



HOW HUMAN RESOURCES MAINTAIN LEGITIMACY IN WORK ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT

A qualitative research about how Human Resources navigate challenges in organisational and social work environment

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Supervisor:	Karin Allard
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Abstract

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- Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to investigate how Human Resources within the private sector in Sweden, maintain legitimacy in the work environment management and to what extent the legislation is supportive. Further, how HR navigates challenges in the work environment management will be investigated.
- Theory:** The theoretical framework in the research is based on Institutional theory by Scott (2014) and the concepts "Best Practice" and "Best fit".
- Method:** The methodological research design is based on a qualitative approach, and the result is based on interpretations and analysis of the empirical data from 13 semi-structured interviews with a total of 15 Human Resource professionals and managers within nine different large companies.
- Result:** The empirical finding demonstrates how Human Resources maintain legitimacy within organisations for the work environment management. Human Resources transform the legislation into comprehensible information and useful tools for the entire organisation, particularly for managers who perform the work environment management. The finding shows that Human Resources add value to the core business and are close to top management and managers and provide with situational support.

Foreword

This research period has been an interesting and challenging journey for us. We have gained lots of new and interesting knowledge that we will bring with us in our future professional paths.

We would like to express our gratitude to our supervisor Karin Allard. Thank you for your time, reflections, guidance and interesting discussions along the whole way.

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Annika Magnusson & Mari Yamaki Wiklander
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the research

Work environment is more important than ever and is the top priority among Human Resources (Bjurner, 2020 april). The psychosocial aspect of work environment is recurrent and a highlighted topic by key actors in Sweden. One of them, The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (2020) has published articles about work environment every third day since 2016, to emphasise the significance for organisations to take actions. To retain and ensure well-being among the workforce have become recognized by organisations as an economic advantage (Birgerdotter & Strandberg, 2018, Quade et al., 2019). The high rate of ill health in the Swedish society has also raised concerns by the government who launched a work environment strategy 2016-2020 (Skr 2015/16:80). To create a good work environment that makes both business and people prosper is worth aiming for (Gunnarsson et al., 2016).

Human Resources play a major part in implementing the work environment work in organisations. The legislation is a framework and provides guidelines for the work environment management. However, the legislation does not give firm directives in how to perform the work and is not adapted to suit every business field. The work life is in constant change, affected by societal influences such as boundaryless work, high performance and high demands. The combination of rigid legislation and transient environment makes the work environment management challenging for Human Resources (Boxall & Purcell, 2016).

According to Bringselius (personal communication, 2020-02-14) it is not only for professionals to strictly apply the law, they also need to actively interpret and use their professional judgement to get a holistic view of the intention of the legislation. Human Resources then require adapting and transforming the legislation into comprehensible procedures for managers. When Human Resources succeed, they gain legitimacy and trustworthiness within the organisation. This is connected to the Human Resource transformation waves which demonstrate the increased credibility for the Human Resource function within the business (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). Human Resources add relevance and value to the business when participating in the core business and proceed to create and shape the support closer to the operations (ibid.).

The purpose of this research is to investigate how Human Resources within the private sector in Sweden, maintain legitimacy in the work environment management and to what extent the legislation is supportive. Further, how Human Resources navigate challenges in the work environment management will also be investigated.

To explain the external and internal factors that influence the work environment management, the research takes the standpoint through the lens of Institutional Theory with the main focus of the compilation of the three pillars: regulatory, cognitive and normative (Scott, 2014). The research will then contribute to the gap of research stated by Schmidt et al (2019) in how Human Resources structure and operate in the work environment management within the private sector. Further, the research contributes to highlight the challenges in incorporating the work environment legislation into practice (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2015, Hartman & Odmark, 2019).

1.2 Research Questions

1. How do Human Resources and managers apply and use the Work Environment Act and its provisions to create good work environment?
2. What are the challenges for Human Resources and managers in work environment management?
3. How do Human Resources navigate the challenges in work environment management?

1.3 Background

In the section an overview of the work environment legislation in Sweden is presented. The concept “good work environment” is discussed and regulated collaboration presented.

1.3.1 The legal context in Sweden

Laws are made to consist over time and provisions to complement these laws in adjustments to the societal context (Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2020). The Work Environment Act (1977:1160), in Swedish Arbetsmiljölagen, abbreviated AML, is a framework and has a purpose “to prevent occupational illness and accidents and to ensure a good work environment” (1 chap. §1 AML). As a development from the Swedish Work Environment Act, the provision

Systematic Work Environment Management (AFS 2001:1), in Swedish abbreviated SAM, aims to encourage organisations to incorporate the work environment management systematically, on a regular basis and as a natural part in the business. To carry out the work environment management systematically, the employer shall investigate, take actions, do risk assessments and follow up the business (AFS 2001:1).

The provision Organisational and Social Work Environment (AFS 2015:4), in Swedish abbreviated OSA, came into effect 2016 and aims to promote health and prevent employees from illness due to organisational and social changes within work environment and to ensure good conditions for employees. Organisational work environment covers conditions and prerequisites for the work that include management, communication, room for action, allocation of work tasks, demands, resources and responsibilities (AFS 2015:4). Social work environment implies collaboration and social support from managers and colleagues (AFS 2015:4 §4). Guidelines are provided to every provision to facilitate incorporation and the aim with the legislation can be found in preparatory works (the Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2020).

The employer has the main responsibility for the work environment (3 chap. § 2-5 AML). Still, the work can be distributed to managers with staff liability (AFS 2001:1). The Act is a legal public law and legal binding between the government and the employer. If the employer breaks the law sanctions will be promulgated. The provision OSA includes particular requirements for knowledge and the employer is responsible to ensure that managers possess knowledge about how to manage and prevent unhealthy work environment.

1.3.2 Good work environment

The Work Environment Act states the employer to ensure a good work environment but does not include a distinct definition of what good work environment is. However, the provisions and guidance from the Swedish Work Environment Authority (2020) provides with clarification for a better understanding.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority has launched several reports and compilations as an attempt to guide what a good work environment is regarding the psychosocial aspects. The

compilation “The good work environment and its indicators” (Lindberg & Vingård, 2012) compile scientific literature and define good work environment as “a work environment that has positive and beneficial effects on the individual”. A similar concept that goes somewhat further is "healthy workplace", defined as “a workplace with a work environment that has beneficial effects on both individuals and business” (Lindberg & Vingård, 2012:4). The definition clearly states the advantage of promoting the individual’s health within the business (Lindberg & Vingård, 2012).

The compilation goes further and states what characterises a good work environment and mentions for instance: accessible and fair leader, skilled communication, cooperation, positive and social culture, participation, clear expectations and goals, feedback, development and growth at work, modest work pace, manageable workload and personal support at work (ibid.). All these positive wordings can easily connect to a good work environment but still the degree of effort is diffuse.

1.3.3 Collaborations within work environment management

In Sweden, collaborations with trade unions and occupational health service are regulated in the Work Environment Act and its provisions. In the provision SAM, collaboration in the daily work is highlighted as an advantage for work environment management in order to be as efficient as possible (AFS, 2001:1). The legislation emphasises participation of employees in the work environment in order to create a good work environment (3 chap. §1a AML).

The occupational health service is defined as an independent expert resource within the areas for work environment. The function shall mainly support and educate organisations to prevent and remove risks at workplaces, furthermore, they shall possess competence in identifying and describing the link between work environment, organisation, productivity and health (AML §2).

2. Previous research

In this section an introduction to the main aspects of work environment management will be presented. The aim is to provide with further understanding of the topic.

2.1 A changing work environment landscape

Work life has dramatically changed economically and socially the last 40 years and European workplaces face challenges (Van del Heuvel et al., 2018). The work environment has evolved from considering physical risks to aiming for sustainable workplaces and organisational and social aspects at work (Uhrenholdt Madsen & Boch Waldorff, 2019). The challenges evoke from an aging population, increased numbers of boundaryless workers, globalisation and an expanding service sector (European Agency for Safety and Health at work, 2015). Furthermore, digitalisation affects work environment due to the escalated demand to use technology which leads to technology-stress for individuals (Van del Heuvel et al., 2018).

These work life changes are a consequence of increased competition on the global market and organisations need to react fast to this changing environment (Van del Heuvel et al., 2018). Due to globalisation, a greater flexibility has been characterised in today's work life which has also faded out the boundaries between work life and private life (Näswall et al., 2008). Focus has moved towards higher demands for employees and employers to organise their own work (Mellner et al., 2016). Work tasks are less tangible, which means it is more difficult to know when a task is completed or not. This phenomenon is called boundaryless work (ibid.) and Allvin (2011) points out the shift in power that boundaryless work entails, from organisations to individuals being accountable for their own employability and work. These new ways of working also creates a diffuse line between work life and private life, which imply new stressors for the individual (Näswall et al., 2008) when work no longer is referred and fixed neither to a certain place nor to working hours. Mellner et al (2016) argue that a tendency to work longer work days is characterised for today's workplaces and these new ways of working imply psychological effects on people as for instance stress, sleep disorder and the interference of recovery (ibid.).

