Table 1. Description of the participated HR managers.

	HRM 1.	HRM 2.	HRM 3.	HRM 4.	HRM 5.	HRM 6.	HRM 7.	HRM 8.	HRM 9.	HRM 10.	HRM 11.
Sector	Public sector	Private sector	Private sector	Public sector	Public sector	Public sector	Private sector	Public sector	Private sector	Public sector	Private sector
Years in working within the HR profession	18 years	18 years	10 years	12 years	12 years	10 years	14 years	19 years	14 years	10 years	19 years
Size of the HR department	Working together with HR consultants	Working together with HR consultants	Only HR profession in the organization	Working together with a HR consultant	Working together with specialist, consultants and administrators	Working together with an HR administrator	Working together with specialist, consultants	Working together with other HR professions	Only HR profession in the organization	Only HR profession in the organization	Working together with HR consultants, administrators and specialists.

With this table I hope to contribute to enhance the transparency and authenticity for this study (Bryman & Bell 2017) By describing the participants in detail and numbering them and further showing how each quote is connected to each respondent in the empirical data.

4.2. Sampling method and data collection

The collection of my data was achieved by several sampling methods. By convenience sampling (Bryman & Bell 2017), snowball sampling as well as multistage sampling (Richie & Lewis 2003). The convenience sampling was based on those HR managers that I had access in my contact network. Further in interviewing HR managers they gave contact information to other HR managers that would be interested in participating in the study, this was the snowball sampling. Beyond this I used multistage sampling where my sample frame was LinkedIn. I searched for HR managers working with employee well-being and took contact with my request to participate in this study. This sampling method proved to be successful and I received the most notice of interest by this form of sampling. Concerning the limitation in the data sampling I am aware that convenience sampling might create a bias in the result because the respondent did know me. However, by combining several sampling methods and mainly using the multistage sampling I hoped to reduce the bias and limitation.

The data collection was conducted by semi structured in-depth interviews (Ritchie & Lewis 2003; Bryman & Bell 2017). By using this method, the interview has been flexible, allowing the respondent to structure their answers based on their perspective and what they choose to highlight as importance. The interview was semi structured in topics that was based on my aim of the study. The topics were background questions considering working life and education, strategies in working with employee's health, expectations and challenges in the workplace and future expectations (See appendix1.). The interviews were held at places that the respondent chose and they were around 40 minutes up to one hour. I gathered the data by using a recorder on my phone. Using semi structured interviews that was between 40 minutes up to one hour, contributes to transferability (Bryman & Bell 2017) in this study. The transferability in qualitative method refers to having a deep description from each respondents of their reality. This interview approach gave the possibility to receive broad description of the HR managers experience in order to answer my research questions. Further by showing the interview guide (See appendix 1) also demonstrate how this study contributes to transferability (Bryman & Bell 2017).

4.3. Data analysis

In this section, the analysis of the data will be described. By demonstrating in detail how my analysis was conducted I contribute to enhance the credibility (Bryman & Bell 2017) of this study. The credibility (Bryman & Bell 2017) is shown by the detailed description of how my coding of the data was connected to the theoretical concepts I chose to have.

The analyzing process has been conducted in three stages of coding, inspired by interpretive thematic coding from grounded theory (Bryman & Bell 2017). The first stage was to transcribe each interview based on the recording. I began by transcribing the first interview and at first, I could not compare this transcription with another one therefore my strategy was to mark words that the first respondent repeated. By the end of this transcription I made a summary in order to answer the question of what the respondent really talked about. I continued performing further interviews and by the second transcription I could compare this to the first one and highlight the common words that they repeated as table 2 illustrates.

In using this strategy by looking at the summary and transcription, the second stage was to look for common themes based on the words of the HR managers from the first stage as table 2 demonstrates. At this stage in the coding, it was important to stay close to the respondent's expressions, in an inductive manner, and then having a more abstract analytical deductive approach to the themes later on. The first identified themes as table 2 display are based on the direct words from the respondents. In order to have an overview at the terms used by the respondents I constructed a table where I wrote the quotes that represented the common terms and topics the HR managers mentioned. By doing so I enhanced the internal validity where there is a strong connection between the respondent's expression and the later theoretical conception that develops (Bryman & Bell 2017).

After several interviews, and in a third stage, I could take the coding towards a more abstract level by using my theoretical framework that would explain the themes that the respondents expressed. I chose to start coding more abstract after around five interviews in order to have a ground to build on from the beginning before I identified the theoretical themes.

At this stage, I used different concepts from the theory that I thought would explain the expressed strategies and added them in the table. I looked over the interviews that I had transcribed in the chart and started to add the quotes and themes under the theoretical concepts instead. I continued to interview and transcribing and summarizing in the same way and noticed that some concepts from the theory had not enough data therefore I chose to eliminate those concepts. At this point I was left with three main concepts instead, client differentiation, internal stratification and abstract knowledge. When it became clear in the analytical process which theoretical concepts explained does the HR managers perception I continued to code the interviews in the same way by first highlighting their repeated words and common themes and then summarize it. Since I had the theoretical concepts I added the highlighted quotes directly under the conception in the chart instead of adding it in the themes first.

