

**HRM in Transition:
Chinese HR Managers Talk**

Weiwei Guan

School of Management
University of Surrey



A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
September 2010

ProQuest Number: 13803803

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 13803803

Published by ProQuest LLC (2018). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

Abstract

This research aims to ascertain how HR managers in China perceive their roles under China's economic transition period from a state-controlled economy to a market economy. There has been a tendency for studies of Chinese HRM to be dominated by survey-based methods and quantitative techniques and whilst these have provided helpful cross-sectional insights they have generally failed to capture how the practice of HRM is experienced from the perspective of Chinese managers themselves. An examination of the literature shows that both in the context of Chinese HRM, and HRM more generally, the lack of detailed qualitative research has left gaps in terms of HR managers' perceptions of their role, most notably in terms of its emotional dimensions (especially important in the Chinese context of *guanxi* practices) and its status as part of a career pattern.

This research therefore adopts an exploratory approach that aims to provide tentative explanations of patterns that emerge from detailed semi-structured interviews with Chinese HR managers (38 managers from 26 diverse companies). Analysis of this data revealed three groups of respondents, defined according to their HR role descriptions: Restricted Functional; Professional Functional; and Strategic Partners. These groups are compared and contrasted in terms of their HR practices, the ways in which they handle emotions, and their career anchors. In each case a distinctive pattern emerges which appears to reflect a complex combination of individual aspirations and structural factors, the latter particularly associated with the hierarchical structure of the organizations concerned and the ways in which power is exercised. The study contributes to knowledge of HRM in six ways: 1. It supports studies that claim ownership may not be the main determining factor in shaping Chinese HRM practices; 2. It shows a tension in the debates about the role of HR managers in relation to employee care and advocacy; 3. It makes a valuable contribution to the role of emotion in HR work; 4. It contributes to showing the significance of *guanxi* practices within Chinese organizations; 5. The study contributes to the area of HR career development which has been seen to be largely unresearched in any form; 6. Finally, it contributes to knowledge of HRM in China by filling an important gap in the form of the lack of qualitative studies of Chinese managers. By presenting a view of the nature and roles of Chinese HR work through the words of Chinese HR managers themselves, this study presents a body of rich data that provides a very unusual insight into the experiences of a group that has been widely explored from the 'outside' but has been given little opportunity to 'speak for itself'.

Dedication to my supervisor
Professor David Goss, Mrs. Fiona Goss and my parents
Without your support,
I would never have been able to achieve this.

献给我敬爱的导师-大卫高斯教授
和他的夫人菲欧娜高斯女士还有我的父母
今天所取得的一切都离不开你们的支持。

Acknowledgements

Everyone has a dream. When I was a little girl, I had a dream to learn English so that one day I could do my PhD in UK. My story of growing up is always connected with learning English. I was graduated from an English Specialized middle school in Dalian, China, my hometown. And then I chose English as my major in Dalian University of Foreign Languages. I get my Bachelor Degree in English. Then I came to UK to pursue my dream of doing PhD. I should say I like UK as I like my hometown. I got the best higher education here and the knowledge I learned here worth to be tasted for the whole life. The process of doing PhD is also a process of personal growth. I came here with an impulse of pursuing dream but achieved here a sharp insight of rationality.

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Professor David Goss, who is the navigator leading me to reach the destination. His wisdom, talented academic ability, hard-working, patience and kindness will root in my heart forever.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Mrs. Fiona Goss and Mrs. Karen Buddle from University of Portsmouth. You are my English mums who shine up my day in UK and prevented me from feeling lonely. I should also send my 'deep thank you' to Mrs. Jane Cook from University of Surrey, who is always there when I need any help. I will also send gratitude to my English, Chinese and other international friends. Without your care, I could not stick to work. Also I would like to say 'thank you' to Dr. Wang Zhaoqian in China, your contribution to the cutting edge medical research in the world encourages me to study hard. Also I would like to say 'thank you' to Mr. Thiti, my study partner, a very handsome and sunny Thai man. It is lucky to share the precious study experiences with you. Appreciation should also be given to people who helped me with my fieldwork in China.

Finally I would like to express my gratitude to my parents, my grandparents and all my relatives. I could always hear your pray and best wishes for me. For your love, I shall work harder and harder.

Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Introduction	2
Chinese Economic History	3
Conclusion.....	19
Chapter Two: Literature Review	21
Introduction	22
HRM-Its Development in the Western and Chinese Economies	23
The Roles of the HR Manager.....	48
Emotion and HR Management	64
Conclusion.....	77
Chapter Three: Methodology	81
Introduction	82
Research Design	83
Research Instrument	96
Sampling.....	98
Validity, Reliability and Ethics	102
Preliminary Analysis of the Data and the Development of Working Categories for Further Analysis	105
Conclusion.....	111
Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group.....	114
Restricted Functional Group.....	115
Conclusion.....	161

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers.....	163
Professional Functional Managers.....	164
Conclusion.....	204
Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group.....	207
Strategic Partners Group.....	208
Conclusion.....	237
Chapter Seven: Conclusions.....	239
Introduction and Summary	240
Discussion.....	245
<i>Buffering</i>	246
<i>Guanxi</i>	249
<i>Emotion Handling</i>	252
<i>Career Anchors</i>	254
Limitations and Future Research.....	263
References.....	267
Appendices	298
Appendix 1: Research Introduction Letter-English version and Chinese translation	
.....	298
Appendix 2: Biographical details of 38 managers.....	301
Appendix 3: The summary of frequency of quotations used by each respondent.....	303

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Three broader developments relating to contemporary HRM	24
Figure 2.2: Storey's model of HR roles.....	50
Figure 2.3: Ulrich's model of HR roles.....	52
Figure 2.4: Higgs's model of HR roles.....	56
Figure 2.5: Ashkanasy's model for emotion management	66
Figure 2.6: The five emotion-handling strategies as derivations of the two logics of appropriateness, mothering and guide-following	71
Figure 3.1: Structure of the research design	101
Figure 7.1: HR roles, power ritual and agency	257

List of Tables

Table 2.1: A comparison of personnel and HRM.....	27
Table 2.2: Personnel management and human resource management	29
Table 2.3: Evolution of HR thinking.....	54
Table 3.1: Three types of research.....	83
Table 3.2: Positivist and interpretivist principles	87
Table 3.3: Major difference between inductive and deductive approaches	89
Table 3.4: Characteristics of three different groups	109
Restricted functional group	109
Professional functional group.....	110
Strategic partnership group.....	111
Table 4.1: Typology of HRM function.....	131
Table 4.2: Ulrich’s typology of HR roles	132
Table 4.3: Pattern identified from restricted functional group	148
Table 5.1: Pattern identified from professional functional managers	196
Table 5.2: Typology of HRM function.....	205
Table 5.3: Ulrich’s typology of HR roles	205
Table 6.1: Ulrich’s typology of HR roles	214
Table 7.1: HR roles and factors	246
Table 7.2: HR roles and emotion handling.....	254
Table 7.3: HR roles and career anchors.....	256

**Chapter One:
Introduction**

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

China is the most populous country in the world and the third largest country in geographical mass. It is also viewed as one of the fastest growing economies in the world: the average annual growth rate in GDP has surpassed 12.5% since 1992 (Gregory & Wales, 1996). China not only presents itself as one of the largest traders and one of the fastest growing economies in the world but has already assumed the important role of one of the engines of global economic growth. This role of China was evident during the global economic in crisis of 2007 when Chinese economy showed significant resilience to the adverse economic climate and contributed significantly to the global GDP even during the hostile economic conditions.

HRM, originally an American management concept, has grown in application in most developed countries, defined for present purposes as “a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization’s most valued assets – people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives” (Armstrong, 2000, p.6). The objective of this research is to study the nature of HRM in China *from the point of view of HR managers* as the Chinese

Chapter One: Introduction

economy undergoes its transition from state-control towards capitalism. Most of the principles of HRM, due to the American origin, are rooted in capitalism and liberal labour market theory. However, in the case of China, the country is making a relatively slow transition from government-controlled factor markets towards partial capitalism. Thus there are potential problems and conflicts in applying concepts and principles derived from Western HRM. To understand this challenging context it is first necessary to provide some background on Chinese development.

Chinese Economic History

China had followed a system of communism which was characterised by centralised government planning and state-run distribution systems from the 1940s until 1978. Even though the Communist party had long argued in favour of industrialisation, Maoism believed that modernisation was the “road to capitalistic restoration” (Cushing & Tompkins, 2007, p.51). In 1978 the Chinese Premier, Deng Xiaoping, began the process of economic reform with an objective of elevating the standard of living of Chinese population, which was growing rapidly (Harvey, 2007). The reforms coincided with the implementation of neo-liberal solutions in Britain and United States. The economy and the managers under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping were asked to work under the slogan of ‘*xiaokang*’- which meant that an ideal society always took care of the needs of the members of the society. Deng summarised the essence of the concept as four modernizations: in Agriculture, Industry, Science and

Chapter One: Introduction

Technology, and Defence. The objective of economic reform was not to abandon communism but to make it function better through relaxation of direct control and government planning.

In 1978, Chairman Hua Guofeng presented the ten year plan for the period 1976-1985. The objective of the plan was to stimulate the infrastructure development through 120 new projects spanning Iron and Steel, Oil and Gas, Coal, Electricity, Railroad and Water Transportation. In 1960, China had produced 19 million tons of Steel which fell to just 8 million tons in 1961, due to the anti-industrialist policies perpetrated by Mao during the period of 'Great Leap Forward'. According to the Ten Year Plan, the steel production had to be increased to an annual level of 60 million tons by 1985 and 180 million tons by 1999. The Chinese government during this period realised that the indigenous technology was not adequately developed to achieve these targets and so resorted to joint ventures with industrially advanced nations such as Germany and Japan. The government also recognised that China was very weak in the generation and transmission of electric power. The Ten Year plan called for investment of \$60 billion in Oil and Gas fields for exploration of new coal mines as well as construction of 20 hydroelectric power projects and 10 other kinds of power plants including thermal. Another area of modernisation was agriculture. China was then a predominantly agricultural country that used primitive techniques in agricultural production which undermined productivity and yield. According to the Ten Year Plan, the government planned to invest \$33 billion in modernisation and

Chapter One: Introduction

mechanisation of agricultural practices. The government was concerned that it had to provide alternative employment to the 100 million agricultural workers who would be left unemployed due to mass mechanisation, but was confident that the parallel growth in industrial and infrastructural sectors would be sufficient to absorb the displaced workers. The planned development in transportation infrastructure included 7 railroad lines across the country and 5 harbours to encourage exports and imports.

China faced massive shortage of capital to implement the extremely ambitious Ten Year Plan. It was believed that the proposed projects would cost between \$350 billion and \$630 billion during the plan period. Besides, most of the projects envisaged were of very long-term nature meaning that there could be long periods of gestation before they began to generate adequate revenue to become self-sufficient. As a means to fund the investments, the government opened the tourism sector and actively marketed China as a tourist destination, which saw some inflow of capital but which was anywhere near adequate. The government, crippled by the shortage of domestic capital, opened the gates for foreign investments. Many Japanese and German companies invested in power and other forms of infrastructure projects on an equity participation basis. China also arranged for a large loan of \$1.2 billion from a consortium of British banks. In a sequence of such debt schemes, the country received about \$10 billion of capital. The problems faced by China in implementing ten year plans were not limited to capital alone. The country faced a massive shortage of skilled labour. It was estimated that there would be a total of 400,000 skilled

Chapter One: Introduction

labourers by early 1980. However considering the total population of 1 billion and the number of industrial projects envisaged simultaneously, this number was miniscule. The problems with respect to the lack of basic infrastructure to support the ambitious projects were clearly visible by the first year of implementation. Almost all the steel plants which were constructed during the period could not attain the crucial production threshold because of the lack of power to support these plants. Besides, due to the failure of the government to press ahead with the development of new harbours, the ships carrying iron ore from Australia and Brazil could not reach the steel plants. The poor condition and inadequacy of the road transport meant that alternative means of transportation of iron ores were unavailable. This led to massive losses for Japanese and German firms which had invested on the basis of the Government's promises.