2.2 Implementation of organisational and social work environment

In Scandinavia a holistic perspective on psychosocial factors is established and is now called organisational and social work environment to make it more correct and to emphasise the organisational influence (Uhrenholdt Madsen & Boch Waldorff, 2019). Expertise, time and knowledge are required qualifications on an organisational level to manage these issues (ibid.). Hartman & Odmark (2019) emphasise the significance of good work environment and show the link between work environment, organisation and illness. Research shows a need of support from the government and clarity regarding the employer's legal responsibility to create a good psychosocial work environment (Andersson, 2013).

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2015) claims in their study with 49 320 respondents, that the organisational and social aspects of work environment are challenging. One in five organisations experience time pressure or obtain insufficient proper information or tools to manage difficult and demanding situations in relation to organisational and social aspects. Only 53 percent of the respondents know how to manage and incorporate organisational and social aspects in risk assessment (bid.). Risk assessment is the cornerstone of the European approach to occupational safety and health but organisations claim the interventions to be time consuming and difficult (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2015).

In Sweden, organisations report difficulties in implementing the systematic work environment management (Hartman & Odmark, 2019). Difficulties are demonstrated when organisations tend to focus more on producing policies and routines than to strive for the aim of the work environment management. Follow ups are made to a limited extent with insufficient evaluation in order to know whether the measures did any difference or not in promoting a good work environment (Schmidt et al., 2019). When organisations stay in a bureaucratic manner and only tick off duties it is a risk to miss the value in creating good conditions for the employees. Bringselius (2019) puts attention to the extensive documentation, and relates to New Public Management, with the constant measurement as a risk to undermine employees' engagement and professional knowledge. In the research by Hartman & Odmark (2019) the authors report the need for more involvement of the top management due to its heavy influence in the organisation. A supportive management is also needed when implementing provisions (Stenlöv & Larsson (2107). The Authority for Work Environment Knowledge (2020) reports in their

knowledge compilations with a total of 516 national and international studies, lack of knowledge regarding basic data for health factors at work places, gender perspective and imbalanced knowledge among branches about work environment.

2.3 Human Resource Management and Legitimacy

Human Resource Management (HRM) is described as the process through which management builds the workforce to create a prospering organisation (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). When organisations grow, the complexity grows and HRM has to adjust its strategies to the circumstances. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2019) state the work of HRM to handle the conflicting goals and interests between the employer and employees within an organisation, which requires HR to master these multiple goals and conflicting interests. Kochan (2008) claims the need of HR to achieve a balance between employer, employees and the society in which these relationships are embedded in order to maintain legitimacy (ibid.).

According to Frick & Johanson (2013) it can be a conflict between profit and how top management prioritise the level of investment in work environment. HR has to promote and motivate the advantage of work environment management to the management team to achieve overall goals (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). However, HR has for a period of time struggled to achieve legitimacy and power in organisations when having difficulties to establish themselves as a trustful contributor to the organisation, notably by line-managers and top management (Heizmann & Fox, 2019). Schmidt et al (2019) claim the need of HR to be more involved in the systematic work environment management since the function of HR has shown great influences in the work environment management (Schmidt, 2017, Boglind, 2019). According to Birgerdotter & Strandberg (2018) the work environment question shall not to be discussed at a separate meeting or be postponed and considered less important. It shall be approached as any other question concerning economics, quality and production (ibid.).

Quade et al (2019) report that supervisors driven by profits can actually lose the respect of their employees who respond by withholding performance. On the contrary, leadership that focuses on well-being of employees gain stronger profit within the organisation. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2015) reports the most common driven forces to work with

organisational and social aspects of work environment as to keep and maintain the organisation's reputation, involve the employees in the process and to meet their expectations. Work environment management contributes to a good economy, good reputation which subsequently leads to maintenance of employees and to recruit new candidates (Birgerdotter & Strandberg, 2018, Sadri & Lees, 2001).

2.4 Organisational culture and values in work environment management

According to Uhrenholdt Madsen and Boch Waldorff (2019), people's beliefs guides their practices and actions and influence the outcome in an organisation. The belief system gives an understanding when discussing the organisation's culture, more specifically its values, symbols, norms and behaviour (ibid.). It is the organisational culture that gives legitimacy to an organisation's mission and vision and shows the strong intertwined relation between the leadership and the culture (Sharma & Sharma, 2010). The top management has then a major impact on the organisational culture and if there is a gap between promises and deliveries, it affects the level of trust and commitment from employees. On the contrary, if there is alignment between words and actions, a sense of trust and reliance on workers own judgment increase, which has a positive impact on the organisation (ibid.). An organisation's strategy is best discerned in the organisation's behavior or significant actions, not in its formal planning documents (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). The value of organisational culture has been recognised as critical for the organisational strategy. The organisational culture can have huge positive impact on employees and gain profitability (Sadri & Lees, 2001).

The Government gave the Trust Delegation a mission to provide an overview about trust management within organisations. The results are presented in a report by 23 scientists and emphasised a culture with focus on employees' needs and activities that works to stimulate cooperation and a holistic perspective, to build trustful relations in order to create a good work environment (Bringselius, 2019). The Authority for Work Environment Knowledge (2020) also reports the need for new cultures, new mindsets and underlines focus on possibilities regarding health factors in the work environment rather than focusing on risks and challenges.

3. Theory

The research is structured from the institutional theory by Scott, DiMaggio and Powell's and serve as the theoretical foundation. Scott's three pillars are applied while investigating the function of HR in the work environment management. The regulatory pillar presents the regulatory factors as the legislation for work environment management. The cognitive pillar presents the societal changes as the changing work landscape. Finally, the normative pillar presents the organisation's culture and values. DiMaggio and Powell's description of pressure and response to achieve legitimacy are used as an analytic tool.

3.1 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory is not a set of proper definitions and statements, it contains several variants and can therefore not be called a theory. It is rather a framework, a way of thinking about social life that may take different paths (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). Still, it is named as a theory.

Scott (2014), one of the institutional theorists, mentions that rational actions are always grounded in a social context and institutions influence an organisation's behaviour. Institutions are described by Scott (2014) as cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior. Scott (2014) goes on and divides institutions into three pillars. First, the regulative pillar consists of constraints and regulative behavior, to comply with laws and regulations. Second, the cognitive pillar consists of social agreed behaviour, a construction of reality that is taken for granted in social systems and can be shown in traditions. Third, the normative pillar contains values, norms and moral that influence actions by individuals or organisations. These agreed sets of concepts are connected to inner beliefs. Actions taken from these structures become carriers of the institutions and make the institutions stable over time (ibid.).

According to institutional theory, organisations search for legitimacy for their actions. It is a condition reflecting consonance with relevant laws, normative support and cultural alignment and cannot be possessed (Scott, 1995). Krell et al (2016) mention that if organisations want to achieve legitimacy, they need to consider legitimacy on three levels: comply with the legal request, imitating a behavior that is considered acceptable by the society and comply with

appropriate norms. If not, they may be subjects to attacks or slender. To achieve legitimacy in response to the pressures, organisations imitate each other which make the systems stable and homogeneity is created. The homogeneity creates isomorphism and can be described as a constraining process that forces one part in a population to mimic other parts within the same industry (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Eriksson - Zetterquist (2009) argues that organisational identity comes through actions and reveals their norms and values. Societal pressure forces organisations to stay accurate and competitive. Even if organisations mimic other successful organisations they need to find their own competitive advantage and form strategies due to its own context. In order to find uniqueness and competitive advantage, organisations need to make reforms. Brunsson and Olsen (1990) claim reforms to be easier to initiate and decide upon than to implement. For a reform to be performed successfully the persons behind the reform must demonstrate the improvements with the new solution for the members of the organisation and participants need to be actively engaged in forming the reform. Eriksson - Zetterquist (2009) argues for reformists to have the ability and skill to stabilise interest, collaborate with key persons and relevant networks to challenge isomorphism.

The regulative pillar relates to laws, regulations and agreements that people and organisations need to conform to. It is agreed by citizens to accept and follow these regulations and if not, sanctions will be promulgated. The Work Environment Act and its provisions are regulations to guide organisations toward a good work environment. The regulations are sprung from a cultural belief based on that every person shall be equally and fair treated (Swedish Council, 2020). The cognitive pillar relates to a shared understanding, common beliefs and perceptions taken for granted among citizens in the society. These values are seldom reflected upon for the reason that they are imbedded in culture, religion and history (Scott, 2014). Some understandings can be demonstrated when people perform highly in spite of having small kids at home or to work regardless sickness and in some occasions work during spare time. Cultural values influence organisations due to what is expected from the citizens in the society. Therefore, organisations need to act responsible towards employees and consider their reputation. The normative pillar associates with inner values, norms and conceptions of an appropriate action both for individuals and organisations. It can be visible in different actions,

for instance how an organisation treats the employees. One example is to what degree high pressure to perform is connected to enough resources, to what degree high expectations of risk taking are embedded in an atmosphere of safety. The degree of feedback, trust and possibility to participate in job situations related to good working conditions is described in the provision OSA and plays a role in this pillar. Tensions can arise between various driving forces, both between economic goals, resources to work environment and to gain social legitimacy in having good reputation both within and outside the organisation. In this matter, legislation can support organisations in term of providing directions (ibid.).