The analysis of the data was a repeated and continual process where I mixed data analysis with gathering the data in order to follow the HR managers expressed experienced and avoiding preconceptions (Bryman & Bell 2017). Following table 2 illustrates an example on how I conducted my analysis. The first horizontal charts describe the words used based on the HR managers expressions. Following chart describes the identified theme based on the words of the HR managers and the last charts illustrates the theoretical concepts used to connect the data.

Table 2. Following table describes a simplified example on the principles I followed during the coding scheme.

Words based on the expression from the HR managers	Identified theme based on the words of HR managers	Theoretical concepts based on the used theoretical frame
Supporting the manager, gaining credibility from the manager and the board *List of quotes*	**Employer representative**	**Client differentiation,**
Proactive work, creating the processes, seeing the whole perspective of the organization *List of quotes*	**Strategical work**	**Abstract knowledge**
Specialization, need for operative work *List of quotes*	**Work division within the HR**	**Internal stratification**

Additionally, this analysis was based on my research questions. I did not focus on the differences of the strategies used by HR managers depending on where they worked or their gender. I aimed to analyze the HR managers individual experiences as the research questions highlights and not the contexts of the HR managers. This approach will be elaborated in implication for further studies.

4.4. Ethical considerations

The four main aspects according to Vetenskapsrådet (2002) was considered regarding the ethics in the research project. These aspects have all been considered by first sending out a request document to the respondents (See appendix 2.) The demand of information was considered by informing all of the HR managers of what my purpose is for this study, where this study will be published, who have access to it and that they can at any time choose to quit their participation and that the participation is voluntary. I have as well informed the participants on how I will use the result in the study in order to consider the demands of the use of result (Vetenskapsrådet 2002). In the case of confidentially requirement (Vetenskapsrådet 2002) I have considered this demand by informing the participants that I will not identify the interviewee in my study and they will be anonymous. I will leave out the city where the interview is done or the specific company that they work in, however I will name the sector, years of experience and size of the HR department since it might be of interest for the study in order to show transparency. Additionally, I received permission for recording the interview and I informed the participants that I would be the only one having access to the recording.

5. Empirical findings and analysis

In this section, the findings and analysis from the interviews will be presented, structured by the chosen concepts from the professions theory by Abbott (1988). Following text will provide the expressed strategies in how HR managers experience their role and status in the organization while working with employee well-being. Based on the empirical findings, this study identifies two main strategies used by HR managers in order to reconcile with the demands from employees and line-managers regarding working with employee well-being and maintaining their status. The strategies are as followed, who they work with; HR managers as employer representatives and what they work with; HR managers strategical work. Finally, the section will conclude the need for internal stratification within the HR profession due to the previous mentions strategies.

5.1. HR managers as employer representatives

Following text describes the expressed perception from the HR managers concerning who they work for in their daily work. The text is divided in subheadings based on the theoretical concept of client differentiations. The text demonstrates the client differentiation by the HR managers and more specifically how the client differentiation manifests in practice.

5.1.1. Client differentiation by HR managers

The HR managers highlighted the challenges for them to have a given place in the organization and not be treated as a side function. They therefore took on the role of being an employer representative. By taking on the employer representative perspective it was a way for them to claim their place. Following quote illustrate this challenge.

> Overall the biggest challenge for HR is to actually make sure that you get the given place you deserve [..] The reason for supporting the managers is that HR have to take more space, and not being only a support function. *HRM 6.*

Being employer representative means that the HR managers represent the organization they work for and they do that by supporting their line-managers. They took the perspective of the employer prior to the employees because then they are able to influence decisions at a higher level. The HR manager continued: *"It's more about being there as a partner and being able to affect the strategies and being more involved in the business." HRM 6.* In supporting their line-managers it is expressed that the HR managers needed to be able to create relationship with them and thereby gaining credibility. This is a way from the HR manager to gain trustworthiness from their line-manager so that HR processes are not only centralized to the HR profession but is part of the whole organization

The decisions made by the line-managers and the board are those that are prioritized and therefore by working close towards the line-managers the HR considerations will be prioritized. It is explained that being employer representative is about being the line- managers shadow and having a holistic view as an HR manager. It is about having a continued dialog with the line-managers in order to receive information. The employer perspective does not however mean that the HR manager ignore the employee's perspective but it is more about giving the line-managers tools so they can create have a good relationship with their employees.