By 1979, the government began to openly acknowledge that the Ten Year plan had hit major roadblocks due to their resource intensive nature which the country could not provide. In June 1979, the government revised down the targets for all heavy industries by significant margins. For some sectors such as Steel and Petroleum, the targets were almost halved. About 348 heavy industrial projects and over 4,000 small projects were halted. However the government persisted with the vigorous expansion measures and aggressive targets for soft infrastructure projects such as power and coal which were attracting large scale foreign investments.

Chapter One: Introduction

The period between 1979 and 1981 is referred to as the period of readjustment when the Chinese government was focused on correcting some imbalances in the economy created by the earlier economic system and the original Ten Year Plan. During this period of readjustment, the government, armed with its learning that promotion of large scale heavy industries require massive infusion of domestic capital as well as the existence of adequate soft infrastructure, intended to promote the expansion of soft sectors such as agriculture, education, exports etc. One of the primary changes brought about during this period was the rapid increase in exports. The remarkable strength of present-day Chinese economy is its export-oriented industries. This has been achieved as a result of export expansion programmes undertaken since 1979. The government, during the period of readjustment, was also focused on improving the state of infrastructure in the country including roads, rail networks, power, water etc. and redirected investments into light industries which saw the growth of textiles, banks etc.

In the industrial sector, the period of readjustment saw the adjustment of imbalance of power which was totally concentrated in the hands of the government officials. The individual businesses and small industries were given greater autonomy to follow their own schedule of production and were provided with assistance in learning management of the businesses. During the period before 1979, the factories were not allowed to produce more than the government-dictated quota and production less than the quota was severely punished. During the period of readjustment, the government

Chapter One: Introduction

relaxed the imposition of production quotas and allowed the factories to produce more than the quantity specified in the production plan. The factories were allowed to sell their additional output in the open market. Some major changes were introduced during the readjustment period on a trial basis, some of which were confirmed during the economic reform period that began in 1982. One of the most important was the system of taxes. Prior to 1979, all businesses were required to remit all their profits to the government. The government, who owned all the resources including capital, redistributed capital to businesses on the basis of need. However during the period of readjustment, a tax system was introduced, according to which, businesses were allowed to retain a significant portion of their profits, after paying a large percentage of tax to the government. The businesses were however required to distribute some part of their retained profits to the labourers as bonuses and were also required to compulsorily reinvest a specified part of their retained profits as investment in their businesses in order to increase the scale of production. This reform, introduced on a trial basis, saw a cheerful reception from the businesses who could take advantage of open markets to increase their profits and in turn increase production, thereby raising the wage level for the workers.

The readjustment period from 1979 to 1981 and the economic reformation period which began in 1982 have led to emergence of China in the global arena as an economic superpower. Chinese entrepreneurs continued to expand output and take advantage of the forces of globalisation to increase exports which brought in huge

Chapter One: Introduction

inflows of foreign reserves and foreign direct investments. However, the most significant point in the modern history of Chinese economy was membership of the WTO in November 2001. Following this event, China continued to gradually reduce trade barriers and has been making slow progress to free-float the currency which is now pegged to the US Dollar in a narrow band. The outbound trade sector in China continues to expand in spite of the increases seen in imports into the country.

The relaxation of controls on foreign investments saw thousands of joint ventures between domestic companies and foreign companies, particularly from the developed West. Besides capital, the foreign JVs also brought in modern management practices and a developed educational system which some parts of the Chinese population readily adopted. The schools and education system was modernised to match the growth seen in agricultural and industrial sectors. Western education principles and practices were imported. Science education was given major importance due to the massive requirement for engineers and scientists caused by the sudden increase in the rate of industrialisation of the country.

One of the important unintended outcomes of the economic reforms process was that Cheng (1989) argues that the economic reform that China has undertaken is in fact a form of reformation of property rights and ownership. The author argues that the transition from state ownership of resources to private ownership is at the core of the economic reforms. Economists had long argued that the incentives for the individuals

Chapter One: Introduction

to improve their productivity are limited in an economic system which does not provide adequate rewards. China had a system of state ownership of resources including land and factories which in effect converted all the Chinese employees and owners into labourers. However, the responsibility system which was introduced as a part of the economic reform with less restrictions in agricultural sector and with significantly more restrictions in the industrial sector, allowed a group of individuals to come together and obtain a lease of different resources from the government and in turn remain responsible to fulfill the production quota set by the government as a part of each lease. This was intended to ensure that there were adequate incentives for the workers to work hard at their land and in their factories to exceed the production quotas set by the government so that they would be able to sell the extra produce for profits at the outside market and retain the benefits for themselves. Through this system of government leasing out productive resources to private groups, China was transitioned from communism to a system of pseudo-capitalism, even if not a full-fledged form of capitalism.

Even though the economic reforms managed to usher in a period of economic expansion in the country, a number of researchers have criticised the economic reforms for creating a number of social and economic problems, including the greater divide between the wealthy and poor in the country and the creation of an underground economy. Dorn and Wang (1990) argue that the persistence of state owned enterprises in the country, even after the reform period, has led to large scale

Chapter One: Introduction

inefficiencies and imbalances in the entire economy. They point to the fact that state owned enterprises have lagged behind the private enterprises in productivity and so have acted as a drag, in effect nullifying a large portion of the positive impact created by the latter. Dorn and Wang (1990) note that in China, the real control of resources still lie with the large public enterprises and the economic growth created by the private enterprises has only increased the power of the elite group of bureaucrats who refuse to adhere to the rules of the private market place. They claim that the economic system fails to function effectively if the government does not take an impartial role: “When enterprises are owned and controlled by the state, economic decisions necessarily become political decisions, and impersonal price competition is supplanted by forms of personal competition driven by the quest for political power and privilege” (p.564).

Lin et al. (2003) identifies that the economic reforms in China are hardly half-way through as there still remain some very important issues that need to be addressed, some of which are created by the rapid economic reforms themselves. The primary problem faced by the Chinese economy is that it is based on a high investment and high consumption of resources model, rather than a high technology model as some of the developed economies with which it will need to compete. A second problem is the unequal distribution of resources among the different industries and the energy shortage faced by the economy as a whole, coupled with issues of pollution and an over dependence on coal-based energy. There is also an issue with exchange rates.

Chapter One: Introduction

The Chinese government has managed to make the currency float within a very narrow range in response to the massive pressure exerted by the US. The country still continues to subsidise and support its agricultural sector which, in spite of all the modernisation, is not strong enough to face outright competition from the Western mass producers of agricultural products. Economic reforms in China are, at best, an unfinished agenda.

The ownership forms of businesses in China have seen changes that have reflected the large scale changes and developments witnessed in the economy as a whole. The changes to the rules governing Foreign Direct Investments in the country have also affected the ownership forms of businesses significantly.

As stated earlier, economic reforms in China began in 1978. Before that period, all major businesses and industries in the country were owned by State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and private ownership of resources and factors of production was barred by law. This government ownership of enterprises meant that the production and productivity were determined by the government on the basis of the national need. The government procured the goods from these enterprises directly and rationed to the individuals on the basis of individual or group needs as determined by the government officers. However, as soon as the government began the process of economic reforms, some parts of the resources were handed over to private businesses on a lease basis with a system of private markets where, after fulfilling the

Chapter One: Introduction

minimum required quota determined by the state, the private businesses were allowed to sell the surplus products in the open market. Thus a large number of private enterprises came into being.

Foreign firms participated in the ownership and profits of the businesses in which they invested and this created a new form of ownership: Joint-Ventures (JVs) which were considered a special form of Foreign Invested Enterprise (FIEs). The changes in legal statutes “provided foreign joint ventures with preferential tax treatment, the freedom to import inputs such as materials and equipment, the right to retain and swap foreign exchange with each other, and simpler licensing procedures” (Fung et al., 2002, p.3). Thus, FDIs were not just permitted but were provided with additional incentives even over the domestic investments. The JVs were provided preferential treatment in the provision of public utility services such as water, power and transportation. Besides, they were also allowed to procure these services at subsidised rates which matched the rates paid by State Owned Enterprises. However until 1990, the reforms were limited only to the operational and investment aspects of FDIs. In 1990, the government enacted legislation which allowed non-Chinese to become Chairmen of the Board of Directors of the Joint Ventures. The legislation also removed the cap of 25% imposed upon the proportion of capital that could be contributed by the non-Chinese partners in the JVs. Subsequently, as the reform process gained speed and the country began tasting success of some of the sectors in which foreign investments were taking place, complete foreign ownership was also

Chapter One: Introduction

allowed on a selective basis. These firms were referred to as Wholly Foreign Owned Enterprises (WFOEs).

Legalisation of FDI played very important role in the setting up of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). In 1980, China set up SEZs in four provinces - Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen. These SEZs were provided special status and so were distanced from the bureaucratic problems faced by other businesses in the country. The SEZs were also accorded a privileged status which ensured that the businesses set up inside these SEZs could gain access to critical resources, including raw materials, not only easily but also at subsidised prices. These factors played significant roles in enhancing the flow of FDI into the country. Chiu (2002) argued that SOEs and FIEs treat their employees in radically different manners thereby evoking different kinds of commitments and productivity from them.

The history and development of HRM in China have been closely linked to the changes in economic systems, which have been discussed above. Zhao (1994) states that HRM and labour management practices in China are quite distinct and different from those of other countries because of the unique political and economic systems in the country. The broad issues involved in HRM in China will be outlined with more detailed discussion provided in Chapter Two. During the pre-reform period, when almost all the businesses were SOEs, HRM was present in only a diluted form. It was mostly referred to as industrial relations management or personnel administration.

Chapter One: Introduction

Pieper (1990) argues that personnel administration during communist rule in China was more a political than a management function. It was used as a primary tool for handing out favours to those employees who displayed loyalty and belief in the communist system and punishments and disincentives to those who displayed any form of digression from the political control. Training and development programmes were used as principal tools of indoctrination of employees in communist thought and philosophy. The selection and promotion of specific individuals was almost purely based on their familiarity with the senior management of the SOE and their adherence to the Party manifesto. Employees tended to be active at the social gatherings and Party meetings in order to ensure that their career progress was on track, as those who were found to be least interested in practicing and professing the dominant political thoughts were considered not deserving of promotions and incentives. Even the SOEs themselves were just required to fulfill production quotas set by the government and existed to primarily to provide employment to thousands of labourers. As there was no serious profit motive in SOEs, the productivity and performance of the employees were not taken or ascertained in objective manner. Warner (2001) states that China engaged in a "...colossal exercise in 'mass mobilization' or 'people-management' on a scale hitherto not undertaken. The way the Chinese went about it colours the description of how human resources are managed in the People's Republic" (p.19). Naughton (1995) argues that the labour base of China was primarily composed of illiterate workers and peasants, which made it quite easy for the SOEs to mobilise

Chapter One: Introduction

them in large groups and indoctrinate them under the function of personnel administration.