3.2 “Best practice” and “Best fit”

The concept “*best practice*” is associated with the notion that organisations can be successful if copying methods from other enterprises (Urban, 2018). However, this strategy tends not to result in desired outcome in reality since the context differs between organisations. The reason behind is argued by Urban (2018) to be that few managerial approaches have a universal nature to be applicable anywhere. On the other hand, the approach “*best fit*” directs the idea of covering goals instead of particular approaches but use methods and tools suitable to fit the organisations needs (ibid.). While applying best fit it is important to bear in mind “best for whom?” (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2019). Boxall & Purcell (2016) argue that HR strategies have to be adapted in relation to other strategies in the organisation and to the wider environment. The legislation is stable and concerns every business field, hence HRM has to find the best fit for its own organisation. HRM must consider the legislation, unions, stakeholders, business field along with organisational goals and values when performing work environment management (ibid.).

4. Method

In this section a description of how the research has been conducted is presented along with the research design and methodological approach that has been applied. Further it describes the sampling strategy, data collection and the analysis approach. At last, ethical consideration is discussed besides trustworthiness and finally limitations with the research.

4.1 Research Design

The research design is structured from an exploratory and qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews (Charmaz, 2014). The approach is not intended to provide conclusive evidence but help the researchers to gain better understanding of the problem (Research Methodology, 2019). The research investigated in how organisations apply the Work Environment Act, the provisions Systematic Work Environment Management (SAM) and Organisational and Social Work Environment (OSA) and transform the legislation into practice. Discussions about organisational culture and values, and how HR and managers adjusted the work environment management to the business became essential to understand what challenges HR face in implementing the work environment management. Besides primary data, the interviews, secondary data is investigated; the Work Environment Act, the provisions SAM and OSA, official documents from Swedish authorities, scientific articles and compilation reports.

Institutional theory is not only applied as theory but serves as framework in the finding and analysis to clearly structure external and internal influences of the work environment management.

4.2 Participants

Nine organisations within the private sector are selected. All are large, well-established and well-known companies within Sweden and operates internationally. Included are also two well-established governmental organisations, however these two organisations are independent and without political governance. Private sector was chosen to investigate organisational priorities and values within organisations without external interference and budgetary constraints. The research focused on Swedish workplaces and context since laws are national constitutions. The

chosen organisations operate across different business fields. What characterizes the organisations is a minimum of 10,000 employees, in the governmental organisations 1, 000 employees, at least ten personnel at the HR department and an extensive part of management for white collar workers.

The research is based on 13 interviews with a total of 15 persons, all with involvement in work environment management. The informants representing HR are in total 10; 3 HR specialists, 1 HR manager, 3 HR strategists (one of them has experience of being manager within the same company and contributed with the perspective of a manager as well as HR strategist), 1 HR Business Partner and 2 HR directors, all with a minimum of ten years of HR experience. For additional understanding of work environment management, 4 managers with staff liability for white-collar workers were interviewed. In one organisation we got invited to interview 1 senior safety representative. The person's answer cannot represent a larger community of safety representatives, nevertheless, that voice contributed to valuable insights of the managerial level of the work environment management.

All HR representatives are located at the organisation's headquarter and the managers are located in the three biggest cities in Sweden. It is an equal distribution between men and women among the interviewees despite roles.

4.3 Data collection procedure

Purposive sampling is used in the research and according to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) the interviewees have specific qualities and knowledge that will contribute to rich information and understanding of what is aimed to study (ibid.). Organisations considered as attractive employers or organisations recommended for their known good environment management were contacted. Initially, interviewees representing the HR department involved in work environment management and a manager with staff liability for white collar workers in each organisation were requested. In half of the cases the initial contact gave direct contact to HR personnel and a manager. In the remaining part, the HR personnel forwarded a contact to a manager.

The interviews were conducted with both of the researchers presented, except one interview. Participation by both researchers decreased the risk for bias and encouraged researchers to be reflective of own speculations and assumptions. The interviews were briefly summarised and discussed afterwards. Six interviews were conducted face to face and seven via Skype or trialogue. All interviews were conducted in Swedish according to the preferences of the participants. Face to face interviews lasted for 60 minutes and some approximately 90 minutes. Interviews conducted via Skype or trialogue lasted for approximately 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded, approved by all informants, and then transcribed.

The design of the interview guide is divided into nine areas: work environment, knowledge of work environment, priority of work environment, responsibility and roles, culture and values, the law, systematic work environment management, challenges and success factors. The interview guide was semi-structured and gave the researchers opportunity to create and achieve an open interview and a chance to be adaptable during the interview. Before ending the interview, all areas were ensured to be covered. One interview guide was designed for both HR and managers with only some adjustment depending on the role of the interviewee (see Appendix 1).

4.4 Data Analysis

According to Yin (2014) the units of analysis are the persons investigated through the interviews. The collected data from interviews were transcribed and categorised in themes to detect patterns, as suggestions from Yin (*ibid.*). Regarding the analytic strategy in the research, the data program NVivo was used to code and create themes from the data set. It supported with a good overview of the codes which facilitated to create themes. Thematic analysis was used and according to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is considered as the foundation for qualitative methods and one of its advantages is its flexibility. The aim with the approach of thematic analysis is to identify themes and also to compare between all transcripts in the research (*ibid.*). The six phases of the process of thematic analysis were followed: familiarise with the data and reread the transcripts, generate initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, define and maintain themes, and producing the report (*ibid.*). Four themes emerged; legislation, HR function, challenges in work life, organisational culture and values.

4.5 Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity are central concepts in research that evaluate the quality of the research, hence required to consider by the researcher. Validity evaluates whether a measuring instrument measures the concept as expected. All the respondents gave similar answers that correspond to each other and can therefore enhance the validity. The HR and manager within the same organisation shared an equivalent view on their own work environment management, which increased the trustworthiness in the data. Reliability refers to consistency in measures and the ability to retest the measures in order to examine its stability over time (Bryman, 2012). In the analysing process the researchers identified codes and initial themes individually, in order to see whether similar interpretations and perceptions were found. Mutual themes were detected and became a stable foundation for further analysis which contributed to higher reliability for the research. However, the work environment management is a constant process within the organisations and the answers would probably be different if the interviews would be conducted one year later.

The researchers are entrants to the HR field, hence have less pre-assumption within the area. In addition, both the internal situation in the organisations as well as interviewees was unknown to the researchers which provided with a neutral point of departure. To stay neutral and non-judgmental is according to Ritchie & Lewis (2003) the keystone for a researcher.

4.6 Ethical consideration

Ethical consideration is crucial in research and liability, honesty, respect and responsibility need to be considered (Science Council, 2018). Initially, every participant got brief information about the research, its purpose and voluntary participation. A consent form was designed for each participant to sign before the interview started with information about the possibility to withdraw from the research or end the interview at any moment. To further protect the information in the research, this research follows the four ethical principles; information requirements, consent requirements, confidentiality requirement and the usage requirement (Science Council, 2002). The informants received instructions that the consent form and recordings were stored on a password protected file, only accessible for the researchers to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The recordings were dissociated with numbers (1,2,3...) instead of names. In regard to the interviews conducted via Skype, the informant was presented

the consent form via email and approved by returned email. All participants have been offered to receive their particular transcript and all of the respondents received the final draft of the research to have the possibility to correct eventual misinterpretations.

4.7 Limitations with the research

All the interviews and transcriptions are made in Swedish. The interpretations, translations of words and the meanings might have been transformed and twisted to some extent, which can have an impact on the results. However, in order to avoid eventual biases, the translation was carefully inspected on a frequent basis and the informants have had the possibility for corrections. The topic of the research is limited to the Swedish context and has implications for appliance to an international context. The research investigated in Human Resource function of work environment management and does not include any analysis of different HR roles and its impact on work environment management. The researchers experienced saturation regarding HR interviews but with reference to the representation of managers, more voices would contribute to the research. However, due to the global impact of Coronavirus, Covid -19, interviews with further managers were cancelled.

5. Result

In this section the results from the empirical data will be presented. It is divided into several paragraphs based on themes evolved during the process of analysis. The three pillars in institutional theory are applied as structure to frame the finding. Human Resource and managers' work environment management are influenced by external factors as regulatory and societal factors but also internal factors as organisational culture and values.

5.1 Regulatory factors in the work environment management

This part describes regulatory factors that influence the work environment management. It contains both HR and managers' view upon the Work Environment Act and the provisions and how they apply the legislation. Finally, a presentation of the regulated collaboration will follow.

5.1.1 The legislation perceived as supportive

Regarding the Act and its provisions, HR and managers share a similar view on the regulation, that it fulfills its purpose to be supportive and are a foundation to relate to when it comes to the work environment management. Many of the HR respondents mention that their policies, guidelines and code of conduct are designed and formulated from the Act and provisions. They state that the legislation pays great attention to certain areas that organisations must consider and is supportive when it comes to priorities and to raise awareness among management and HR department. When management at any level, want to make changes in priorities, the legislation gives HR legitimacy in their work for work environment:

"/.../ we do have a legislative demand that we must comply with, and if a manager or HR want to put focus on something else and says we can do that next year, well then it is a great support for me to, to refer to the law /.../ we have to do this, this year, because it is our obligation as employer" – HR

One HR clearly stated the work environment legislation as important as the economic aspect. The legislation gives HR support to prioritise in the organisation.