> As human resource managers, we need to have a long-term perspective. If we work with rehabilitation for employees and a manager say that this is a matter for HR to fix, it is not how this works. Our job is to make the line-manager understand their part in the process and that the line-managers leadership is the outcome of the employee well-being. My work is to make line- managers understand what leadership is. (HRM 11)

Who the HR manager works with most is obvious when there is a conflict at work between the employees and the line-managers. Following quote illustrates that there is a mutual distance to the employees by being an employer representative. The employees receive their direct support from the union and the HR managers will stand behind their line-managers. As following quote illustrates. *The division is very clear when something is going wrong in the organization. Because then HR manager is on one side with the manager and the employees with the union on the other side"* (HRM. 6)

Another challenge HR managers face is the fact that being employer representative is not always obvious before they start working. The following quote illustrates the ongoing perception from the HR mangers education, that the role of being HR profession might mean that you are the employees representative as well. The struggle with this perception is that the HR managers might have a different view of their work when they start as how it is.

> I wish that the education was clearer in the fact that regardless of what level you are in an organization as a HR profession you are never the employees representative. You are the employer representative always, and this is extremely important to know about. (HRM 5)

In other words, in order to claim workplace jurisdiction, the HR managers need to work close to the board and line-managers. Otherwise they will lose their jurisdictional claim and their place in the organization. The client differentiation that follows from this strategy is expressed by working directly towards the manager and the board. This is a way for the HR managers to work with clients higher up in the organization, in order to receive higher status. As the quotes show, it is a way for them to secure their place in the organization, and thus claim workplace jurisdiction. It is also described how the jurisdictional workplace claim is different than first expected from their education. This shows a struggle of the expectation the HR managers had in comparison to how it actually looks in the working place and their role in the workplace. The following section will demonstrate further *how* this client differentiation takes place in the workplace.

5.1.2. Client differentiation in practice for HR managers

Being employer representative by supporting the manager firstly the HR managers still needed to approach the employees. In cases where the employees took contact with the HR managers, they expressed that their job is then to stay neutral. Neutral is described as not engaging in the eventual conflicts at work that the employees experience and instead suggest third part meeting so that the manager can join them or that the employee does contact their union.

By being neutral this gave the employee and line-managers a chance to solve the problem without involving HR as a third part. Otherwise in engaging in topics considering HR from the employees, this puts the HR managers in a role conflict since they need to take on the employer perspective as they expressed in the following quote. *"It can be a role conflict when one needs to for example sit with the stakeholders and talk about organizational changes and the next moment work closer to the employee and encourage them"* (HRM 4).

The previous quote describes that the HR managers needed to decide what kind of role they had to take when starting their employment. By sitting with the line- managers and in board meetings it was difficult to both do that and then work close to employees. Particularly when they needed to go through organizational changes such as terminate employment and then at the same time encourage their employees. As previously stated, their role is build up on trustworthiness and they therefore find it especially important to maintain and decide their role.

However, it is as well expressed from an HR managers that they valued the close relationship with the employees and would engage in direct conversations. As one of the HR managers expressed that being neutral does not necessary mean that one needed to distance themselves directly from their employees. Following quote illustrate this:

> We want employees to experience that it is open and not hierarchy, it is part of the company cultures, one reason for it might be that I still meet her employees in different situations and thereby not fully distancing myself. If an employee wants to contact me then they are welcome, I will take that conversation. *(HRM 7).*

To stay neutral might be a strategy from the HR managers to handle the role conflict that might occur between employees and employers. The client differentiation is maintained by HR managers distancing themselves from the employees and the need for them to stay neutral towards their employees. However, as the previous quote illustrate, working close to employees and being valued from them does enhance the HR managers' status in the organization as well. As Abbott (1988) describe that the division in client differentiation makes the profession vulnerable towards the fate of the clients that they serve. Therefore, in order to further be acknowledged in the organization the HR managers found it important to have a good relationship with the employees as well.

5.2. HR managers strategical work

Following text describes the expressed perception from the HR managers concerning what their working tasks are and what they work with. The text is divided as previous section in subheadings, based on the theoretical concepts of abstract knowledge. The section demonstrates the value of using abstract knowledge by HR managers and using the abstract knowledge in practice.

5.2.1. The value of using abstract knowledge by HR managers

As previous section states, there is a client differentiation by the HR managers in working directly with their line managers and distancing from their employees. This created the opportunity for the HR managers to use their abstract knowledge as following section will demonstrate.

It is expressed by the HR managers that working with well-being for employees must be established in the overall company in order for things to change. It was important that the HR processes such as working for well-being for employee is set in the other leader's responsibilities. As one of the HR manager expressed: *"So, well-being and working environment not only becomes a HR product but everyone's, the line-managers and leader's responsibility as well. This is important because otherwise the line-managers would only focus on sales".* (*HRM 2).*

The HR managers expressed working in supporting line-managers directly and thereby supporting employees through them. Their job was to give the line- managers tools such as coaching and education so that the line-managers can solve the problems concerning well-being with employees on their own. The purpose in being employer representative is always to use their knowledge to educate and strengthen the relationship between the manager and the employees. This is a way for the HR manager to mark that they would not only perform direct operative work that the line-managers demand but instead show that they had the competence to work with the overall organizations development.