According to Cooke (2000) there are two very important attributes of personnel administration which are distinctive to China during the period of full-fledged Communist policies. First is that the personnel managers in SOEs did not have any right to determine the pay or selection policies employees. The government decided the number and nature of employees to be taken on for any specific function. The pay scales for the employees were also fixed by government directives. The personnel managers were required to simply execute the government policies and administer the process of implementation. They were held responsible for any deviation in policies. All employees at a particular level were paid same wages and all employees doing similar functions across different SOEs were paid similar wages. Thus the personnel management department had neither the requirement nor the right to determine the performance or worth of each employee. Their sole duty was to conduct the department activities in strict adherence to the policies determined by the government (Child, 1994). According to Cooke (2004) the responsibilities of the personnel department were allocating jobs, filing personnel records, and administering welfare benefits.

The second important attribute of personnel policies during communist rule was the assured life-long employment provided to the employees. This policy was referred to

Chapter One: Introduction

as the “iron rice bowl” because the employees were always sure that they would continue to be fed by the government irrespective of their performance or of their employers (Von Glinow & Teagarden, 1988). According to Ahlstrom et al. (2001), policies such as ‘iron rice bowl’ made sure that there were virtually no HRM practices in any major businesses until very recently when these policies were given up by the enterprises.

Besides the SOEs, there were some family owned businesses which existed during the pre-reform period, albeit on a very small scale. These family-owned businesses were headed by the descendants of the family who typically exhibited very strong ‘*guanxi*’ with the government officers in their provinces. This close relationship ensured that they could run their businesses without much interference from the government in general and could tap into their sources for raw materials and other resources which were required for smooth functioning. Even though these businesses were not directly controlled by the government, the HR practices in them were close to those in SOEs. Even though performance of the employees was closely monitored, trust was given more importance than performance and the pay scale of the employees were determined by the level of trust that they managed to evoke from the owner.

The period of economic reform which began in 1978 saw the slow adoption of Western HRM practices by the Chinese businesses. The joint ventures which were

Chapter One: Introduction

created between Western firms and Chinese counter-parts led to slow introduction of Western management and HR practices. The creation of SEZs and WFOEs led to the more robust adoption of these practices. As the government slowly privatised resource ownership, the policies which ensured life-long employment for the workers were relaxed. The businesses were allowed layoff employees in accordance with the contractual agreements created between each employee and the employer. Employment agreements and contracts became important documents determining the rights and liabilities of employees and employers. Along with the breaking of the 'iron rice bowl', the rigidity and uniformity of wages were also challenged. Businesses were given freedom to pay a wage as determined by the market rather than the government. This ensured that there was competition among the firms to obtain skilled and resourceful talents from among the population of workers. The personnel administration department slowly began to assume the role of a more western-style HR department with various policies related to recruitment, selection, pay, training, retention, layoff, and performance appraisal etc., determined by the management of each organisation. The enterprises shifted focus from seniority to performance as the most important determining factors of the pay of employees.

However it cannot be stated that the Chinese WFOEs and JVs have adopted all the policies and practices of the Western HRM. There is a cultural and social uniqueness in China which has created barriers to the adoption of such policies. It has been noted by a number of researchers that the adoption of Western HRM has been a very slow,

Chapter One: Introduction

gradual process which is considered to be still underway in several regions of the country. At present, Chinese the business sector seems to demonstrate two different forms of HRM which are somewhat contradictory. On one hand, there are a few SOEs which continue to follow the old practices with respect to personnel administration even though the State does not determine the wages of employees anymore. On the other hand, there are hundreds of thousands of small and large private businesses which have adopted Western HRM to a certain extent. The ability of HR managers in China to adopt Western HR practices given the sharp cultural and social differences that exist between China and developed West has continued to remain an important point of study for many years and, as will be seen in the following chapter, debates have continued about whether its practices are converging or diverging from those of the West or developing as a form of hybrid (Selmer, 1999).

Conclusion

It is to explore these tensions and conflicts that this thesis has taken the title of '*HRM in Transition: Chinese HR Managers Talk*'. It is focused on the present condition of HRM in China in its current transitional state. It is believed that during this period of transition, HR managers face a number of conflicts and contradictions between the Western HRM practices and the legacy of Chinese practices. More importantly it is focused on the perspective of HR managers in China. A number of researchers have already researched this topic from a macro-perspective, but there are few studies that

Chapter One: Introduction

examine how these changes are seen by practicing Chinese managers and fewer that has attempted to do this through detailed qualitative techniques in order to get a full and detailed understanding of what it means to be doing HR in the China of today. As such the thesis is concerned to let their voices be heard and to see what can be learned from their detailed talk about what it means to be a Chinese HR manager.

Therefore the aim of the research is to explore Chinese HR managers' understanding of the meaning of HR, involving:

1. To clarify the meaning of HR management practice;
2. To identify how HR practices are shaped by organizational and contextual factors;
3. To provide a unique insight into the thoughts, feelings and activities of working Chinese HR managers and the issues they face in a period of transition.

The next chapter will examine the literature on HRM in general and specifically in China, in order to develop a set of research questions that can be used to address these objectives and to contribute to the understanding of Chinese HRM.

Chapter Two:
Literature Review

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

The objective of this research is to ascertain how HR managers in China perceive their roles amidst China's massive transition from a state-controlled economy to a market economy. Most research studies have used quantitative data to ascertain the changes in the HRM practices and processes during this transition while only a few researchers have attempted to use qualitative analysis in studying the changes that are taking place from the perspective of Chinese HR managers especially in their roles and relationships during this transition. The existing research tends to be focused more on the practices than on the people. The aim of this literature review chapter is to establish what is currently known about the changes in the HR practices and roles in China, to determine the extent to which they are being affected by western approaches, and to identify any gaps in knowledge that require to be addressed. For this purpose, the chapter will first establish the major debates in the field of HRM in general to provide the necessary background and examine how these debates are reflected in the studies of HR practices in Chinese organisations. It will be shown that there are two key areas where there is an absence of detailed knowledge that is potentially limiting the understanding of Chinese HR. These two areas relate foremost to the changing *roles* of Chinese HR managers and to the impact of this on their careers and, secondly, to the emotional dimensions of HR work which are deemed critical in the context of the debates on the significance of *guanxi* practices within Chinese organisations.

HRM – Its Development in the Western and Chinese Economies

To understand the development of HRM in the Chinese context and its influence on the roles of Chinese HR managers, it is necessary to begin with an account of how HRM has developed. This chapter will look into the primary development of HRM in western developed societies before considering how it has spread as an international practice.

A number of researchers have attempted to provide comprehensive definitions of HRM based on how HRM is understood and practised in the Western countries. Ackers and Wilkinson (2003) state that there are two broad categories which various definitions of HRM fall into – inclusive and exclusive. The inclusive definitions attempt to define HRM from a broader perspective on the basis of the different practices and components of HRM. On the other hand, the exclusive HRM definitions attempt to explain HRM using the differences between HRM and personnel management or HRM and industrial relations. Although this is a distinction that relates to the possible boundaries of HRM either as a distinct discipline that must be understood in its own terms (inclusive) or as one approach of people management that has developed historically or in relation to other people management approaches (exclusive), it is necessary to consider both aspects to gain a full understanding of what HRM involves in contemporary organisations and contexts. Therefore it is desirable to begin by examining the historical development of HRM before turning towards its specific policies and practices.

The development of contemporary HRM can be related to three broader developments: business environment, organisation, and socio-cultural factors (Boxall,

1993; Goss, 1997; Guest, 1987; Legge, 2005; Storey, 1991; Torrington et al., 2008).

This is summarised in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1: Three broader developments relating to contemporary HRM

<u>Business Environment</u>	globalization industry sectors technological development
<u>Organization</u>	organization structure strategic management
<u>Socio-cultural</u>	individualism consumerism

Source: Goss (1997)

In the business environment, Goss (1997) refers to globalisation as ‘the progressive ‘shrinking’ of the world’ in the last half of the twentieth century. He argues that this has opened up new markets to western businesses but has also exposed them to intensive competition. This has meant that international businesses are more likely to have multi-cultural workforces and more importantly, there will be a greater concern for performance and innovation to compete against emerging economies with cheaper labour conditions. He claims also that the shift of employment in developed economies from manufacturing and into services has weakened the power of trade unions and allowed managements ‘a much freer hand . . . to experiment with new patterns of work organization’ particularly in terms of flexible working practices (De Cieri et al., 2007). In terms of technology Goss (1997) claims that information and computer technology have changed the processes of work allowing for more remote working but also the closer monitoring of performance through control systems, and has changed the skill base for many workforces making ICT skills a vital requirement for many forms of

Chapter Two: Literature Review

employment (Greenbaum, 1998, pp.124-141).

Organisational changes posed challenges to traditional bureaucracy and created greater interest in downsizing, delaying and decentralisation to create organisation that were more responsive to change and with flatter structures (Grey & Garsten, 2001; Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994). There has also been, as Goss (1997) claims, a greater interest in strategic management as a technique for adapting to unpredictable future changes rather than for purely rational long-term planning (Martin-Alcazar et al., 2008). The latter approach meant that HR practices traditionally followed in a reactive way but, more attention has now been given to how HR knowledge can be proactive for shaping strategy (Boxall, 1996; Boxall & Purcell, 2003).

Collings and Scullion (2008) identify the changes in cultural ideas that have increased the emphasis on individualism rather than collectivism (associated with the traditional strength of trade unions) and the employees' expectation of greater choice in the working arrangements. There has also been a move in demographic factors that have seen more women entering the labour market as full-time employees and an increase in the life expectancy of older retired people that challenges pension and welfare systems which can possibly lead to longer working lifetimes (Burke & Ng, 2006).

Goss (1991, 1997) argues that such changes have shaped the emergence of HRM in a way that has given it a greater emphasis on strategic relevance in proactively improving employee performance, in developing of policies more focussed on individuals rather than workers in collective forms, and in creating work practices that reflect changes to cultural values and demographic challenges. However, it is

Chapter Two: Literature Review

interesting to note that although these changes have been happening relatively rapidly in the western context (over a period of 40-50 years; Burke & Ng, 2006), in the case of developing economies such as China, it is possible to see a similar pattern of development taking place at an even more rapid rate (Warner, 2009). The implications of such rapid change will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Based on the developments in HR practices that these changes have produced, Storey (1995) defines HRM as a unique approach to employee management with an objective to achieve competitive advantage through strategic deployment of a capable and committed workforce that works in an integrated manner using a number of cultural, structural and personnel techniques. Guest (1987) has acknowledged the same concept as he states, “HRM comprises a set of policies designed to maximise organisational integration, employee commitment, flexibility and quality of work” (p.503).

Storey (1995) noted the differences between traditional personnel management and HRM. These differences were presented as ideal-types that should be used not as guides to prescriptive practice but as tools for analysis to determine how far a particular organisation has moved in relation to the theoretical ideal-type model (see Table 2.1 below).