" Work environment is a legislative demand as well as corporate taxes, but we never talk about that we might not pay the corporate tax when we might skip the work environment parts, not skip but it does not have the same focus in our plan to conduct our business" - HR

Although the legislation puts focus on different areas, the majority of manager respondents expressed a distance to the legislation and did not see the law as a direct support to them:

“I have not got any education about the legislation. We attended a work environment course when I started here at XXX and I gained knowledge from that perspective, but I can't say I sit and read the law since then” – Manager

By contrast the managers acknowledged the HR to be supportive in terms of understanding the legislation. One manager refers HR to be the experts who possesses the legislative knowledge and receives help when needed. According to HR respondents, the provision OSA contributes to highlight areas and gives support and legitimacy when promoting a good working environment. One informant articulated:

*“I think that the advantage of the provision OSA is more about putting focus on particular issues than providing with concrete advice or that it has implied a huge turn in how to work with work environment issues. It works more like a signal legislation, which I think is good”
- HR*

Since the Work environment Act is framework legislation and leaves out details, several HR informants express the provisions to provide with clarification. Especially when it comes to stress, the provision OSA highlights the organisational structure and level of stress, not only the individual or the individual stress. It implies for instance not having the right conditions, absence of managers or unclear communication which is a crucial perspective to include while discussing stress. Some of the informants claim that by emphasising the organisational dimension of stress, the provision OSA has contributed to development in the work environment management.

“The advantage with the provision is that it is not only about the individual, it is more about the entire structures. You cannot only blame the stress on the individual you must acknowledge the organizational structures too” - HR

The work environment management is seen as beneficial for the business and people and some of the HR and managers respondents claim that they would work with these aspects even though it would not be regulated in the law. Some informants even mention working with these areas before the legislation and provisions came into effect.

5.1.2 The legislation is perceived to miss the “how” in implementing the law

The Work Environment Authority produces information and guidance regarding the work environment. HR and managers respondents report the legislation to be too theoretical. One HR respondent said: *“The legislation is written by lawyers for lawyers”*. Additional opinions from both HR and managers is the legislation and guidance from the Swedish Work Environment Authority to be research oriented and difficult to apply to the own work environment management. The majority of the respondents experience a lack in explaining how to implement the legislation regarding work environment, for instance how a risk assessment shall be performed. Furthermore, some of the respondents mention that the legislation is more applicable for blue-collar workers rather than white-collar workers. They mean that the physical aspect of the work environment in this sense is clear and firm. However, when it comes to the systematically work with the psychosocial dimension, it is more challenging since there are more variables to consider, hard to work with and more diffuse. The concepts in the legislation are not clearly described and are open for interpretations, nor to what extent they shall be followed. One HR elaborated with concepts in the law and the degree of the interventions and reported:

“/.../ what is manageable workload, and what do we mean with resources? And how do we balance the demands from everyone’s differences? /.../ of course, that is a challenge to handle. What is good enough for me as employer?” – HR

Both HR and managers claim the provision OSA to be vague, that it lacks description of the practical way of working.

“It [the provision OSA] has put emphasis on the area. The problem is that it says what you shall do, but not how you shall do. It is good, but still, it is not sharp enough, it leaves pretty much space for interpretation” – HR

A tendency among managers is the experience of work environment aspects to be too much and not knowing the lowest level of achievement. It is a feeling of discomfort to be responsible but not knowing exactly what is good and what is not. One manager reported:

“I don’t know how it [the law] shall be interpreted and, I think it seems to be very complex and difficult /.../When it comes to the psychosocial dimension, I am feeling doubtful/.../ for myself but also for a majority of managers in general” - Manager

One example of when the provision OSA is unclear regards the changing work life according to the HR respondents. The provision is not fully developed and contains many grey areas which create frustration and no control that worry managers. A consequence is described by one HR respondent: *“Our managers want to do right and then they do nothing, because they do not want to do wrong”*.

An HR informant continues explaining that the leeway for interpretation regarding the provision OSA and how you interpret it is closely connected to the culture in that particular organisation and mentioned:

“Depending on what culture exists within the organisation, as an employee you might not dare to turn your phone off, you bring your computer with you on your vacation and things like that. That is more connected to the culture at your workplace. If you have a culture that actually do not allow you to be off when you are supposed to be off, well then, the law is more or less toothless. It is difficult to change that behaviour” – HR

5.1.3 How Human Resource and managers apply the legislation

When it comes to the daily work and how HR and managers apply the legislation, several of the respondents mention it as a foundation in their work. The legislation is the base in processes, measures and how HR works with internal training and education. Some of the organisations have a thorough structure connected to the legislation for the work environment management and few of the organisations embrace the challenge in implementing the work environment without explicitly talk about the legislation.

The provision systematic work management (SAM) covers investigation, risk assessment, measures and follow ups. These components require documentation and particular paper forms and the design makes the work environment management abstract and time consuming. Many of the manager respondents report a tendency to focus on formalities and hence losing easier ways to approach the dilemma. One part of the provision SAM is to do risk assessments. Some HR claims they do risk assessments before every organisational change and others report the risk assessment to be an overstatement. The following quotations regard a reorganisation toward activity-based office landscape and an HR said:

“It is of course very good to reflect and consider what can happen, but I have so far not seen a risk assessment that has changed anything /.../ Some hates changes, others love it. And the ones who does not like it, you cannot change that /.../ You cannot educate these things away. Instead, what you have to consider how to handle this.” - HR

Another part of the provision SAM is to perform employee surveys and a majority of the HR and managers argue that this way of conducting surveys is an old way of working and one manager stated:

“Yes, we perform them [employee surveys] but we perform it in another way. It is boring once a year, like ok, shall we do this also? Very bureaucratic. As we are working today, I have told HR, that it does not work out well. Once a year. It is not working any longer.”
- Manager

“We cannot have appraisals only once a year, you have to be attentive and have a dialogue with the employees” – HR

Despite the fact that employee surveys are considered as old fashioned, many of the respondents mention them as being a tool for starting a dialogue with the employees. However, some of the organisations have started implementing new tools for frequent audits. This gives an overview and better understanding of how the employees feel and managers can easier act upon alarming signals. One of the managers mentions new tool that provides with advice and ideas for help to self-help and contributes to open up dialogue.

“It highlights areas we need to improve, and we can discuss this as a group and talk about what needs to be done in order to make it better. But it [the tool] also brings out areas where we are doing very well, and we can work with these areas together as a group. It is an excellent tool. I immediately feel that this will help me a lot in my work environment management” – Manager

Proactive work is mentioned as crucial to make work environment management more efficient. HR claims difficulties to convince management at different levels about the advantage of preventive work rather than to work reactive and mentions actions often comes too late.

“We start to push our positions forward regarding the proactive work, but it needs hard work. It is so frustrating to see it rolling back and forth and to see small steps at different levels. But the prerequisites are good, it is high on the agenda” - HR

5.1.4 Regulated collaborations

Many of the HR and managers respondents mention the relation to trade unions as beneficial in their work for work environment management. The informants mention platforms on a regular basis with representatives from trade union and the dialogue is based on an open conversation aiming for the same goal. A respondent mentions the importance of getting another perspective:

“The contact with trade unions is very important for us, and we are happy and proud of the relation. We can see the advantage of our contact /.../ it is good to get another perspective than the employer’s view. /.../ We have the same ambition and direction, we can have different opinions, but it gives dynamic to the collaboration. The third party is necessary in order to find the best solution – HR

When it comes to the quality of support given from occupational health service, it differs among the HR respondents. Some state a close contact with the occupational health services and claim them to support work environment related issues both on operational level and on strategic level. They can be an important actor while discussing work-related stress. One HR respondent expressed the need for a more active collaboration with occupational health service in order to use support functions more efficient:

“We might need to work more active and be better to involve the occupational health service, to get more focus on creating better conditions for managers to perform their work. - HR

Another aspect of using occupational health service as a support function is to provide managers with relevant education to detect early signs of perceived stress in an early stage. An HR respondent argued for better knowledge:

“We need to increase the knowledge and dare to act more proactively, one cannot wait until someone shows signs of ill health before you actually do something. Then it becomes a matter of rehabilitation” - HR

Not all of the respondents agree with the advantage of collaboration with the occupational health service. Some mention that their support is both expensive and too general to really support in work related issues. The occupational health service does not know the business as

good as needed to be a sustainable support. One HR respondent expressed a need to improve the occupational health service and made a statement in terms of their function:

“/.../ I think the occupational health service needs to develop since it is a critical actor in the work environment management. The collaboration needs major improvements /.../ I am very critical to the occupational health service /.../ they also fumble a little when they are coming out to the workplaces. We need a collaboration and they need to know us and our work” - HR

5.2 Societal influences on work environment management

This part presents societal factors that influence the work environment management. The main components identified by HR and managers contain work environment challenges at workplaces, high demand and ill health.

5.2.1 Work Environment challenges at workplaces

In terms of challenges at workplaces, both HR and managers identified consequences of globalisation and digitalisation such as boundaryless work. The new way of working is mentioned by all of the respondents as a challenge and they require clearer legal directives in terms of boundaryless work, as for instance when it comes to work from home and the manager's responsibility of the work environment at home.