The strategy for the HR managers to use their knowledge was to work with the decision making at a strategic level in the organization. As the following quote illustrates:

> I enjoy being a strategical partner and being able to be part of the stakeholders meeting and being able to take the business forward. If I want a change one can of course work operatively, but if one is not there where the decisions are made then one cannot change anything. (HRM 6)

Concerning the topic of employee well-being the interviewees often said that their strategies is about showing the line-managers and the board the profitability of employee well-being. By meaning that if the well-being is good then the performance of the employee will rise and this profits the organization. They experienced that there could be an opposition between the board and the humanistic approach. *"My mission is always to have the board perspective but with a humanistic approach. We need to have a balance between the board perspective and the humanistic approach." (HRM 7).* This quote illustrates that it is the HR managers job to connect the humanistic approach and the board perspective. They refer the humanistic approach to having the perspective of the individual and having an empathic view even if they are employer representatives.

To summarize so far, the HR mangers needed to be working where the decisions are made in order to see changes in the organization. They therefore value their strategical work. By thinking in long terms, organizational changes and the overall development in organization this is a way for HR managers to use their abstract knowledge. The operative work is defined as working direct with matters concerning employees and from the result it seems to be less valued for the HR managers to work operative due to not being able to create strategies and really make a difference. This strategy can be explained by Abbott (1988) use of abstract knowledge, where professions use their academic knowledge in monopolizing areas in the workplace. In order to reduce the image of being a side function the HR managers express that they need to always update themselves in academic research and overall about the organization different parts. The following section will demonstrate more specifically in what way the HR manager uses their abstract knowledge.

5.2.2. Using the abstract knowledge in practice by HR managers

The strategic work of HR managers includes the need and desire for them to work proactively regarding their work with employee well-being. By working more proactively they can avoid situation where they need to work operatively in order to solve direct problems. Even if they worked directly with the line-managers and not with the employees, working proactively is something they found to improve the processes in employee's well-being because they could eliminate situations where it has gone too far such as for example employee report sick leave, as the following quote illustrate. *"We don't want to be in situations where employees turn sick and we therefore need to work proactively with this and the proactive work is important" (HRM 7).*

In the proactive work, it includes the HR managers to being able to look at the organization as whole and see the reasons for what makes the employees well-being at risks. It is as well about creating processes in early stages that regards the employee working environment or well-being so that line- managers does know what they are supposed to do. The proactive work is also illustrated by educating line-managers in how they can ask their employees and looking for early signs if it is a well-being problem. They explain that by doing this, it lowers the risk of only stepping in when things have gone too far such as conflicts at work.

Another strategy is to be able for the HR manager to have an efficiency focus in presenting the actions that are needed and selling it to the board. They do so by highlighting the fact that in order to have a succeeded company, employees need to be able to perform and in order for them to perform they need to have a good well-being.

The abstract knowledge comes with having the knowledge about the processes behind well-being and looking at it from a helicopter perspective and how this affect the organization. The helicopter perspective refers to having a view over the whole organization and seeing how individuals and organization affect each other. Their competence is not in talking directly with the employees or follow thru the processes, this is the manager's job not theirs. The following quote illustrate this:

The competence lies in amazing the combination in understanding the individual, organization and structure and really see the bigger picture. It is not a lot of professions that do have this competence. If an employee doesn't feel good we need to think, okay so how does his well-being affect the organization and the performance? We solve this by thinking person-situation, as an employer perspective we have to look at the situation how this affect the organization. (HRM 11)

As previous section of client differentiation has shown that working more towards line-managers and thereby more strategically, it did create the distance from the employees. One of the HR managers expressed the backside of working more strategically with abstract knowledge, and that they needed to see the importance of the operative work as well. Otherwise they would not see results and what action is actually needed in the general top-down processes. Following quote illustrate this challenge:

I first believed that I could work with organizational changes by working more strategically but as it turned out I worked so high up with strategy work that I really had to practice my patience because I couldn't really see the result of my work. *(HRM 4)*.

In other words, the abstract knowledge is about using their education and research in order to improve the organization from the top instead of working directly and operative by concrete solutions. In order to see the bigger, picture the respondent express that they need to value their competence in order to be sustainable. In order to value their competence, it includes to invest in their knowledge by being updated in the latest research and being active in the decision in the organization. As following quote illustrates:

I believe that we as a HR function need to base our decisions on the latest research and science, one need to think about what research my decisions are based on. This is important to do because this creates credibility for the HR function in organizations (HRM 4)

These strategies are as Abbott (1988) explain as growth of knowledge and replacement of knowledge. By being continually updated the HR managers grow their knowledge. By having the competence in understanding the individual and the organization and how this affect and structure the business it is a way for HR managers to monopolize the area of employee well-being and gain credibility as a profession. In seeing employee's well-being as a resource that can enhance the performance and the business, this leads to having more mandate in the board. The strategical work has replaced the operative work and it is more valued by the HR managers to work this way because then they can use their abstract knowledge and this is makes a difference in their work and reduce the image of only being a side function.