Table 2.1: A comparison of personnel and HRM

Dimension	Personnel and IR	HRM
Beliefs and assumptions		
1. Contract	Careful delineation of written contracts	Aim to go “beyond contract”
2. Rules	Importance of devising clear rules/mutuality	“Can-do” outlook: impatience with “rules”
3. Guide to management action	Procedures	“Business need”
4. Behaviour referent	Norms/custom and practice	Values/mission
5. Managerial task <i>Vis-à-vis</i> labour	Monitoring	Nurturing
6. Nature of relations	Pluralist	Unitarist
7. Conflict	Institutionalized	De-emphasized
Strategic aspects		
8. Key relations	Labour-management	Customer
9. Initiative	Piecemeal	Integrated
10. Corporate plan	Marginal to	Central to
11. Speed of decision	Slow	Fast
Line management		
12. Management role	Transactional	Transformational leadership
13. Key managers	Personnel/IR specialists	General/business/line managers
14. Communication	Indirect	Direct
15. Standardization	High (e.g. “parity” an issue)	Low (e.g. “parity” not seen as relevant)
16. Prized management skills	Negotiation	Facilitation
Key levers		
17. Selection	Separate marginal task	Integrated, key task
18. Pay	Job evaluation (fixed grades)	Performance –related
19. Conditions	Separately negotiated	Harmonization
20. Labour-management	Collective bargaining contracts	Towards individual contracts
21. Thrust of relations with stewards	Regularized through facilities and training	Marginalized (with exceptions of some bargaining for change models)
22. Job categories and grades	Many	Few
23. Communication	Restricted flow	Increased flow
24. Job design	Division of labour	Teamwork
25. Conflict handling	Reach temporary truces	Manage climate and culture
26. Training and development	Controlled access to courses	Learning companies
27. Focus of attention for interventions	Personnel procedures	Wide-ranging cultural, structural and personnel strategies

Source: Storey (1995)

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Thus, Traditional Personnel Management emphasises vertical management of subordinates, a function/operational centralised personnel department, an emphasis on rules and procedures, reactive planning and policies targeted at employees as a collective whole. In contrast, HRM is characterised by a decentralised HR function, responsibility for many aspects of people management devolved to line managers, an emphasis on human resource planning as fully integrated with corporate planning and a use of policies focused on individuals.

It has also been claimed that a central feature of HRM is the emphasis on the proactive management of people in response to strategic objectives. Armstrong (1992) states:

‘...the most significant difference is that HRM is based on a management and business oriented philosophy. It is a central, senior management driven strategic activity, and it is developed, owned and delivered by management as a whole to promote the interests of the organisation which they serve. Hence the importance attached to strategic integration and strong culture, which flow from top management’s vision and leadership, and which require people who will be committed to the strategy, will be adaptable to change, and will fit the culture’.

(Armstrong, 1992, p.38)

This has been summarised by Pettigrew and Whipp (1991). See Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Personnel management and human resource management

Element	Personnel management	HRM
Employee relation	Adversarial	Developmental and collaborative
Orientation	Reactive and piecemeal	Proactive and business focused
Organisation	Separate functions	Integrated function
Client	Management	Management and employees
Values	Order, equity consistency	Client and problem focused, tailored solutions
Role of specialist	Regulatory and record keeping	Problem sensing, tailored solutions
Role of line management	Passive ownership	Active ownership
Overall output	Compartmentalized thinking and acting	Linking various human resource levers to business needs

Source: Pettigrew and Whipp (1991)

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The debate about the strategic role of HRM has been a major area for investigation, and has increasingly been regarded as an area in its own right – ‘strategic HRM’ (SHRM) (Boxall & Purcell, 2003; Martin-Alcazar, 2008). For example, Storey (2001) defines SHRM as “a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce using an array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques” (p.8). Schuler and Walker (1990) define SHRM as “a set of processes and activities jointly shared by human resources and line manager to solve people related business problems” (p.89). This definition of Schuler and Walker (1990) explains the most important requirement of SHRM as differentiated from traditional HRM practices. According to this definition, SHRM requires the HR managers to work together with the line managers to identify and solve problems related to human resources. Thus, HRM gets a strategic perspective and is integrated into the mainstream operations of the organisation. In a classic model of the strategic possibilities for HRM, Torrington et al. (2002) define five potential relationships between organisational strategy and HR strategy:

1. The Separation Model: here there is no relationship between organisational and human resource strategy; this type of approach is characteristic of old-style TPM.
2. The Fit Model: this concentrates on the importance of people in the achievement of organisational strategy; human resource strategy is designed to fit with the organisational strategy. In this model the HR function responds to organisational strategy by defining the behaviours needed from employees in order to meet strategic goals of the organisation and then developing policies to deliver these.
- 3 The Dialogic Model: this identifies the need for two-way communication

Chapter Two: Literature Review

between the organisational and human resource strategies, although the former still assumes a dominant position.

4. The Holistic Model: this represents a recognition that the people of the organisation are the key to competitive advantage rather than just a means of achieving business strategy. As such, HR initiatives may take the leading role in shaping the organisational strategy.
5. The HR-driven Model: this represents a situation where human resources are considered to be the fundamental key to competitive advantage and their application and development takes priority as a key determinant of strategic direction.

This model can be reduced into three main positions: separation, fit and holistic. Dialogic is seen as a variation of fit and HR-driven is an extension of the holistic model. It is possible to suggest that the Fit and Holistic models are similar as each places emphasis on the alignment of HR and organisational strategy. However, the Fit model takes an 'external' focus as it can be seen as a response to organisational strategy that is attempting to establish a fit with the external competitive environment. Thus, organisation strategy is a response to changes in the competitive environment and HR strategy is a response to organisation strategy in terms of producing the needed behaviours from employees that will help to deliver the organisational strategy and therefore make the organisation successful in its environment (Schuler & Jackson, 1987). However, in contrast, the Holistic model takes an 'internal' focus because it is influenced by the Resource Based View of the firm and assumes that competitive advantage comes from core capabilities and that these are most likely to be found within the workforce (especially in knowledge intensive sectors; Barney & Wright, 1998; Boxall & Purcell, 2003). Therefore, it is necessary to develop strategies that

Chapter Two: Literature Review

identify and develop these core capabilities so they can be used to set the organisation's strategic direction and to gain advantage in the environmental conditions. Thus, rather than responding to external changes as the main driver, this approach seeks to use internal capabilities that can be maximised by innovative HR policies to operate proactively in the environment.

One variation of the fit approach is the 'best fit/best practice' model (e.g., Pfeffer, 1994). This tends to lean towards the aspect of prescription by specifying the policies that need to be configured as necessary requirements for producing high performance and high commitment rather than taking a contingency view which argues that policies will need to change in relation to different environments. However, this former assumption has been given critical review by Marchington and Grugalis (2000) on the basis of available research evidence in the key areas of the approach:

Best practice, it seems, is problematic. When unpacked, the practices are much less 'best' than might be hoped, there are times when they appear to present contradictory messages, they are not universally applicable, and they tend to ignore any active input from employees – other than to help achieve employer goals – into the organizations for which they work. It is not clear that employees are as enthusiastic about the model as their employers and, if they are, their views are not accorded the same space. In presenting the argument for the adoption of 'best practice' HRM, the nature of the employment relationship itself is over-simplified and distorted. Useful though this debate has been, and it has certainly catapulted discussions of the links between HRM and performance into the limelight, much more research is needed to make it meaningful and sufficiently rigorous to withstand critical analysis.

(Marchington & Grugalis, 2000, p.1121)

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The first is the need to examine particular practices in detail rather than to assume that their effects are positive and beneficial. The second is to be cautious about the ways in which policies operate together rather than to assume the effectiveness of the so called “criterion-specific studies, such as that by Pfeffer, which outline a number of ‘best practices’ and suggest that the closer organizations get to this list the better their performance is likely to be” (Marchington & Grugalis, 2000, p.1115). As Guest (cited in Marchington & Grugalis, 2000) points out, there “may be room for variation between organizations in order to make allowance for specific internal and external circumstances. In this case, the key might be to identify the key objectives and strategies of an employer, and then search for HR practices which might be appropriate in the circumstances” (p.1115). This can be seen to be in line with the recognition of the contingency effects as outlined above, rather than the adoption of universal prescriptions.

The best fit theory of SHRM is typically considered better than best practices theory. ‘Fit’ refers to an ideal set of practices that suits the needs of an organisation (Guest, 1997). According to Armstrong (2000), the best fit theory requires that the needs of an organisation be assessed using a detailed analysis of the context which includes factors related to culture, technology, structure etc. Based on the requirements, a specific set of practices may be identified out of the best practices so that they would together form a bundle. Thus, the chosen bundle is expected to meet the specific requirements of the organisation. Purcell (1999), however, opines that the organisations should focus less on fits and practices and more on processes of organisational change. The best known approach of this sort is the Resource Based View (RBV) of HRM. According to this theory, an organisation derives competitive

Chapter Two: Literature Review

advantage from its resources; however, in order to create competitive advantages, these four criteria need to be satisfied: value; rareness; imperfect mobility; and non-substitutability. According to the RBV, a firm should treat its employees as resources and should ensure that the specified characteristics are developed in the resource. The firm would then be able to derive competitive advantages over its competitors using the firm's human resources, "managers must look inside their firm for valuable, rare and costly-to-imitate resources, and then exploit these resources through their organisation" (Barney, 1991).

The inherent logic behind RBV is that any given firm possesses a plethora of resources and capabilities that may not be immediately obvious and for the most part not tradable on the open market, yet of crucial importance to the strategic success of the firm (Conner, 1991; Rumelt, 1984; Wernerfelt, 1984). According to Lado and Wilson (1994) "a firm's resources encompass all input factors – both tangible and intangible, human and nonhuman – that are owned or controlled by the firm and that enter into the production of goods and services to satisfy human wants" (p.700). In this sense, the RBV considers employees and human resource systems to be one such resource and can be a leading contributor in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. This is possible because they facilitate "the development of competencies that are firm-specific, produce complex social relationships, are embedded in a firm's history and culture, and generate tacit organizational knowledge" (Lado & Wilson 1994, p.699). This largely draws upon disciplines such as behavioural psychology and proposes that through the effective use of human resources as a strategic tool, specified patterns can be created for employees to demonstrate strategic functions such as instilling a low cost or product differentiation mindset (Schuler & Jackson,

Chapter Two: Literature Review

1987; Schuler & MacMillan, 1984). In this sense, the firm not only acquires these resources but plays an important role in fostering, developing and organising them in a way that adds value of a unique nature and makes it prohibitively hard for competitors to imitate (Barney, 1991). For the resource to be difficult to imitate, it must contain facets that are immovable and firm specific. Hence, the intense applicability of RBV to SHRM is obvious. Competitors find it difficult to copy capabilities that are based largely upon the skills, the behaviours and the knowledge of employees (Colbert, 2004; Hoskisson et al., 1999; McMahan et al., 1999; Wright et al., 2001; Ulrich & Lake, 1990).