Boundaryless work is demanding both for employees and leadership, while having many employees working from home or on another geographical location, and the respondents believe that this way of working is not sustainable. One informant expressed that the globalisation and digitalisation have influenced the work climate and have created a new reality with high demands on flexibility and adjustments which leads to challenges. Organisations need to be alert how this new work life affects people and create organisational structures to ensure people good conditions and opportunity to recover. Further, many of the respondents talk about the difficulties to handle work hours. The demand of flexibility is a challenge in order to control worked hours and still comply with the legislation.

“We want everyone to be at the office as much as possible and if you want to work from home that will be only if necessary. But we have a new generation with another way of thinking and we need a balance. Since we are a global firm, one may sit at home because that person works with the United States or starts working early because a colleague works in Asia.” - HR

Digitalisation is claimed by several HR and managers as something that creates frustration and stress for many employees across departments within organisations. New systems are constantly implemented in organisations which has an effect on the work environment. New systems change people's way of working and these are implemented without enough time for preparation to adapt. One HR respondent stated: *"You have very little control, and, in these situations, stress occurs"*. The majority of the HR respondents claim the need for a legislation regarding the digitalisation in order to structure the work.

"We have recently changed our sales-system, and you can imagine the cues. If talking about digital work environment and OSA, it is such an important part. To implement IT-systems, it becomes more efficient and we save money, absolutely, but it also means that you change people's work, and new conditions emerge" - HR

5.2.2 High demands and ill health as societal factors in work environment management

High demands that creates ill health is mentioned as another challenge from HR and managers. Further, they mention the psychosocial dimension as complex since each individual is unique and one case is not similar to another. It is time consuming and takes a lot of effort from both HR and managers to handle. The reality for the research's selected organisations within the private sector is characterised by high performance and the respondents mention the difficulties in balancing demand and resources and see an increased risk with ill health and stress. An HR manager said: *"Nowadays we see increased rates among officials due to ill health and stress"*. The versatile challenge of high demands at workplaces worries both HR and managers. They are aware of the tension between the wish for high performance and balancing the demands and resources. One manager said: *"The challenge for us is that there is always too much work and that we hire driven people"*. The safety representative also mentions the high demands on the employees and raised concerns:

"The demands are still high. In earlier days we had more slacks, more odd personalities that did not have the same high expectations for delivery. Then the globalisation, the individualism and other, have increased the demand of delivery on each individual and the economic goals makes it nearly anorectic at some places. It emerges from both the outside and within. I can be sad when I see that. I see how that breaks down some individuals. One has to be very strong to endure or resist that" – Safety representative

Additional remark stated by several of the HR respondents was the gender aspect. They explain girls in general to have higher grades in school and vastly ambitious while enter the work life. The respondents continue by claiming that women have higher expectations on work life that the organisation, presumably cannot meet. When it comes to sick-leave it is quite balanced between men and women until women have children. Then something happens. One HR mentions the attempts to find solutions for the inequality within the workplace but point out the social structures such as traditions to be more difficult to handle and said:

“We cannot find all factors within the work environment which make it difficult, but we are doing some attempt to correct the issue” - HR

5. 3 Organisational influences on work environment management

This part presents how HR navigates the work environment management and how cultural values influence the work environment management.

5.3.1 Making work environment management comprehensible and useful

Organisational and social work environment are central aspects in the work environment management that according to the HR respondents requires great attention. The work environment management is often laid upon the HR department who has the task to make the work permeated through the whole organisation. A solution, reported by many of the HR respondents, is to do the work comprehensible and useful for the people within the organisation and especially for the managers who perform the management. HR works closely to the legal issues and therefore is more knowledgeable about the legislation. This is confirmed by all of the respondents that agree upon HR to be the experts and who translates the legislation into practice for managers. This division lowers the expectation on managers to know what is regulated in the law. Therefore, a majority of the HR respondents explain that they strive to integrate the legislation into the corporate culture and express the need to communicate and translate the law and its provision into comprehensible and useful tools for managers.

*“/.../ if we were talking about the laws, well, then it would just become pure legislation. /.../ therefore, we try to talk about our values /.../ and build upon that, and I think managers do not know what part is from the law and what is our culture, and for us that is nonessential”
- HR*

To make the work environment management understandable and useful, every HR respondent mention that they provide educations at all levels in the organisation. However, most of them claim the need for higher level of knowledge. One HR respondent argues that work environment platforms with HR, managers and safety representatives tended to be perceived as dull with main focus on presenting absence due to illness and the connection to their own work and how to solve the dilemma was not clear. As a result of this, managers did not show high interest in enhancing their knowledge about work environment, and managers are comfortable in knowing that HR is the experts regarding legislation. To raise interest among managers, some of the HR respondents strive to make meetings and workshops more interesting and relate to managers' own situation. One HR respondent wanted to change the meetings of discussions to be more concrete:

“I don't want us to discuss only how we are doing here and what we want to achieve, I want more hands-on training” – HR

Many of the HR respondents mention their work to bring a holistic understanding of work environment, to make it easier for each manager to apply and connect to their particular work. Several of the HR informants agree upon the need for managers to fully understand the purpose of work environment, to achieve a mutual understanding of the work in order to gain higher engagement. HR respondents are aware of the need to provide educations and meetings of relevance for managers. A former manager that now is an HR described the time as manager as following:

“One shall attend leadership educations, and then, from another direction, that we shall think of work environment. Well, isn't it what I am doing already? We attend courses in appraisals and then it comes something else with name “work environment”. It is like something extra to do and I am asking myself “haven't we already done, isn't it what I am doing all day? I get into a defensive position at once” – HR

5.3.2 Human Resource as a close support to managers

Many of the HR respondents clearly state the challenging situation for managers, characterised with high demands and fast delivery. It is a challenge to create right conditions for managers and HR informants mention the high turnover among managers. Apart from managers' own

work they shall work for a good work environment for the employees and some of the HR informants raise concerns about the pressured situations.

“A lot of the work environment work is in place but then it is the managers, they are in a jam. They have their own workload, so they do not manage to take in other’s as well /.../ You can’t just think of the employees, managers are also employees, but they have another role and how are their conditions?” – HR

As stated in the quotation above managers have a pressured situation and many of the HR respondents stress the need to support and facilitate for managers. All of the respondents state the role distribution between HR and managers regarding responsibility and tasks to be clear. In situations of high pressure and heavy workload, a dialogue is necessary to unburden the managers to find what parts can be relocated from the manager and not. However, it is clear that the responsibility for work environment cannot be erased from the manager. Despite clear role distributions, some of the HR respondents mention that it seems to be difficult for managers knowing what to do in certain situations. Since the work situation varies when managing work environment, it is necessary for HR to firmly demonstrate what support they provide. One HR respondent said: *“I think the operations don’t know exactly what to do and when, and what support there is.”* To counteract the uncertainty, HR needs to be active in promoting their support, and one HR informant put emphasis on this matter with an illustration:

“We want to see the managers as internal customers, so they will come to our shop and find something they want, to help them...” - HR

One HR respondent talks about HR’s support to managers as consultative, they do not take over the work or mandate from managers, to the contrary, HR listen actively and discuss towards solutions together with managers. This has contributed to a feeling among managers that they receive help from HR and it creates greater confidence both for managers to handle situations but also for the HR function in the organisation. A manager mentioned: *“to be brave, it is our duty”* and argued for support from managers to create confidence in confronting difficult issues. To further prevent uncertainties among managers, some HR respondents talk about the importance of support and to facilitate managers in their daily work environment work.

“Our highest ambition is to create confidence among our managers. We want to do that both via structures and tools to give them support to help them be the best possible manager. /.../

Focus is to create good conditions for our managers to fulfill their mission. They are both leaders, employers and business representatives, they have great responsibility” – HR

One part of the HR function that has emerged from several HR respondents' answers, is how HR needs to be flexible and responsive to organisational needs. This was demonstrated in one of the organisations, who runs a major project and the organisation appointed a work environment expert to the project as a close and extended support to the manager. This function advised and facilitated the managers on an operational level. The advantage of structuring the support is illustrated by the respondent manager in the organisation:

“To have a resource that is supporting is really beneficial, everyone feels so much better. People really wants to prioritise these parts, but it is lack of time /.../ initially, one produce good documents, then you shall do follow ups, but you do not manage to do all these because you have so much else to do. So, I guess that the big difference, is that you have someone that can help you do the follow ups, that pushes you and say: ‘hey, I do the administrative work, let’s look at it together’ because it is that administrative work that gets too heavy”
Manager

5.3.3 Economical aspects for work environment management

HR's work is highly a part of the entire organisations' economy and their strategy needs to be compatible with other strategies in the organisation. Several HR respondents advocate for the work environment management to be integrated into the entire business and not discussed as a separate topic. It needs to be prioritised in the organisation and a suitable action plan is required. Some of the organisations have further developed the integration of work environment management and incorporated the action plan into the organisation's business plan. One HR expressed:

“You need to place everything into one business plan, to prevent a variety of separated action plans. Instead, you have one business plan that you break down to different levels in the organisation. I think that is good. Before, I thought we could have one action plan for health and wellbeing, that everyone placed their guidelines in. But we do have one business plan, and it needs to be integrated there. The measures must be in the same plan since we discuss and collaborate around that plan” - HR