5.3. The need for internal stratification within the profession

As Abbott (1988) states the abstract knowledge is a way for professions to claim jurisdiction and in this case HR managers to own their processes and use their competence. However too much abstract knowledge would distance them from the operative work and seeing results and that will affect their strategically work as well. The HR managers seemed to be aware of the distancing towards employees by working more strategically and they expressed the need for balance in their work. The consequences of this was that they needed internal stratification as well in order to cover the operative work and maintain their position in the strategical work. This meaning that they needed tasks differentiation in the HR work by having HR specialist and consultants within the HR profession in order to cover both operative work and strategic work.

By seeing the bigger picture, HR managers expressed that another consequence of this might be the assumption from the line-managers that the HR managers should be the ones that are actually performing the processes, meaning working operatively, not only creating them. This however was not appreciated from the HR managers since they expressed that following the processes is the line-managers responsibility to do. The consequence of this is that HR managers expressed the need for specialization in order to cover the operative work as well. Following quote illustrate this:

It can be easy to assume that the responsibility that the policies are followed regarding employee well-being is the HR managers responsibility, but it shouldn't be like that. Therefore, it is important to have specialization so that I can use my knowledge where it is needed. (HRM 2)
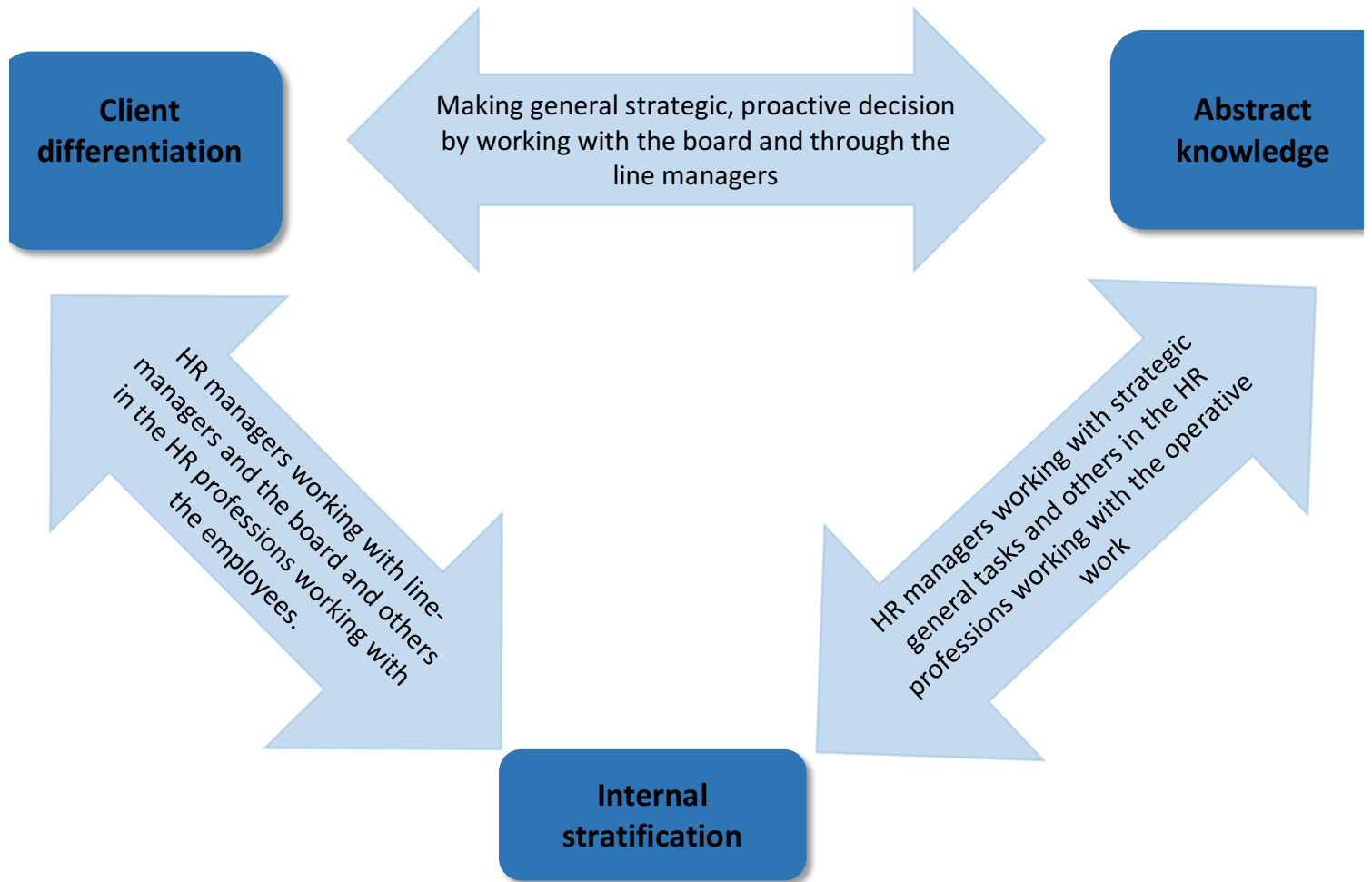
Overall it is expressed from the HR managers that in order for them to work proactive and strategically and get use of their abstract knowledge, internal stratification is needed and wished for. Their main task as HR managers is to create HR processes regarding employee well-being for the manager to use and implement. There are still assumptions from both line-managers and employees that HR managers should either work closer to the employees or be the one that is actually doing the operational work concerning processes of employee well-being. In order for the HR managers to claim their place they expressed the need for internal stratification meaning division of work tasks within the profession.