However, despite the growing sophistication of these theories, there has been little consistency of findings regarding the significance of HR practices for organisational performance despite the development of the theories about the nature of HRM and its relationship to wider patterns of business organisational forms. Schuler and Jackson's (1987) study of US firms concluded that it was possible to show significant competitive advantages from HRM practices; also Huselid (1995) reported that firms that linked their HRM to core strategy produced significantly higher financial performance. Youndt et al. (1996) found a relationship between the strategic importance attributed to HRM practices and the performance of firms. Also Collins and Clark (2003) explored the 'black box' of the relationship between HR practices and firm performance and found that better HR practices lead to higher firm performance. Dyer and Reeves (1995) opined that the popularity of SHRM had increased because of the promise that it makes to improve the productivity and firm performance but claimed that only an average of 20% of organisations in the US had adopted SHRM although it could be as high as 50% in some specific industries. Dyer

Chapter Two: Literature Review

and Reeves (1995) claimed that the present empirical studies are overtly focussed on the rapidly shrinking population of blue collar workers in the US and concluded that “there is every reason to believe that the strategic bandwagon will continue to roll, best to bear in mind the rather fragile empirical undercarriage on which it currently rests” (p.15). Richard (2000) studied the relationship between cultural diversity and firm performance using an empirical data from the US, focusing on the ability of SHRM to bind different cultures together and make them work as a unit focussed on attaining the goals set by the organisation’s management. It was concluded that when cultural diversities are managed using an appropriate SHRM framework, it adds value to the organisation in terms of better performance. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) attempted to identify the intermediate linkages which enable superior SHRM practices to get translated into better firm performance using a measure called ‘strength of the HRM system’ based on the resource-based assumption that collectively, a firm’s human resources hold serious implications for firm performance and provide a unique source of competitive advantage. The authors modelled the different characteristics of the HRM system and suggested that organisations in which the HRM systems are characterised by strengths such as distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, the SHRM practices are most likely to translate into superior firm performance. Thus the following summary of this data which is useful to quote at length:

There is little doubt, therefore, that in the past 20 years some progress has indeed been made in the analysis of the relationship between HRM and Performance. On balance, however, progress has been modest. This is reflected in the rather mixed and, by and large rather cautious conclusions from some of the main overview articles that have appeared over the past few years. Becker and Gerhart (1996) . . . indicate that the conceptual and empirical work has progressed

Chapter Two: Literature Review

far enough to suggest that the role of human resources can be crucial. Similarly, Paauwe and Richardson (1997) conclude that HRM activities give rise to HRM outcomes which will influence the performance of the firm. More specifically, Huselid and Becker (2000) indicate that the effect of one standard deviation change in the HR system is a 10–20 per cent increase in a firm’s market value. However, on a more cautious note . . . Wright and Gardner (2003) reflect on the available evidence and conclude that HR practices are at least weakly related to firm performance, while Boselie et al. (2005) . . . conclude that much – though by no means all – of the empirical HRM research in its ‘systems’ form has been found to matter . . . for organizational performance. . . . Wall and Wood (2005) conclude – even more cautiously – that the evidence for an effect of HRM on performance is promising but only circumstantial due, for the most part, to inadequate research design. Thus, 19 of the 25 studies they examined report some statistically significant positive relationships between HR practices and performance. The effect sizes, however, are typically small, with the majority of studies also failing to pay proper attention to whether it is the HRM system (the ‘gestalt’) generating the effects or just specific component/individual practices (p.453). Overall, therefore, they conclude that ‘. . . the existing evidence for a relationship between HRM and performance should be treated with caution’ (Wall and Wood, 2005, p.454).

(Paauwe, 2009, p.132)

It can then be concluded that there may be a necessary but not a sufficient relationship between the level of HRM practices and organisational performance as it seems that poor HRM would usually have a negative impact on performance by leading to reduced motivation and to issues such as absences and higher turnover (Van Riel et al., 2009); however, this alone might not be sufficient to ensure high performance i.e., HRM prevents negative impacts but may not significantly increase positive impacts

Chapter Two: Literature Review

automatically. This is one possibility suggested by Brown et al. (2008) based on the WERS study of the UK with a sample of approximately 50,000. They reported that job satisfaction (achievement) improved in the UK between 1998-2004 as well as improvements in job security, 'climate' and management responsiveness but they also noted a marked decline in 'high involvement' HRM practices. They concluded that the satisfaction (and hence, overall performance) improvement was associated with job security and management responsiveness which were functions of labour market conditions rather than HRM strategies alone.

On the basis of this overview of general approaches to the nature and definition of key HRM issues, the attention can now be focussed on China and how these developments have been reflected in the people management processes of the country. The research on HRM practices, systems and performance in China has been conducted fairly recently but has grown rapidly. As China remained closed to international businesses and was entrenched in the traditional form of state controlled management, there were very few researchers who were interested in the management practices in the country. However, the entry of China into WTO and the opening up of the country's foreign investment floodgates saw a huge influx of capital and resources from the West to China. These funds led to the creation and rapid growth of Foreign Invested Enterprises (FIEs) in China. These organisations brought western management thought and practices along with capital inflow into the country. The Chinese organisations found significant benefits in the western style of management and many began to blend their traditional practices with those of the Western countries. This transition has attracted a large number of researchers to study the management and HRM practices in Chinese organisations particularly on the changes that are taking

Chapter Two: Literature Review

place. Zhu et al. (2008) conducted a comprehensive survey of the HRM literature related to China and identified that the number of research papers increased by almost 100% from the 1995-1999 period to the 2000-2005 period. These numbers purposely exclude Taiwan and Hong Kong which have remained pockets of greater attention for over a decade.

Almost all of the researchers who study HRM practices in China note that the organisations in the country are making slow transition from their traditional style to a Western style. Ding et al. (1997) studied 158 FIEs in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ) because of their unique blend of foreign and domestic resources and the power of control which is mostly vested with the Western partners of the firms. The authors identified that the FIEs had already made a major move away from the typical Chinese HR system based on centrally planned job allocation, lifetime employment and egalitarian pay. Instead these firms had embraced western practices such as an open job market for employees, performance-based compensation plans, and training programmes focussed on differences in skills and requirements. The authors contend that these changes reflected the influence of economic reforms; however, these firms still retained at least some of the Chinese societal ideologies such as approximate equality of pay between men and women, between management and non-management staff, provision of housing and other benefits as part of salary packages which are not typically found in the Western HRM style.

Child (1991) identified three strategies that worked to reduce the conflicts between western and Chinese entities arising due to the clash of cultures. The first was for the Western parent companies to totally accept Chinese practices, citing the example of

Chapter Two: Literature Review

joint ventures in Hong Kong which were typically characterised by this approach. The second strategy was to totally westernise the HRM practices in Chinese companies, giving the example of popular hotel chains which bought local hotels and converted their entire set of practices to reflect the Western standardisation of service. Finally, the third strategy was to create a hybrid HRM system which integrated the popular principles of both sides. It was noted that the third strategy avoided the other two strategies' major disadvantages: the Chinese subsidiaries often adopted refined HRM practices such as performance based pay and competitive job markets while retaining some valuable Chinese practices such as long-term relationships with stakeholders. Bjorkman and Lu's (2001) study of 63 joint ventures between Chinese and Western entities examined the practices associated with professional and managerial level employees in these joint ventures. It was observed that the HRM practices in the sample companies mostly resembled those of the western counterparts than of the domestic companies. The authors cite the higher bargaining power of the western entities as the main reason for this higher degree of adaptation by the joint ventures. Farley et al. (2004) characterised the relationship between Chinese subsidiaries of foreign companies and their headquarters using push-pull factors. When the two entities which were expected to work together in a synchronised fashion did not face the same kind of economic, political, social and other contingencies, there could be conflicts arising during the normal course of business. The parent company could push the Chinese subsidiary to adopt the HRM practices and policies formulated by the headquarters. On the other hand, the Chinese subsidiary could be influenced by its own domestic values and cultural factors. If these factors were strong enough, the subsidiary exerted a pull force on the parent company thus explaining the dynamics and reasons for the often slow adoption of western management culture and HRM

Chapter Two: Literature Review

practices by Chinese companies. A number of early researchers including Hofstede (1983, 1994), England (1983), and Rosenzweig and Singh (1991) also noted that the pull factors could be strong in Chinese case as the culture itself was extremely traditional which strengthened ties between the entities and the society making it difficult to shun domestic values and adapt Western style HR practices.

Although some commentators (Selmer, 2004; Tsang, 1999) have argued that the focus of Chinese companies should be globalisation and not localisation as globalisation would provide opportunities for the domestic labour force to learn new skills and acquire new technologies, most research studies agree that it is difficult for Chinese subsidiaries to totally reflect Western management philosophies. Most researchers have suggested a middle ground, pointing to hybrid HRM systems that are emerging in Chinese subsidiaries. Gamble (2003) states that:

‘...structural dimensions such as the country of origin, the degree of international production integration and the nature of product markets appear to have less utility in explaining the transfer of HRM practices than institutional and cultural features of the host-country environment and, above all, specific firm-level practices and the presence of expatriates in key management roles.’

(Gamble, 2003, p.1)

Zhu et al. (2008) note that most of the researchers have based their opinions on observations, made from FIE which are formed as results of joint ventures between Chinese and Western companies. This form of organisation has typically interested researchers because of the complex control structures evident in them. The handful of research studies (Benson & Zhu, 1999; Björkman, 2002; Branine, 1997; Child, 1995;

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Cooke, 2000; Ding et al., 2002; Goodall & Warner, 1997; Lewis, 2003; Ng & Siu, 2004; Warner, 1986) that have focussed on the Chinese State-owned Enterprises have emphasised that these entities continue to practice most of the traditional Chinese HR processes and so have lagged behind their private counterparts in terms of their efficiency and productivity. However it has been noted that the reforms brought about by the Chinese government and adoption of Western HRM practices by private enterprises is starting to impact on SOEs although most maintain that large scale reforms are still needed. Pei et al. (2004) focus entirely on the SOEs in the healthcare sector and identify two major issues with respect to poor efficiency and productivity: outdated wage policies and lack of management control over recruitment process and decisions. Ding and Akhtar (2001) conducted primary research through questionnaires using samples from 326 joint ventures and state-owned enterprises. Using structural analysis, the authors attempted to identify the different contextual factors that can influence HRM practices in these entities. They concluded that:

Ownership and the strategic role of the human resource were key variables in explaining an organization's choice of HRM practices. Age and size of the organization had limited effects. Compared with cost and quality strategies, the innovation strategy affected HRM practices both directly and indirectly which indicated the increasing dynamism of the Chinese economy towards a market orientation.

(Ding & Akhtar, 2001, p.946)

It will be noted later on in the results from the current study, drawn out from a much smaller sample which may not be a substantial representation statistically, that the effect of ownership alone does not establish the approach to HRM practices although it does have some degree of influence.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Easterby-Smith et al. (1995) compared the cultural aspects of Chinese and UK companies to identify the micro-aspects of similarities and differences. The study acknowledged not only the popular notion of widespread differences in the HRM practices of these two countries but also emphasised the surprising yet existing similarities. Particularly, the significant resemblance of their manpower planning systems were determined to be factors which were not influenced consequently by national and cultural aspects. On the other hand, in some parts such as pay and reward systems, the authors identified major contrasts concluding that “there may be deep-seated differences between the two countries in terms of attitudes toward rewards which will limit the transferability of HRM ideas in this area” (Easterby-Smith et al., 1995, p.1).

Shifting attention to the issue of strategic HRM, Selmer (1998) presented one of the most comprehensive lists of differences between SHRM practices in the Chinese and Western models. The most important distinction observed dwelled upon the dimension of approaching or solving an existing problem. The Western system leaned its focus towards finding strategic solutions whilst the Chinese system employed functional solutions to similar problems. This primary difference resulted in widespread variations in the way SHRM was currently being practiced in the West and in China. The author pointed out that communication in the Western system of SHRM was flexible while that in the Chinese model was constrained. The reactionary leadership typically seen in China, as compared to the proactive leadership in the West, was claimed to be a major hindrance to a successful implementation of SHRM. Chinese managers lacked comprehensive training for it and were prone to having a static management style and a tendency to avoid conflicts and confrontations. The

Chapter Two: Literature Review

strong hierarchical organisational structure served as a barrier for HR managers to take part in top-level meetings and decision making processes. This meant that HRM practices were considered as a corresponding end result to the strategic decisions made by top management. The authors concluded that SHRM practices were not implemented in any significant extent in most Chinese corporations including those that had active business and strategic links with Western counterparts.