The connection between investments in organisations work environment and profitability is known by the HR respondents. The most appearing cost due to personnel is turnover and loss in knowledge transfer. The HR respondents also possess the knowledge about economic costs

of long sick-leave and the implied consequences on group level. The uneven workload for colleagues, lack of competence and the changed group dynamic followed by uncertainty among the employees', impact both performance and profit. By considering these areas HR can contribute to economic prosperity as well as higher well-being among employees. Therefore, work environment management is high on the agenda according to the respondents. One of the HR respondents explained the economic impact:

“We as employer has to help, that is an economic advantage for us, it is costly to have someone sick at home. Not only that we assist and pay salaries or sickness benefit, it is also loss in production, tensions arise in the group and they become understaffed.” - HR

Another economical aspect of work environment management is the need for the organisation to stay and maintain attractive as an employer on the market. Organisations have to be competitive and take the reputation into account. To have a good work environment is beneficial for both the employee and organisation. The connection between work environment and economy is articulated by all HR respondents as critical to put greater emphasis on. One of the HR stated:

“To have a good work environment becomes more attractive for the employee. We shall not only work with it due to the legislative demand; I believe many job applicants require a good work environment today” – HR

5.3.4 Cultural influences on the work environment management

The importance of the organisation's culture is something that the majority of the respondents express as vital for the work environment management, sometimes even the greatest strength. In one of the organisation an HR phrased:

“/.../ to think together and to take care of each other, that is so fundamental in our culture, and as I see it, that is our greatest strength” – HR

An organisation's culture is colored by the structure and gives directions for the implementation of work environment management. HR respondents discuss the need to talk more about structure in the context of culture. It is a challenging work since in some organisations the structures are old and rigid, hence hard to modify and renew.

Values are fundamental in an organisation and both HR and managers spoke about their organisation's mission and vision that permeate the organisation. Values are like cornerstones that HR can build the work environment management on. The respondents firmly see the connection between the organisational culture and work environment in a positive sense but also see the contradiction when words and actions do not correspond and only becomes empty words. One HR reported:

“Sometimes the top management team talks about values, but it becomes “fluff”, because they only talk about it there and not at lower levels in the organisation” – HR

Support from top management is claimed as important by all the respondents and one HR expressed: *“the support from top management is alpha and omega”*. However, the degree of engagement and involvement from top management varies from organisation to organisation. Some of the respondents mention the challenge to let the mission and vision be the guiding values and express top management occasionally demonstrates insufficiency in letting the values become actions. This is illustrated by one HR: *“You can say it, but it may differ between what is said and done. To be honest”*. Although none of the respondents explicitly expressed contradiction between words and actions, one respondent demonstrated an example of conflicting values. The respondent works in an organisation with good cultural reputation and claimed the expression to be said with a good intention:

“I get nearly crazy every Christmas when they say: ‘go home and relax so you can come back fully recharged, we have a hectic spring in front of us’. What, shall I spend my vacation just to rest so I can work hard again? I go nuts on that” – Manager

When values fail to be acted out from top management, HR steps in to restore the values. The manager behind the last quotation gives appraisal to the HR that takes responsibility and step forward in living the values when setting limitations.

“/.../ they lead by example, sometimes I nearly get annoyed at my HR. I write an email late at night but does not receive any answer until the next day, even though I see that the person is online...(laughter)” – Manager

A culture is strong and hard for individuals to change. One respondent explains the difficulties for an employee to turn off the phone on vacation or leave the computer at home if the culture demands the opposite. This is connected to what is acceptable in the organisational culture and the behavior is difficult to change claimed by the respondent. However, individuals can do major changes due to organisational values. To lead by example on the managerial level is something that the majority of the HR respondents report and the significance to act out the values. One of the HR respondents gives an example of when their culture totally changed due to a shift in a top management position:

“Since we got a new manager a year ago, it has changed, now one lives the values and norms in a good way. You are not supposed to answer emails when on vacation. You are not supposed to call in to a meeting when you are off. Then you shall have a stand-in person, one that represents you at these meetings. That culture did we not have before. Maybe at lower levels, but at top level, no. It is very top management that sets the tone” - HR

5.3.5 Values in proactive work environment management

To create a good work environment, HR and managers need to be accordant while embracing a holistic perspective of the individual. In one organization, HR expressed the intention for the employees to work optimal rather than maximum. The manager in the same organisation emphasised the importance having a dialogue with the employees about the need to take breaks and promotes a mindset of listening to the mind and body. Several respondents mentioned their interventions for strengthening the mental health and underline this to be crucial with today's high demands and fast pace. Most of the organisations have an approach of focusing on healthiness rather than illness and mention the advantage of focusing on the 98% of workers that are healthy instead of the 2% that are not. This approach highlights the strengths and enhances the level of engagement among all employees. Managers can work proactively and for example help employees to find best way to recover after peaks. The manager in the organisation said:

“It is crazy how much work it is sometimes, but then it is also super important to know where one can receive energy/.../We have talked very much about what recharges. How can we think about mindfulness and other practices? It is not mambo jambo, it is good for your brain. We need to make the employees understand that we can't go on as we always have done and work like crazy, no one can handle that. People get burned out. We need to learn how to handle our living days as it is today” – Manager

Working with strengths and possibilities rather than weaknesses have raised further perspectives in order to empower and enhance the strengths in the individual instead of being persistent in attempts to develop some qualities. One HR respondent articulated:

“I think it is even more important to enhance what is already good/.../ if you are good in something you probably have the chance to be even better in that. Do not force someone to do something they feel bad about /.../ if you hate talking in front of people and the results turns out bad, let the person avoid these situations and let someone who enjoys it do that task”
- HR

5.3.6 Dialogue as a valuable asset in work environment management

The significance of dialogue to achieve a good work environment is stated by all of the respondents. An open dialogue and to constantly prioritise conversations are beneficial at all levels, but also claimed to be a major challenge. One outcome of the constant dialogue between HR and managers has given confidence for the HR function within the organisation. One HR said: *“It is about to open up for a dialogue. When doing that, solutions to other issues will come one after the other”*. Besides that, all of the respondents talk about the need for the daily and natural conversations with their employees and one manager claimed the daily ongoing dialogue that ensures something systematically. One HR respondent also claim the importance to keep it simple and said that the best advice to a manager regarding work environment is to use one’s common sense and mentioned the positive outcome of uncomplicated talks.

“It might sound silly, but when you come to work in the morning and say hello to your employees, you achieve awful lot, you pick up how people feel and you get an immediate feedback if there is something of importance” – HR

The simplicity in the everyday conversation along with a manager’s availability is claimed by an HR respondent to be the success for a leader and continues to underline that it is not about having major programs or plans but being attendant. The work environment is associated with high demands and an employee’s private situation is often less considered. The productivity varies due to every single life situation and a part of the HR work is to initiate dialogue with managers about finding ways that help managers to adapt demands after the employee’s circumstances. The safety representative stressed the need for dialogue:

“We need to talk to each other as adults, that is most important, and the helping climate will come, it is like a self-playing piano. Now I sound like Jesus (laughter) but I do really believe in that. When there is trust, then you want to help” - Safety representative

Another asset to involve employees in a dialogue, as mentioned by an HR, is to take advantage of the thoughts and ideas from the employees and claim the voice to be a needed in the organisation. To involve employees is also beneficial for HR in their work environment management since increased engagement among employees contributes to improvements for the organisation. One HR respondent phrased:

“We can educate the managers in absurdum but if we do not involve the employees, it does not give anything. Additionally, if we educate and do workshops with the employees, then they can claim requirement to the managers. Then it may be hard for managers who have not acted” – HR

5.3.7 Collaboration with safety representatives

The degree of collaboration with safety representatives differs between the organisations. In one organisation the manager did not have any collaboration with safety representative at all and did not have insight about their function or the purpose of the collaboration. Several respondents put emphasis on the advantage of a collaboration and dialogue with the safety representatives in their work environment management. The respondents mention the safety representatives involved in various activities in relation to work environment as for instance employee surveys, reorganisations and to be an extra eye to detect disproportion. The safety representative can be an additional part for managers to deliberate with and for employees to talk to if something at the workplace is not satisfying:

“If it is not possible to talk directly to the manager, we have the safety representatives who the employees can turn to and raise their concerns if they perceive the manager not to be responsive or does not understand” – Manager

To have a good collaboration with safety representatives contributes with additional support for HR in the work environment management and once again highlights the importance to work together for the purpose of good work environment.

6. Analysis

In this section previous research in relation to the research questions will be integrated together with the finding and analyzed through the lens of institutional theory. Still, the theory will structure the presentation via its regulatory, cognitive and normative pillar. In this section the legitimacy of Human Resources is elaborated when navigating the external and internal influences in relation to work environment management.

6.1 How Human Resources navigate regulatory factors

The employer's responsibility is “to promote health and prevent illness and accidental events at work and to ensure a good work environment” (AML, 1977:1160). The legislation is stable and the framework that constitutes the central point in HR’s work in work environment management. HR has to navigate the work environment management in relation to the legislation to make the content relevant and supportive for the organisation.