One need to see the HR work in different layers. Not everyone in the profession can work strategically, the line- managers do need help with the practical stuff and operational stuff as well such as administrated schedule and this is something that is almost forgot about. (HRM 5)

The quote illustrates an interesting aspect that more HR managers worked strategically but it is important not to reduce the importance of the practical work as well. The HR operational work is still needed even if the HR managers works closer to their line-managers. They expressed that the solution is not for the HR managers to conduct the operational work in greater extends because then they would lose their workplace jurisdiction and position in the company, but instead have the internal stratification and dived the working tasks within the profession and having specialization within the profession as well.

5.4. Summary

Figure 1. The connection between the identified theoretical concepts based on the findings in the empirical data.

Client differentiation

Making general strategic, proactive decision by working with the board and through the line managers

Abstract knowledge

HR managers working with line-managers and the board and others in the HR professions working with the employees.

HR managers working with strategic general tasks and others in the HR professions working with the operative work

Internal stratification

In conclusion, based on the empirical findings and the analysis using concepts from the theory of profession, figure 1 summarizes in short how the concepts are connected to the HR managers experiences. Regarding the first strategy of who the HR managers work for the division is clear that they take on the employer perspective and thereby working directly with the line-managers in the client differentiation. Since working with higher status clients, in this case the line-managers the HR managers can highlight their HR policy's such as employee's well-being and receive acknowledgement and space for their work. However, in practice, this client differentiation leads the HR managers to distancing themselves from their employees and staying neutral towards them.

In turn as figure 1 illustrates, by having this client differentiation it gives the HR managers the opportunity to use their abstract knowledge by working strategically. This is demonstrated in the second strategy of the empirical data that shows what the HR managers work with. They devote themselves mostly to general, non-individual oriented work and with decision taken at the highest management level, taking an overall policy level. Working with employee well-being and really making a difference in the organization is expressed from the HR managers by working strategically at a higher level with the board members and line-managers. By working proactively and establishing policies on an overall level in the organization they use their abstract knowledge to claim jurisdiction in the workplace. However, the use of abstract knowledge is also a way for the HR managers to maintain client differentiation, by valuing their competence and working strategically they get a place in the board and with the line-managers.

As figure 1 illustrates, by having client differentiation and using their abstract knowledge HR managers expressed the need for work division within the profession, this is explained as internal stratification. This tasks division is important in order for them to maintain the client differentiation and use of abstract knowledge because then others in the HR profession can cover the operative work as well, leaving more space for them to work strategically.

Since they distanced themselves from the employees and the operative work, they still express that line-managers needed help from the HR professions on an operative level and being able to work with the employees in order for them as HR managers to perform their work and maintaining insight in the organization. Therefore, as figure 1 illustrates, the internal stratification leads to client differentiation and use of abstract knowledge as well.

In conclusion by the two identified strategies from the HR managers daily work the three theoretical concepts does affect the maintenance of each other in order for the HR managers to maintain their status and jurisdictional claim and be acknowledged as an obvious part of the organization. These strategies demonstrate based on the profession theory how the HR managers experience their place in work and how they experience is the best way for them to be acknowledged.

6. Discussion

This section will begin by stating the theoretical contribution based on previous literature and the empirical result. Further this part also demonstrates the practical implication for HR professions and the limitations of the study and ideas on further research.

6.1. Theoretical contribution

In line with Wright (2008) the result in this study points to HR managers treating line- managers in their organizations as their clients, by mainly supporting and educating them. In this way, the HR managers becomes managerial consultants. Turner & Huemann et al. 2008 identified the conflict in being support for the manager but at the same time having to focus on employees and their well-being. The conflict raised due to the focus on profit than investing in employee's well-being from the line-managers side. This study however points to the fact that being support of the manager does not mean that HR managers ignore the practice of employee well-being. For the HR managers being a consultant to their line- managers means to be an employer representative. They identify themselves as consultants to the line- managers but they also identify themselves as a bigger part of the organization, not only a function for the line- managers. It has therefore been important for HR managers to highlight the importance of well-being among the line-managers to show how this can benefit the organizational performance. In other words, investing in well-being has been found as beneficial and positive from the line- managers in this study.