Warner (2005) presented a more promising state of SHRM in China. He stated that SHRM practices were in place to a notable extent at least in Chinese companies with joint ventures in Western companies. The same applied to Chinese subsidiaries where HR managers were presumably relocated from the head office in the West to China for the purpose of inculcating the practices and culture of the main branch. Chinese HR managers were usually hired from prestigious business schools in the country. Most of them, if not all of them, tended to be proficient or well versed in Western management school of thought particularly SHRM practices and theories. This, Warner claimed, has ultimately led to the adoption of what ought to be considered as critical parts in SHRM such as HR planning, performance-based pay etc. Zhu et al. (2005) also supported the view that SHRM practices are becoming more common in China (in contrast with the initial expectations of their research). For them, China is seen to be undergoing a transitional phase where the reforms in essence are poised to make it become an integral part of the global economy. Using a regression analysis method, the authors identified the changing role of HRM in higher level decision-making procedures in the industrial sector of China, thereby showing clear and emerging trends of increasing propensity for the adoption of Western HRM practices in Chinese corporations. The authors drew out the conclusion that more and more

Chapter Two: Literature Review

companies in China, including those that are owned locally, are showing outward tendencies to include HRM in strategic decision making processes.

In the earlier section of this chapter, it was suggested that HRM practices in China tend to vary depending on the different types of ownerships. However, in the case of the adoption of SHRM, many researchers including Zhu et al. (2005) and Wei and Lau (2005) state that ownership type is not a major determining factor. They stress that SHRM practices from the West have permeated through the corporate layers of Chinese companies in spite of the strong influence held by the Chinese culture. Wei and Lau (2005) claimed three most important factors that play detrimental roles in deciding the adoption of SHRM were market orientation, HRM importance and HRM competence. The authors tested this hypothesis on a sample composed of heterogeneous firms from different sectors in China. The results test indicated that all the three factors show significant influence upon the adoption of SHRM practices by the organisation. It was noted that the organisation size and the type of ownership did not have any significant impact on the adoption of SHRM. However, Schuler and Jackson (2007) argued that the major problems hampering HRM practices in China was the lack of integration in HRM activities. They stated that the Chinese firms “lack a comprehensive HR strategy that provides skilled training and career structure” (Schuler & Jackson, 2007, p.280) and in spite of an oversupply of labour, companies face problems in retention due to the lack of coordination between recruitment and training processes. They claim that there is a lack of relationship between motivation and performance with reward as pay packages are often decided or awarded on the basis of *guanxi* (which means that pre-existing connections of some employees with decision-makers in the organisation prevail over merit or performance; see further

Chapter Two: Literature Review

below). In addition, they assert the absence of structural planning and cultivation in terms of organisational culture can fundamentally affect loyalty and commitment amongst employees. However, in contrast to most other researchers, Schuler and Jackson argue that SOEs in China have a much better HR system than smaller and private companies. The reason for this is that the state owned firms have a history of directly hiring thousands of employees. Over time, these entities have learned a number of efficient techniques and tools of HRM by trial and error. However, other writers have pointed out that most of the elements in these SOE HRM systems, in practice, are very outdated and that, due to rigidity of the system, further changes or improvements may not be feasible. In fact, Wang and Fang (2001) surveyed employees from a large number of MNCs operations in China and showed that most of the employees opted to join MNCs primarily because they believed that their talents and skills would be developed and utilised to the fullest extent. They cited financial rewards as a secondary factor in influencing their decision. Li (2000) used an exploratory model to study the relationship between competence and performance in Chinese firms in four broad areas – marketing, product innovation, manufacturing and HRM. The HRM area included employee empowerment, job promotions and performance management criteria. The author observed that HR items were highly correlated with the performance variables and he opined that “the results clearly show a trend moving from the state-planned economy to the market economy” (Li, 2000, p.299). Takeuchi et al. (2003) studied the impact of HRM practices on Chinese and Taiwanese affiliates of Japanese corporations and concluded that SHRM practices do have significant positive impact at the minimum on the financial aspects of the performance of the firms, confirming the conclusion previously drawn out by Li (2000) using a different sample and a completely different method of analysis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Similarly, Deng et al. (2003) studied the effects of HRM on the export performance of firms in China and concluded that HRM had a substantial impact on enterprise performance. Law et al. (2003) ascertained the significance of how firms managed their human resources to be related to the social framework within which each of them was located. The authors studied empirical data from 180 firms in China to isolate two dimensions - human resources management and perception of constituents towards their leaders. Based on the results, the authors concluded that both HRM and followers' perception of top level management played important roles in determining the financial performance of the firms. They conclude that "while social institutions remain powerful in a transitional economy, effective HRM is important to firm performance" (Law et al., 2003, p.255).

Ng and Siu (2004) focused on the role of training in enhancing the performance of firms in a transitional economy using a sample of manufacturing firms. One of the important findings in the study was that the non-state owned firms tended to attribute greater significance to training than SOEs. It was found that SOEs tended to focus simply on skills training while the non-SOEs concentrated on nourishing relationships as well as the improvement of skills. As the non-SOEs tended to focus more on a broader form of training, the authors found that their productivity tended to be higher, matching the conclusion made by Law et al. (2003). Björkman and Fan (2002) studied a sample of 62 manufacturing firms in China including a number of joint ventures and wholly owned subsidiaries of foreign enterprises. They concluded that "a positive relation was found between firm performance and the extent to which firms used a 'high-performance' HRM system as well as the degree to which they engaged in the integration of HRM and firm strategy" (Björkman & Fan, 2002, p.853), reflecting

Becker and Huselid's (1998) assertion that HRM affects business performance significantly. Zhu et al. (2008) has claimed that the conclusions arrived at by Bjorkman and Fan (2002) are some of the strongest evidence in support of the close positive relationship between firm performance and the degree of integration of HRM.

At best it can be observed that SHRM in Chinese enterprises is still at its nascent stages. While firms, both state-owned and private, recognised the importance of SHRM and have begun adopting these practices, there is a still long way to go in implementing SHRM practices completely and understanding the likely impacts on performance. However, this is not completely different from the situation relating to the research as these factors apply to western organizations. The analysis so far for this chapter has focused on the overall nature of HRM issues at an organisational level, including their links to strategy and organisational performance. However, it is also necessary to move the level of analysis towards the role that actual HR managers undertake and how this has been affected by the wider patterns of change identified above.

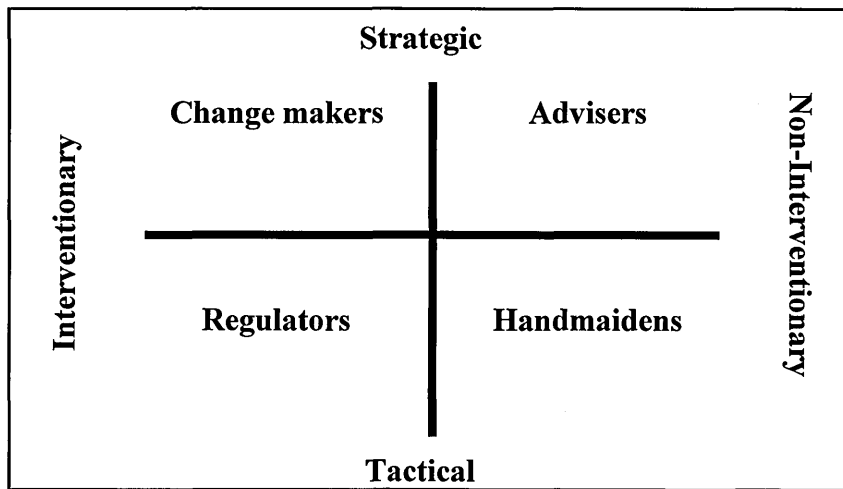
The Roles of the HR Manager

The changing role of HR managers has been the topic of research for many decades and largely in response to the sorts of changes in HRM structures mentioned in previous sections. Thus the research into this area attained prominence primarily due to the massive increase in scope of organisation activities caused by the forces of globalisation and trade liberalisation. This section attempts to briefly analyse some of the important models that have captured the changing roles of HR managers in multiple settings.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Storey (1992) conducted empirical research in the form of case-analysis using a sample of 15 UK based companies in order to acquire a better understanding of the nature of roles played by HR managers in each one of them. On the basis of the outcomes of the research, he presented a simple model for drawing out insights from them accordingly. In the model, the author takes into account two dimensions – ‘intervention’ and ‘nature’, thereby creating a total of four variants of HR roles. The first dimension goes from intervention to non-intervention. The interventionist position means that the HR manager is actively involved in the key decision-making processes of the organisation; on the other hand, a non-intervening HR manager tends to be restricted to implementing others’ decisions and does not participate in the decision making process itself. The second dimension, nature, is divided into strategic and tactical roles. The strategic nature of HR means that the HR manager is involved in long-term decisions which determine the future course and success of the organisation based on inputs relevant to its HR capabilities. Tactical roles involve decisions deemed as operational in nature and mostly pertain to short-term progress in narrow functional areas. Figure 2.2 shows the four HR roles created through the intersection of the two dimensions.

Figure 2.2: Storey's model of HR roles



Source: Storey (1992)

A HR manager plays the role of a *Change maker* when his/her function is intervening and strategic in nature. In other words, a change maker takes active participation in making strategic decisions in the organisation. In this role, the HR manager has the power to usher in major changes which could change the future of the organisation (this approach could be seen to be associated with a RBV position towards SHRM). When HR managers are provided with intervening powers but restricted largely to tactical functions, they assume the role of *Regulators* within the organisation. They may be able to bring about changes in the processes and activities but their interventions are either short-term or in support of strategic decisions rather than informing these (this could be seen as more compatible with the 'fit' approach to SHRM, with the role of HR being seen as 'downstream' from the key decisions influencing business direction). When the HR managers are allowed to participate in strategic decision-making procedures but are not given decisive powers, they remain as *Advisers* to the management. They provide insights or opinions in strategic meetings but their inputs remain as advice which other managers may choose to overlook.

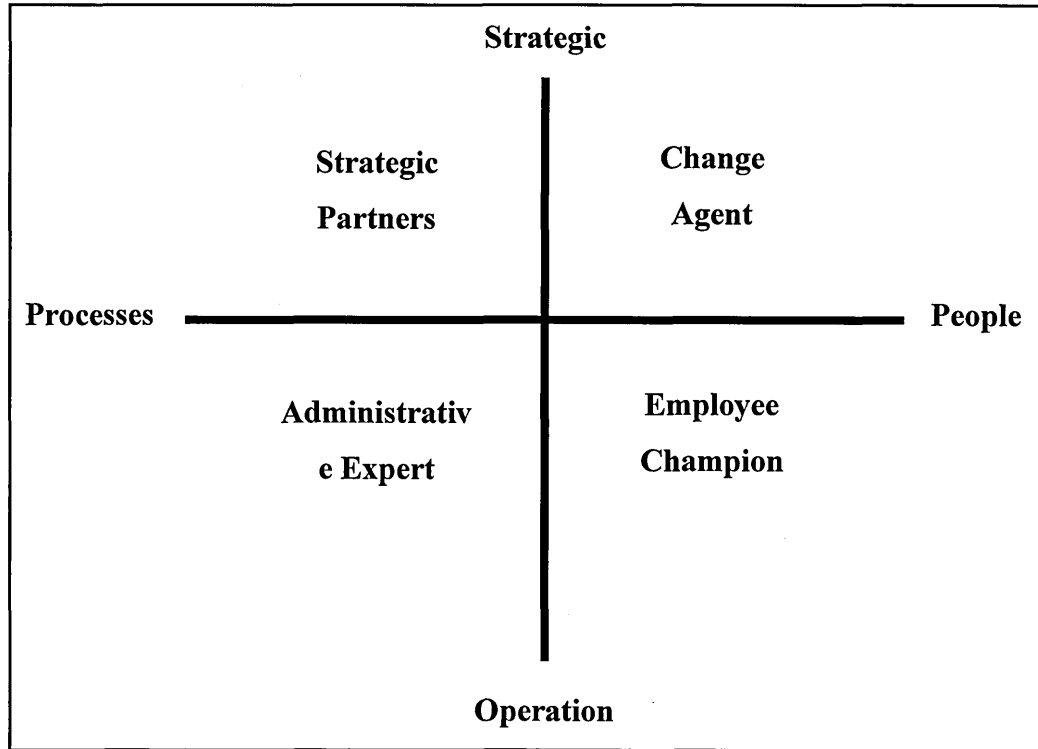
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Because they are non-interventionary the HR approach is likely to be slow to respond to changes unless these get the full support of other key managers. When HR Managers are not allowed to participate in strategic functions and are not involved in decision-making, they remain as *Handmaidens*. In simple terms, they carry out orders issued to them but they do not have any major influence in decision making. Here the HR approach is likely to be narrow and functional and not responsive to change. Change makers, Regulators, Advisers and Handmaidens, therefore, represent the descending order in terms of power for HR roles. Over a decade after Storey formulated the above model, Caldwell (2003) evaluated its empirical validity by ascertaining the nature of the roles played by HR managers in top 500 UK firms. In her findings, most of the HR managers considered the Advisor role as the most important one. However, she also concluded that most of the managers played not just one but multiple roles in organisations. Thus the actual HR manager's job usually included two or more of the four roles specified in the model.