What emerged from the results is that HR possesses legal expertise, hence has the prominent task to interpret and transform the legislation into comprehensible and useful tools. This finding corresponds to the advantage HR has to use their professional judgment to interpret and stay close to the intention of the legislation rather than literally comply with the law (Bringselius, personal communication, 2020-02-14). One example comes from one of the informants who expressed common sense as best advice to perform work environment management. Heizmann and Fox (2019) claimed the difficulties for HR to establish themselves as a trustful contributor. However, HR can use the insight and knowledge when being close to both top management and managers, when transforming legislation into practice and thus achieve trustworthiness and legitimacy within the organisation. HR also requires to be allowed and recognised as a relevant actor by top management, in order to reach its best potential in work environment management.

The Act and the provisions’ aim is to support and guide how to incorporate the work environment management. However, the results reported in the research by Hartman and Odmark (2019) and in the research by European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2015) are concordant with the finding that demonstrated challenges in incorporating the legislation. However, the reality collides with the aim of the legislation and becomes problematic since the laws are made to facilitate organisations to incorporate a good work environment management

on a daily basis. The respondents claim the systematic work environment work to be bureaucratic and incomprehensive with additional documentation and a tendency of insufficient follow up. This aligns with the statement by Schmidt et al. (2019) that claim the value of work environment to be neglected when organisations focus more on documentation. The provision SAM came into effect in 2001 and is colored by the era when New Public Management were influential to make public management more efficient, and documentation was a central part. The extensive documentation risks undermining the employees' engagement (Bringselius, 2019). However, what emerged from the results is a decoupling from the major procedure of documentation towards a more liberates view on the legislation. There is an asset when HR dares to depart from the strict view in how they relate to the legislation and instead use the law as a foundation in their work. It is shown that when HR digests the content of the law and makes it more comprehensible and useful, especially for managers, it facilitates to apply and incorporate the legislation into their own operations. This demonstrates clearly how HR use the approach of best fit to suit the organisation's needs (Urban, 2018).

6.1.1 Collaborations

Regarding the regulated collaboration with Occupational Health Service, trade unions and safety representatives the result confirms the collaboration to give support and expertise to make the work environment management more efficient (AFS 2001:1). Eriksson - Zetterquist (2009) highlights the need for collaboration with key actors. Additional value comes along with a trustful collaboration when the actor can give another perspective as a third party and is a support for both HR and managers in the work environment management.

Opinions arose in the results about the need of improvements for the Occupational Health Service, since they are distanced from the operations and not close enough to adjust their interventions to the particular organisation. This can be perceived as the approach best practice, and to become a better function for organisations, they need to consider an adjusted collaboration to correspond to the organisation's need as a best fit (Urban, 2018).

6.2 How Human Resources navigate societal factors

The societal influences imply different challenges for HR. Digitalisation and boundaryless work as a consequence of globalisation brings major changes with greater flexibility, autonomy for the individual and diffuse line between work and private life in work life (Näswall et al., 2008). According to Mellner et al (2016), employees and employer perceives high demands since they have to organise their own work to a greater extent and Van del Heuvel et al (2018) report digitalisation to be an additional stressor. This corresponds to the finding where respondents claimed the digitalisation to be complex and stressful as it changes people's way of working. Furthermore, the flexibility and changing work life make it difficult for HR and managers to ensure a good work environment and compliance with legislation, for instance in terms of managing work time as been exemplified by the respondents. The changing work life results in ill health and work-related stress (Hartman & Odmark, 2019). The source to ill health is connected to high demands and expectations, and exist both in society and the organisation, but the psychological effects are expressed differently among individuals where Mellner et al (2016) mention for instance stress, sleep disorder and the interference of recovery. The finding shows ill health as a difficult topic to approach because of the individual character which makes it nearly impossible to design best practice. On the other hand, to design best fit is highly difficult due to the diverse variables but also to the diffuse distinction between what is work related and not. Boundaryless work implies greater responsibility for the individual to manage their own work and indicates a shift in power from the organisation to the individual (Allvin 2011) and Näswall et al (2008) also underline this as stressors for the individuals. Still, most of the respondents discuss the difficulties in how to manage the variation of ill health on an individual level. Only a few organisations clearly stated interventions on a structural level to counteract the source of ill health on.

Another example of ill health is the gender perspective where the respondents claimed major concern for young women, especially when having children since the rate of ill health then increased among women. This issue has its firm roots in the society's norms and expectations and the respondents perceived the issue as something that is more or less out of their control. Although, what emerged in the finding, HR tries to develop strategies and work proactive in order to combat these challenges and prevent people from suffering from ill health related to

work in long term perspective. This is done by raising awareness among the employees by discussions and educations. Still, they struggle to find good approaches and methods. The relation to the strong social system, traditions and norms in the society (Scott, 2014) makes it difficult for the particular HR department in an organisation to control and manage. It is important to not only put focus on the individual level but also to emphasise the organisation's responsibility to scrutinise their own structures to detect any negative effect. Organisations can take the role as reformists (Eriksson - Zetterquist, 2009) and counteract the social norms of high demands, if not the norms become reinforced and mimetic isomorphism maintained (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This issue also requires comprehensive interventions on societal level where the government plays a critical role (Skr 2015/16:80). Further, the provision OSA is a response from the government to the current situation in Sweden with high rate of sick leave due to high demands and stress.

The level of actions among the represented organisations towards deep rooted norms in the society and the complexity of individual variables of ill health have implications on HR's work environment management. HR can act as reformists to stabilise interest and collaborations with key persons (Eriksson - Zetterquist, 2009) and create involvement of top management by reason to their heavy influence in the organisation (Hartman & Odmark, 2019). This to make top management prioritise work environment management and together balance high demands and combat ill health in order to challenge rigid structure and isomorphism (Eriksson - Zetterquist, 2009) and promote employees' well-being. Therefore, HR has to advocate for both employer and employees' needs and interests (Kochan, 2008) and demonstrate the connection between the organisation's profitability and to maintain a good work environment (Quade et al., 2019).

6.3 How Human Resources navigate organisational culture and values

To gain legitimacy, HR has to become a significant contributor for the organisation and be perceived as a trustful actor that contributes to prosperity for both business and people (Heizmann & Fox, 2019, Gunnarsson et al., 2016). HR needs to advocate to both top management and managers to prioritize work environment management and by staying close to both of them, HR has the possibility to influence the work environment management (Schmidt, 2017, Boglind, 2019) through their insight and knowledge of the business and adjust

the support to a best fit. According to the respondents, HR gets an understanding of managers' situation and can therefore enlarge the engagement of the aim of work environment. This facilitates the natural integration of work environment management for managers in the business and prevents the work to be handled separated as mentioned by Birgerdotter & Strandberg (2018). The possible conflict between profit and priorities for work environment leaves HR in a position to handle a variety of tensions within the organisation (Frick & Johanson 2013, Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2019). HR is required to possess the qualities to master a variation of goals and interests (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2019). To handle the dissonance and diverse priorities creates, the respondents strongly recommend dialogue as a starting point and argue for a clear and well-intended communication. A beneficial factor for managers, emerged in the finding, is the simple everyday conversation and availability for the employees. A culture with focus on the employees' needs lays the foundation for trustful relations. Together with activities to stimulate a holistic perspective, it leads to a good work environment (Bringselius, 2019) and proves the finding of trust connected to a helpful culture.

The organisational culture is closely connected to the leadership (Sharma & Sharma, 2010) and according to Boxall and Purcell (2016) an organisation's strategy is best discerned in the organisation's actions. What emerged from the finding is the coherence from the respondents within the same organisation and mutual view on their methods to improve their work environment management. In one organisation both HR and manager emphasised their work with structures and routines whereas another organisation emphasised the culture to enhance the work environment management. In the organisation where focus on routines was prominent, less emphasis on culture and human values could be observed. Both respondents in this organisation stated that words and actions are not always aligned when talking about support from top management. As Sadri & Lees (2001) state, a positive culture provides with a competitive advantage. In one of the other organisations, where mission and vision were well established, culture was stated as the greatest strengths and both HR and manager frequently spoke about care of the employees. The outcome when values are stable and aligned with actions, the culture is an asset and gains credibility to the work environment management and legitimacy to HR.

An organisational culture can be changed but requires engagement from top management (Sadri & Lees, 2001) due to its heavy influence in the organisation (Hartman & Odmark, 2019). The possibility to perform a cultural change is also accentuated by the example stated by an HR when a shift in top management changed their organisational culture in only a few months by actively working for a change. HR can also take the role as reformist while advocating for new solutions and creating collaboration with key persons and relevant networks (Eriksson - Zetterquist, 2009). Referring to the respondents, collaboration with safety representatives can be an asset in working for a cultural change to improve work environment management.

7. Conclusion

In this research, 13 semi-structured interviews with 15 HR personnel and managers within the private sector in Sweden, give attention to how the Work Environment Act and its provisions are applied in their daily work and how HR navigates external and internal challenges.

The purpose of this research was to investigate how HR maintains legitimacy in the work environment management and to what extent the legislation is supportive. Investigated is also how HR navigates in the work environment management challenges. Besides the purpose, success factors in work environment management have emerged.

HR has to achieve legitimacy at three levels; comply with the legislation, relate to societal influences and organisational values (Krell et al., 2016). This is illustrated in the three pillars in institutional theory (Scott 2014) which is the theoretical framework in this research. The finding demonstrates that HR meets challenges at all levels and therefore has to navigate its work within the organisation in relation to the people to gain legitimacy. The challenges HR and managers described are also claimed to be success factors while the organisation works together to achieve a good work environment.