Regarding the perception from managers of HR responsibilities, Whittaker and Marchingon (2003) identified that as line managers took on more of the operative tasks that has formally been the HR responsibilities and found this as a positive development. In this study, it has shown similarly that HR managers does want the line-managers to work closer to the employees and take on the operative tasks in order for the HR managers to use their abstract knowledge and work strategically. It is about creating a good relationship between the line- managers and employees.

Whittaker and Marchingon (2003) highlighted the positive response from the line managers in having broader operative responsibility and that it was crucial for them to receive support from the HR managers. In this study however, the experienced response from the line managers to the HR managers regarding their responsibilities was mixed. As described HR managers experienced it challenging in claiming their place due to not being acknowledged. Another experience was that HR managers are expected from the line- managers to proceed with the processes that they create. This was something they struggled with, HR managers needed to show that it is the line-managers responsibility to perform the operative work and strengthen the relationship between the employees not the HR managers. It was important for the HR managers that their line-managers did not regard them of only being a side function. The line-managers needed to see their responsibility as well.

Whittaker & Marchington (2003) also emphases the risks in having the line manager conducting more operative work, doing so, that the line-managers don't have the competence to perform all of the HR practices and therefore risked the development of the HR profession. In this study, it is clear as well that division and stratification within the profession is needed in order to support the line-managers in the operative questions regarding employee's well-being but also for the HR managers to receive an overlook in the organization. The results showed besides this that specialization within the profession is expected as needed in order for the HR managers to maintain their status and use their competence.

As De Gama et al (2012) and Van Gramberg & Techer (2006) demonstrate due to managerial focus HR managers distanced themselves from the employees. The results in this study describe the distancing as well between HR managers and employees by not engaging in the operative work and maintain their strategic position. However, the distancing from employees are not only as De Gama et al (2012) points to, caused by the efficiency focus in the company, it is a way for the HR managers to guard their competence and use it in the strategic work and this will maintain their status in the organization. The strategies of distancing revealed in this study are in line with De Gama (2012), who found that it was in order for the HR managers to stay neutral. This study shows as well that some of HR managers does find it important to actually sometimes take the employees side in order to be a direct support to the employee.

In cases where there was a conflict in the workplace between employees and line- managers, as Van Gramberg & Teicher (2006) points in their study, HR managers described it as being a role conflict in some cases. In those cases, they stayed neutral and additionally in this study they described the importance of union being present. By working more proactively and using their competence the HR managers in this study described it as important in order to avoid eventual conflicts.

In line with Ulfsdotter Eriksson (2017) the implementation of HRM standards in organization does enhance the status of the professions because it makes them more recognized and part of the organization. This has been shown in this study as well, in order to be recognized HR managers need to be in the board and working with high status clients because it is there the decisions are made and where the policies can be implemented. This is a way as well for the HR managers to enhance the status of their profession and become a part of the organization not a side function. The conditions of being an employer representative and maintaining the status is that the processes becomes a part of the company values. This study shows as Wylie, Sturdy & Wright (2014) that receiving credibility from line-managers is important for the HR managers in order to maintain them as clients and thereby gaining status. However, being a change agent and having influence in the organizational changes, is experienced in this study as positive in order to be an obvious part of the organization and being recognized.

6.2. Practical implications for the HR profession

This study aims to contribute to pedagogical authenticity (Bryman & Bell 2017) by sharing the stories of HR managers so that members of organizations can value the profession and understanding their function. As the empirical findings have demonstrated the HR managers does struggle with their place in the organization therefore the role of HR managers is relevant to understand, both for employees and line-managers but also within the profession as well
This study contributes as well to clarify for employees why HR managers stayed neutral and distanced towards them and why it is important for the HR managers to be a direct support for their line-managers.

As this study have shown there are challenges for HR managers to claim their place in organizations regardless of where you work. Therefore, one practical suggestion is that the role of HR managers should be redefined already during the basic training before going into the profession. One need to clarify what it means to be a HR manager and that the HR transformation does not directly mean that the soft values are disappearing because of their enhanced strategically work.

6.3. Limitations and further research

Based on my results and by interviewing HR managers and take part of their perspective, I have contributed to understanding HR managers function and highlighting the importance for HR managers to be recognized as an obvious part organization. Also, since this study is based on the perspective from HR managers in different sectors and organizations making the diversity in my sample a contribution in understanding the profession from different parts.

As stated in the method section this study does not consider differences in strategies regarding gender, sector or organization. Regarding the data selection in this study the participants were all women working in the HR profession for at least 10 years. Further suggestion on research could therefore be to study if the strategies for HR managers differs depending on years working in the HR professions, sector or gender. Further this study does not take in consideration if the HR managers expressed strategies are effective on the organization as whole. One of the limitation and implication for further research could be to take in consideration of the employees or line-managers perspective on the HR function. Additionally, for further research, one could take in the perspective of other profession within the HR profession and how they perceive their status.