Ulrich (1997) presented a refined model of Storey's work. According to Ulrich, the strategic-tactical dimension remains largely unchanged but refers to operational rather than tactical. This is to emphasise that strategy and operations are different levels of activity rather than being simply short-term or long-term. The intervention/non-intervention dimension was changed to Processes-People. Ulrich assumes that the HR function is always 'interventionary' in nature and it is a question of whether these interventions focus on people or processes (this can be seen as broadly equivalent to the distinction between 'humanist' and 'instrumental' approaches to HRM identified by Goss [1991]). Ulrich's classification does not assume watertight boundaries; he states that it is possible for a HR manager to play a combined role with attributes

drawn from more than one of the types shown in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: Ulrich's model of HR roles



Source: Ulrich (1997)

Ulrich states that these two dimensions better represent the different kinds of focus that HR managers may have in their roles. A HR manager whose focus is on the strategic aspects of the organisation and the processes of HR, assumes the role of a *Strategic Partner*. This type of HR manager moulds the processes in the organisation to meet strategic goals. This notion is consistent with the 'fit' model of SHRM identified above. On the other hand, when the focus is on People along with an emphasis on strategy, HR Managers become *Change Agents*. They bring about organisational transformation and deliver cultural changes in the unit. This is considered as having direct association with the RBV view of HR strategy. When the

Chapter Two: Literature Review

manager is focused on day-to-day operational aspects and processes, he/she becomes an *Administrative Expert*. The actual focus is on holding high level expertise in the technical processes involved in HR practices and in administering them. It can be noted that this does not necessarily mean that HR managers are required to be experts personally but would entail a certain level of knowledge on how to diagnose the need for expertise on the specified field and be able to administer and manage tasks in order to meet this need accordingly. On the opposite end is the *Employee Champion* whose primary focus is on the employees on a day-to-day basis in order to maximise their potential and efficiency. This role is not only limited to the provision and protection of welfare but most importantly deals more with the promotion of human capital within the organisation and the development of its potential (rather than just seeing it as a cost to be minimised).

Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), see Table 2.3 below, subsequently revised this model so that the Employee Champion transcends to Employee Advocate or Human Capital Developer. They distinguish these two roles by stating that the former is focused on the transient needs of today's employees while the latter concentrates on their future development to help them achieve overall success in the long run. Similarly, the role of Administrative Expert evolves into a Functional Expert. This is because administrative functions are no longer sufficient to deliver HR values. They also require strategic intervention and participation in policy-making. The authors redefine the role of Change Agent and Strategic Partner as one role and introduce a new role of HR Leader which integrates across all the roles of HR but also functions to ensure the effective operation of the HR function itself.

Table 2.3: Evolution of HR thinking

Mid-1990s	Mid-2000s	Evolution of thinking
Employee companion	Employee advocate (EA) Human capital (HC) developer	EA focuses on the needs of today's employee; HC developer focuses on preparing employees to be successful in the future
Administrative expert	Functional expert	HR practices are central to HR value. Some HR practices are delivered through administrative efficiency (such as technology or process redesign), and others through policies, menus and interventions
Change agent	Strategic partner	Being a strategic partner has multiple dimensions: business expert, change agent, strategic HR planner, knowledge manager and consultant
Strategic partner	Strategic partner	As above
	Leader	Being a HR leader requires functioning in each of these four roles; however, being a HR leader also has implications for leading the HR function, collaborating with other functions, setting and enhancing the standards for strategic thinking, and ensuring corporate governance

Source: Ulrich and Brockbank (2005)

Although this model, and particularly the notion of the HR manager as strategic/business partner, has gained popularity among the HR professionals in the US and UK, research by Caldwell (2008) has questioned its applicability in practice:

The findings broadly suggest that current HR business partner competency models face mounting challenges to their efficacy. Competency models increasingly need to be critically re-examined in terms of the limitations of generic, role-specific and individual competency frameworks, and they need to face up to the broader challenges of developing more process-oriented and team-based capabilities that may have an impact on practice and performance

Chapter Two: Literature Review

(Buckley and Monks, 2004; Delamare Le Deist and Winterton, 2005). But perhaps, more importantly, current competency models need to be recontextualised in terms of the broader strategic changes to the organising forms, processes of delivery and shifting boundaries of the HR function.

(Caldwell, 2008, p.291)

Higgs (2004) presents a less complex model (Figure 2.4) to capture the various roles played by HR managers. According to Higgs there are two dimensions in determining the roles – Strategic focus and focus on control. When the HR manager focuses too much on control rather than on strategic aspects of the organisation, then the role is termed ‘Policing’. Such a role involves mostly ensuring that plans are properly adhered to and the requirements are met appropriately. A low level of focus on both control and strategy is identified as an Administrator role characterised by ‘Pay and Rations’ (i.e., merely ensuring that the most routine aspects of people management are fulfilled). A high strategic focus and low focus on control is called a Strategic Partner, involved in making long-term plans without focusing excessively on implementation. Finally, a focus on both control and strategy implies the role of a Strategic Driver; long term growth-oriented plans are developed, implemented and evaluated.

Figure 2.4: Higgs's model of HR roles



Source: Higgs (2004)

This model shares similarities, based on the distinctions provided, with the model devised by Ulrich (2007) in evolving HR functions, which include Shared Services (routine HR tasks that can be mechanised or outsourced) deemed as the Pay and Rations role; Centres of Excellence (based on HR expertise in specific sub-areas such as reward management, motivation, talent management) which is consistent with the Strategic Driver role (providing and delivering strategically needed expertise as a form of internal consultant) and Strategic Partners as indicated above.

These accounts of HR roles acknowledge the recent advancements made in relation to the constant evolution of organisations which in effect redefined HRM as a whole. However there is an interesting gap in this literature in terms of how these changing roles have been influenced by the career choices and aspirations of the individuals occupying the position. In this respect, it is notable to point out that most of these given accounts of changing roles focus exactly on the 'role' with only slight consideration for the individual. The assumption is that individuals will come to fit

Chapter Two: Literature Review

the role with great ease; but there has been modest reflection of how individuals have responded to such changes. In fact, it has proved to be almost impossible to find any studies relating specifically to the career aspirations and choices of HR managers and how they can potentially shape the ways in which they fill the changing HR roles (the studies that are available seem to focus on the role of HR managers in managing the careers of others, for example, Baruch & Peiperl, 2000; Feldman, 1995; Hausknecht, Rodda & Howard, 2009). Therefore, to gain higher ground in understanding how the career perceptions of HR managers may directly or indirectly affect these defined roles, it is necessary to examine the general literature on managerial careers to extract ideas relevant to the specified field.

A key writer on this subject is Schein (1996) who distinguished internal and external careers. External careers, which are often studied and modelled in management literature, comprise of different roles and levels which employees ascend and assume during their tenure in an organisation. These roles are defined by the policies and practices within the organisation and remain static amongst different individuals for as long as the organisation continues to be constant. On the other hand, Schein (1996) stated that internal careers involve “a subjective sense of where one is going in one's work life” (p.80). The internal career varies from one person to another even though they may occupy similar positions in the same or in different organisations. More interestingly, internal career remains constant regardless of the changes in the external environment within the organisation. In other words, notwithstanding the developments and dynamics of the work setting, the employee stays focused on his/her career path. This is made possible by what are perceived to be ‘career anchors’. Schein (1996) uses the term ‘Career Anchor’ to refer to the self-concept

Chapter Two: Literature Review

which the employee holds. According to the author, Career Anchors consist of three major components:

- 'self-perceived talents and abilities', i.e., what the employee considers himself to be or not to be capable of;
- 'basic values', i.e., those attributes which are part of the employee's life including work and private;
- 'the evolved sense of motives and needs as they pertain to career', i.e., career ambitions and objectives which the employee holds for himself.

Schein identifies that seven major categories of career anchors (based on these components) are commonly found among employees, namely:

- Professional stability;
- Techno-functional competence;
- Managerial competence;
- Entrepreneurial zeal;
- Dedication to a cause;
- Challenge;
- Life style.

These are the major factors to which any employee would anchor his/her career, but the concept of career anchors is highly dynamic in nature. On one hand, an employee may choose to drop his/her anchor as their circumstances change; on the other, the nature of the anchor itself may undergo changes due to the unexpected factors in the external environment which the employee is an integral part of.

The importance of Schein's work is best demonstrated by comparison to other career theories such as Holland's (1973) occupational and vocational choice theory. Firstly,

Chapter Two: Literature Review

occupational choice theory dictates that individuals choose an occupation based upon their interests and preferences. For example, someone will enter into the accounting profession because he or she has an interest in the business sector. The assumption is that just because an individual likes business studies he or she will opt for a career involving it. The value of Schein's theory, according to Feldman and Bolino (1996), is that it does not make such presumptions and puts forward the notion that a 'stable career identity' is only possible if the individual's interest is aligned with his/her capability of achieving it. In this sense, just because an individual has interest in business, it does not necessarily follow that he or she will have an aptitude for accounting. Secondly, vocational theories tell us that an individual chooses a profession rather than a career (e.g., a long term vocation such as medicine or law). What this theory fails to identify is that within these vocations a number of careers may be possible, hence the use of Schein's notion of 'career paths' (Feldman & Bolino [1996] used the example of an individual entering a career in marketing which may lead to a wide choice of career paths: "a technical career in marketing research, a managerial career in brand management, an entrepreneurial career in new product development, an autonomous career as a marketing consultant and a secured career as a marketing professor" [p.90]). Hence, neither the 'discipline' nor the 'vocation' according to Schein, is especially relevant during the process of determining career choices.