On the regulatory level HR has to relate to the legislation and comply with the Work Environment Act and provisions in order to stay legitimated (Boxall & Purcell, 2016). The finding demonstrates the legislation to be theoretical and diffuse. Since the legislation is designed to apply all business fields, firm directives in how to integrate the work are insufficient. The research displays that HR increases the knowledge about the aim of the legislation and transform it into comprehensible and useful tools as a help, especially for managers who perform work environment management. The division of priorities can create tensions HR has to navigate (Frick & Johanson, 2013). The legislation gives a good foundation for HR to advocate for work environment management and to make top management and managers prioritise work environment and is consequently supportive. The finding reports that organisations embrace the advantage when integrating work environment management into the organisation's business plan in order to develop a best fit as also suggested by Boxall & Purcell (2016).

Challenges HR and managers face on a societal level are the implications of boundaryless work and high demands. High demands exist in the society but also within the organisation and the interaction becomes a downward spiral of high demands. This has led to high rates of ill health. Organisations are therefore required to take actions to counteract and prevent the underlying factors of ill health. The finding shows challenges for both HR and managers to handle the broad variation of symptoms caused by ill health and are aligned with the results in the reports by Hartman and Odmark (2019) and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2015). A tendency of interventions has been on individual level, however the finding shows that organisations start to scrutinise themselves to detect negative effects on a structural level. This is a critical aspect in order to counteract strong and ongoing norms and to interfere with isomorphism. The result also indicates that HR changes direction from mainly focusing on ill health, towards a more beneficial strategy focusing on strengths, possibilities and health factors and work to enhance existing positive qualities which also is recommended by the Authority for Work Environment Knowledge (2020). This approach has an economic advantage when high rates of sick-leave declines (Birgerdotter & Strandberg, 2018, Quade et al., 2019) and further, the health focusing approach is easy for everyone to relate to which evokes engagement within the organisation. To work for a good work environment for everyone within the organisation creates trust and legitimacy for HR when contributing to prosperity for the business and people's health.

Organisational culture and values influence how HR performs the work environment management. The finding displays challenges for HR when words and actions do not correspond, particularly from managerial level, and the degree of trust among employees declines (Sharma & Sharma, 2010). Furthermore, the culture can entail challenge but can also be an asset. When the culture is characterised by a people-centered approach, it can bring extra strength to and speed the work environment management (Sadri & Lees, 2001). The finding indicates that individuals play a key role for the work with culture and work environment management and can act as role models to push the work forward.

In the finding, an open and honest dialogue at all levels emerged to be the cornerstone and an asset for the work environment management and claimed to be a good foundation for trustful relations in work environment by Bringselius (2019). HR navigates among different organisational interests from employers and employees (Kochan, 2008) and benefits from

trustful relations. By being close to both top management and managers, insight and knowledge exchanges which facilitates for HR to adjust the support. The finding indicates great satisfaction for managers to have a close and relevant support from HR. The situational support enhances the confidence in managers and prevents the work environment work to be additional work task which becomes a relief in a heavy workload.

To conclude, the scientific contribution of the research is the challenges HR and managers face while implementing work environment management, but also traced success factors to create a good work environment. Patterns have become prominent in this research for how HR maintains legitimacy in the work environment management while generating advantage to the organisation and adding value to the business through economic and health perspective. This underlines the HR transformation waves and describes the development and importance of HR function to operate close both to top management and managers (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). The finding makes it possible to apply to a larger population of organisations in particularly Sweden.

8. Future research recommendations

It would be of interest to apply this focus of the research at the public sector and also in medium scale organisations in order to see if there might differ among the approach of work environment management. In addition, to explore and analyse whether the different roles of HR have an impact on the business and work environment management is of interest for further investigation.

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10. Appendix

10.1 Appendix 1 - Interview Guide

Vad är arbetsmiljö och arbetsmiljöarbete?

- Hur beskriver du arbetsmiljö?
- Vad är viktigt i arbetsmiljöarbetet för dig som HR/chef? Varför?
- Hur upplever du omfattningen av arbetsmiljöarbetet? För stort? krångligt, tidsödande?

Kunskap om arbetsmiljö

- Hur har du fått kunskap om arbetsmiljöarbete?
- Hur mycket har ni pratat om arbetsmiljö på ledningsgruppsnivå?
- Finns det som en stående punkt?
- Hur mycket pratar ni om arbetsmiljö på personalmöten?
- Finns det som en stående punkt?
- Kan du ge exempel på vad ni pratar om då?
- Upplever du att det behövs större kunskap om arbetsmiljö på någon nivå?

Prioritet av arbetsmiljöarbete. Tid

- Har du som HR/chef tillräckligt med tid för arbetsmiljöarbete?
- Upplever du som HR/chef att arbetet med arbetsmiljö är prioriterat utav ledningen?
- Upplever du att arbetsmiljöarbete prioriteras vid tidsbrist inom organisationen? (av kollegor, chefer och ledningsgruppen)
- Vad är det som prioriteras i arbetsmiljöarbetet? Varför?

Ansvarsfördelning & Roller

- Hur ligger ansvarsfördelningen kring arbetsmiljöarbete mellan dig och chef/HR?
- Upplever du att rollfördelningen är tydlig mellan dig HR/chef?

Värden

- Hur värderas det arbetsmiljöarbete som du gör utav ledningsgruppen?
- Varifrån får du ditt stöd i arbetsmiljöarbetet?
- Vilket värde skulle du säga att ert arbetsmiljöarbete har i er organisation?
- Ser ni någon koppling mellan era värden, kultur och ert arbetsmiljöarbete? (bli hörd, delaktighet, våga säga som det är)

Lagen som styrdokument

- Om man tänker på lagarna (AML, SAM, OSA)
- Anser du att du/det går att förstå lagarna? (råd och lagar blandat)
- Hur använder ni lagarna i praktiken?
- Hur mycket omtolkar ni lagarna?
- På vilket sätt är lagarna stöttande i ert arbete?
- Vilken skillnad har OSA:n gjort för arbetsmiljöarbetet?

(Hur ser ni på sanktionerna som är kopplade till lagen?)

Systematiskt Arbetsmiljöarbete SAM

- Använder ni er av SAM hjulet? Är det till hjälp för er?
- När gör ni era *undersökningar* och hur går det till? Vem är ansvarig? Vem genomför?
- När gör ni era *riskbedömningar* och hur går de till? Vem är ansvarig? Vem genomför?
- Hur brukar era *åtgärder* se ut? Vem är ansvarig för att dessa genomförs?
- Vilken typ av preventiva åtgärder har ni för att främja god arbetsmiljö?
- Hur ser era *uppföljningar* ut? Vem är ansvarig för det? Vem genomför?
- Hur bedömer ni att resultaten av åtgärderna förbättrar arbetsmiljön för medarbetarna?
- Om man tänker på OSA; hur säkerställer ni att förutsättningarna är goda för de anställda?
- Hur är medarbetarna delaktiga i arbetsmiljöarbetet?

- Vilken av de fyra delarna i systematiska arbetsmiljöarbetet lägger HR/chef ner mest tid på?
- Vilken del är mest utmanande enligt dig? På vilket sätt?

- Vilken del har ni lyckats bäst med?
- Skulle ni kunna säga att systematiska arbetsmiljöarbetet är väl inarbetat i er organisation?

Svårigheter

- Vilka svårigheter ser du med arbetsmiljöarbetet?
- Vad skulle underlätta arbetet?
- Eventuella svårigheter med lagen så som den är utformad idag? Ändringar?

Framgångsfaktorer

- Vilka är era framgångsfaktorer tror du i ert systematiska arbetsmiljöarbete?

10.2 Appendix 2 - Consent Form Interview



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Master uppsats: Arbetsmiljölagen och arbetsmiljöarbetet inom företag.

Studenter: Annika Magnusson & Mari Yamaki Wiklander

Program: Master's in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations,
Göteborgs Universitet

Stort tack för att du medverkar i vår studie. Intervjun kommer ta cirka 60 minuter. Du behöver inte svara på alla frågor om du ej önskar och vi kan avbryta intervjun när du önskar.

Detta samtyckesformulär är av vikt för oss för att säkerställa att du förstår syftet med din medverkan samt att du godkänner villkoren för medverkan.

Läs igenom stycket nedan;

- Intervjun kommer spelas in och transkriberas
- Transkriberingen av intervjun kommer analyseras av Annika Magnusson och Mari Yamaki Wiklander
- Tillgång till transkriberingen kommer vara begränsad till oss forskningsstudenter. Om behov uppstår kommer delar av den visas för vår handledare Karin Allard, universitetslektor vid institutionen för sociologi och arbetsvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet
- Sammanfattning eller direkta citat som framkommit under intervjun kommer anonymiseras så att ingen kan bli identifierad eller kunna härleda till dig eller organisationen. Materialet kommer att tas om hand med försiktighet
- Den faktiska inspelningen kommer raderas när uppsatsen är färdig
- Möjlighet till att kontakta studenterna om ytterligare frågor tillkommer finns
- Om önskan finns får medverkande ta del av transkriberingen

Genom att skriva under detta formulär, godkänner jag villkoren ovan;

Medverkandes underskrift & Datum

Forskningsstudenters underskrift & Datum