7. Conclusion

This study has contributed in describing the HR managers experience of their role and status in the organization by describing the strategies they express in working with employee well-being and considering demands from both line-managers and employees. Compared to the literature reviewed, this study contributes in confirming previous findings but also by adding more current knowledge in a Swedish context concerning the HR managers perspective on who they consider to be their clients and what the content of the work should be.

Being support to the line- managers does not necessarily mean that HR the managers ignore the well-being due to profit and efficacy focus, as other studies have claimed. This study showed that it is because they identified themselves as not only the managerial support but as an employer representative meaning that they represent the whole organization. This leads to the HR managers prioritizing employee well-being in order for the organization to run smoothly, i.e. As this study has shown there are challenges for HR managers to claim their place and status. Their focus on strategic work is not only for benefiting the line managers and the company but it is also a way for the HR managers to be able to use their competence so that they don't risk being a side function. They gain status by using their competence in creating and monopolizing areas in the organization that other functions don't have: such as seeing the organization from both an individual and situation perspective. Further this study contributes to also shed the light on why HR managers acts neutral and distanced towards the employees. This is a strategy for them to being able to maintain their higher position and maintaining their abstract knowledge. Finally, they experience that it is further important to have a division within the profession in order to maintain their position.

In final to answer the research questions, in the area of employee well-being this study describes the demands and ways of handling them in the HR managers' daily work by HR managers choosing sides and the content of their working tasks. In this case it is about choosing the strategical work and the employer perspective as they experience that this gives them the possibility to work most effectively in the area of employee well-being.

Their strategies for professional status and claiming jurisdiction are explained by the Abbott (1988) theory of profession and the following theoretical concepts, use of abstract knowledge, client differentiation and internal stratification. The further implication for HR managers, board members and employees in the struggle of professional status is the need for clarification in how the HR manager role is experienced and defined and this study helps to contribute to that.

7. *Appendix 1. Interview guide*

Background questions

How does your educational and working background look like?

What motivated you to work in HR?

Describe your role in your workplace today

Describe a typical working day

What do you perceive as the most important and interesting in your daily work?

What do you perceive as less interesting in your daily work?

Questions about the daily work with employee well being

In what way do you work with employee's health?
- Do you feel close to your employees? In what way?
- Would you say that you work more operationally or strategically? In what way?

How does the policies look like when working with employee well-being?

How do you experience your role in this work?

What does employee well-being mean to you?

In your opinion, how would you describe an idealistic work with employee well-being?

Describe a situation working with employee well-being that you are proud of/ less proud of

What would you say is the best and worst thing about working with employee well-being?

How do you relate to other groups within the HR professions?

How do you relate to other occupations in your workplace?

General questions regarding the profession

Can you tell me in what way do you support your line- managers?

Can you tell me in what way do you support your employees?

Can you tell me about the combination in supporting both line-managers and employees?

What tools do you work with in doing so?

What pitfalls are there?

Questions about general expectations

What kind of expectations did you have on working with HR before you started to work as a HR manager?

Do you feel that your daily work meets the expectations?

In what way would you say that you use your educational knowledge in your profession?

Do you experience that your knowledge requirement in your profession have changed since you started working as a HR manager?

Conceptions about the future

What are your goals in your career for the next five years?

What do you think need to be changed in the profession?

In conclusion is there anything you would like to add?

Follow-up questions:
What do you mean to be ex attentive?
Could you give me an example of (some kind of event or phenomena that they mention)?
Can you tell me more about how you thought/felt when this happened?

8. Appendix 2. Request letter

Hi! My name is Paula Salman and I am studying my final semester at the master's program Strategic Human Resource Management and labor relations at Gothenburg University. This semester I am writing my master thesis. The purpose of my essay is to highlight and gain knowledge about HR managers experience and role by interviewing. My focus in the master thesis, will be about emphasizing how HR managers find themselves in various demands from line-managers and employees in working with employee health at the workplace.

The interest for this subject started with my studies of HR transformation and the fact that there are higher demands for the HR profession to working more strategically while it is still of value for employees to have personal support from HR managers in order to perceive a good health in the working place.

In background of this, I would be grateful if you would have the opportunity to participate in my study through an interview. The estimated time for the interview will be around one hour and the questions will concern your daily work and how you find your role as a HR managers. The interview will be recorded by audio recording.

All the material will be treated confidentially. In the essay, you will be fully anonymous, neither your name nor the company you are working in will be stated. If it will be of interest for the study the sector you work in might be included. The time and the place of the interview will be determinate in agreement with you.

You are more than welcome to contact me by email or telephone if you have any further questions regarding the study. If you wish to participate in this study please contact me by email or telephone.

I hope you will have the opportunity to participate in this study! Thank you in advance.

Best regards

Paula Salman

Contact information:

Paula Salman
Paula.salman@hotmail.se

Supervisor
Rebecka Arman
Rebecka.arman@handels.gu.se

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