In this sense, when compared with vocational theory, Schein's Career Anchor theory demonstrates a wider range of explanations and covers more of the real variation in the career choices made by individuals. In particular, it is important to take into consideration the individuals' preferences, abilities, alongside the experiences gained

Chapter Two: Literature Review

in joining an organisation. The daily dealings and interactions with other members of the organisation and the different facets of the working environment help shape the individuals' overall impression towards their career and outline the next sequence of their chosen path. In this sense, Schein's Career Anchor theory is substantially broader in scope and more dynamic and goes beyond the assumption of relatively fixed inherent values (Yarnall, 1998). It takes account of an organisational perspective in relation to the motivation behind employees' actions at any particular stage in their career and can explain "how and why an individual interacts with the organisation" (Yarnall, 1998, p.56). This is similarly aligned with the earlier work of Hall (1976) which states that an employee's values and attitudes toward their career in general are determined by their experiences in the workplace. Thus, if one of the Career Anchor's elements is not achieved nor fulfilled as expected, the anchor may be 'pulled loose' such that the individual may seek new and more promising working conditions and, if these cannot be achieved, may reorientate their career aspirations based on different anchors (Feldman & Bolino, 1996).

The notion of Career Anchors would seem to have some relevance to a professional career such as HR, but its application in China raises some potentially interesting issues. As Wong (2007) has pointed out:

Career research using Career Anchors (as indeed careers research generally) has principally been an activity carried out by western researchers on western subjects (Igarria et al., 1995, 1999; Marshall & Bonner, 2003; Mignonac & Herrbach, 2003; Sarchielli & Toderi, 2005; Yarnall, 2000) with few studies focused on non-westerners. Indeed, the author can find no extant research in which ethnically Chinese managers have been studied using the Career Anchor concept. Wang

Chapter Two: Literature Review

(1998), in a study of Taiwanese college students' career choices, observes that there is limited exploration into the meaning of careers from the indigenous Chinese perspective.

(Wong, 2007, p.1215)

In fact, according to Wong and Slater (2002):

There has been little analysis of Chinese managers' career progress. Who are these managers? What makes a Chinese manager? What are the biographical data and career pathways that lead to management positions and movement through management hierarchies? How does biographical data influence career choice? Furthermore, we need to ask whether there are any significant career-path differences between managers working in State-owned enterprises (SOEs), privately owned enterprises (PEs), joint ventures (JVs), wholly foreign-owned ventures (WFOs) and new State-owned enterprises (NSOEs).

(Wong & Slater, 2002, p.339)

Part of answering these questions depends on understanding the changes affecting Chinese organisations in recent years. In the years before the economic reforms, individuals were allocated jobs in SOEs through the state central planning system where lifetime employment (the iron rice-bowl system) was an integral part of the benefits (Warner, 1992, 1995, 1996). According to Wong and Slater (2002), "under the Mao regime, the notion of career options or career moves was nonsense in those days. Career advancement was based on neither merit nor performance" (p.342). However after the economic reforms, programmes were implemented to accelerate the development of key managers in different sectors, there was, according to Wong and Slater (2002), a process of "enhancing managers" (p.342) mobility and creating better opportunities for the development of new ventures. Hence, it paved the way for

Chapter Two: Literature Review

individuals to have greater flexibility in their future career choices. The few other similar studies available dealing with careers in China relate to managers in general (rather than specific professions). A study by Granrose (2007) focused on differences in career perceptions between women and men and discovered no significant differences between career positions and 'internal career beliefs' as "both women and men value achievement, contributions to the family, and collectivism as career goals and use loyalty to superiors and networking as career tactics" (p.9).

A detailed study by Bu and Roy (2008) enumerated aspects regarded as valuable for careers in China and (perhaps not surprisingly), age was considered to be an important factor. Older men were deemed more helpful than women in the career networks of younger managers, this seeming to be related to traditional Confucian stereotypes which assert that women should undertake more domestic activities and possibly also reflecting the fact that the mandatory retirement age for them is five years earlier than men. The significance of these social networks for career development was confirmed by another study facilitated by Wei et al. (2010) which examined the importance of subordinates' political skills in securing promotion and career advancement. In this study they linked the connections to older superordinates as part of a *guanxi* relationship:

The results of this study confirm that *guanxi* remains important in China . . . This type of social capital . . . could play a substantial role in various situations. In the work setting, if a subordinate wants to gain career prospect, he or she has to pay special attention to the *guanxi* establishment with significant others. For a fresh employee, his or her direct supervisor is such a significant other.

(Wei et al., 2010, p.449)

Chapter Two: Literature Review

However, based on the pilot study of Chinese managers in Beijing and Shanghai, Wong and Slater (2002) conclude that:

Due to the economic demand for managerial skills, the subjects have begun to experience greater freedom in their job search opportunities, enabling them to search for jobs that conform to their own interests and values. The study revealed a common point: most of the managers were keen to increase their human capital in order to further their careers. Thus, the motives of the subjects looking for career growth are in line with Schein's career anchors theory. The managers in SOEs – notoriously incompetent (*The Economist*, 2000:114) – while also looking to improve their knowledge and skills, were more bound to their own sectors.

(Wong & Slater, 2002, p.352)

This supports other limited studies of Career Anchors in a Chinese context although most of them focused on Taiwan rather than mainland China. Wong (2007) studied a sample of 117 Taiwanese managers to instigate broader observations about the reasons and rationale for the career choices made by these managers. Of particular interest to the researcher is the manner in which the Chinese culture affects Career Anchor choices. The findings confirmed Schein's (1996) 'Life Style' as the most frequent choice by the managers, followed by 'Entrepreneurial Creativity' and closely followed by 'Autonomy/independence'. Wong (2007) opined that managers were focused on maintaining a well-balanced lifestyle instead of aiming for ascendance of the corporate ladder. However, as Wong suggested, these results may also reflect the traditional entrepreneurial culture of Taiwan. She stated that there is a need for further comparative studies of different Chinese communities to understand career orientation from a Chinese perspective:

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Chinese in these places may have widely different values. And in so far as values determine choice (which is implicit in the Career Anchors concept), we might reasonably expect research to reveal differences in patterns of Career Anchors across communities, mirroring this diversity. Furthermore, within the Chinese cultural tradition, there is a deep respect for age; males are regarded as more important than females and occupations carry differential levels of respect which do not exactly accord with western values. Examination of these elements within the Chinese cultural tradition, using the Career Anchors concepts as a lens could shed further light on the making of Chinese managers across the vast Chinese diaspora.

(Wong, 2007, p.1230)

Emotion and HR Management

In addition to the issue of career choices, there is also a gap in the literature in terms of emotions. The current literature on the subject provides little detail on the weight of emotions involved in the profession, which is a noticeable gap considering that HR activities are more likely prone or exposed to emotional interactions on a daily basis. For example, HR managers are frequently involved in dealing with people in relation to difficult issues that are likely to generate emotions in those affected and, in turn, to produce emotional reactions in the HR managers who have to deal with them. However, although the study of emotions has become a significant area for study in many areas of organization studies there has been little research focused specifically on HR roles and HR managers.

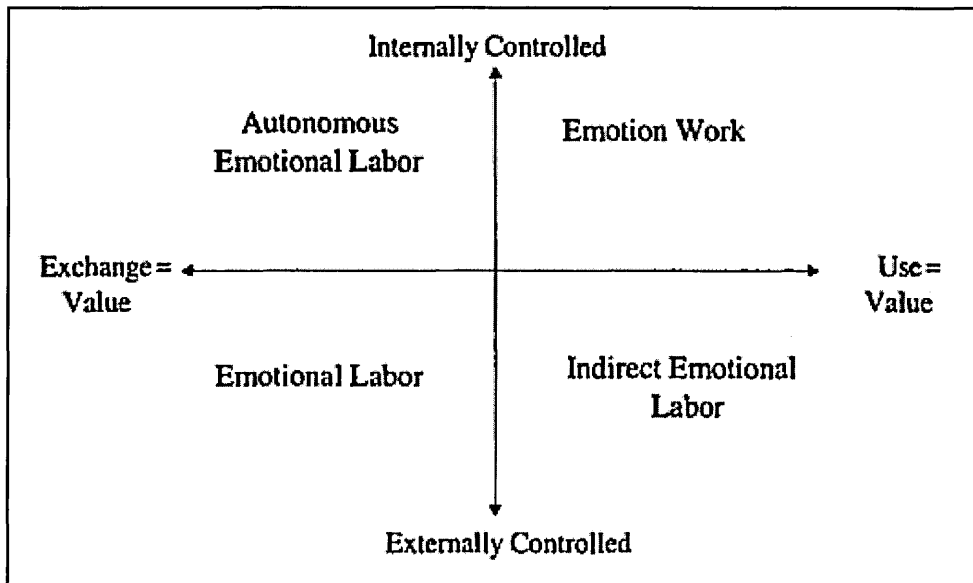
Understanding emotions has been a growing area of interest in the broader field of organization studies, even if ignored by the studies of HRM. Ashkanasy et al. (2000) state that despite over 92 attempts by researchers in Psychology, Sociology,

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Management and other forms of behavioural science, defining it “has continued to prove an elusive goal” (p.4). It is therefore necessary to examine the various theories of emotion available in the management literature in order to shed some light on studies related to emotions and HR functions. Simon (1987) stressed the importance of emotions and the need to manage them in an organisational environment. He argued that management literature tended to focus on rational methods in decision-making which assumes that decision choices can be assessed in advance, leading to a degree of confidence in the outcome. However, he maintained that there is always an instinctive part of decision making (which may take form of intuition or gut feeling) informed by emotion rather than rationalism. His main concern was to understand how managers’ decision-making practices were influenced by emotions and their ability to control them. Although an important move away from a purely rational approach, Simon (1987) focused almost entirely on the relevance of emotions to individual managerial decision-making process. More recent writers have considered the ways in which emotions could be used and manipulated to control employees and other members of an organizational unit (including customers).

Researchers have proposed different theories and models for ‘emotion management’. A brief overview of some of these theories is a key to understanding the dynamics of emotional interaction and the efforts made by most organisations to manage them. Ashkanasy et al. (2000) presented a model (Figure 2.5) for emotion management which is based on the distinction between ‘emotion work’ and ‘emotional labour’.

Figure 2.5: Ashkanasy's model for emotion management



Source: Ashkanasy et al. (2000)

This model is based on the distinction between external and internal control (the former referring to control that is imposed on the individual by an outside force, such as managerial authority, the latter referring to control that is exercised by the individual themselves on the basis of more or less conscious judgement), and between use-value and exchange-value (the latter referring to value that can be used by the organization as part of its market activities, i.e., that produces a profit, and the former referring to value that is of use to the individual or organization, e.g., in helping to maintain a relationship, but does not relate directly to the market process). According to the authors, 'Emotional Labour' refers to the emotional activities, which employees are required to engage in (formally or informally) as a part of their job responsibilities. Employees have to control their emotions and exhibit certain emotions as required by their job profile and description (e.g., a debt collector shouting angrily at a client while at work even though he is otherwise a calm person – anger is an emotion, which the employees generates and communicates to the

Chapter Two: Literature Review

environment because his job demands it from him). ‘Autonomous Emotional Labour’ refers to the spontaneous, individually controlled management of emotions during the performance of job tasks. Employees manage their emotions internally in order to ensure that they fit into their perception of the organisational culture. This benefits the organization and is directed by the employee towards organizational concerns. ‘Emotion Work’ refers to the emotional management practices engaged in by employees due to their inherent self. This type of emotional management is entirely controlled internally by the employees and may have use value in helping the individual to cope with situations and in particular, to deal with relationships involving other people. As such it may help to motivate the individual or to build bonds with others that contribute indirectly to the smooth running of the organization but its main focus is on the individual’s own psychological needs. On the other hand, there are certain situations when the employees are expected to manage their emotions in a way that supports their job responsibilities even though this is not a formally or informally specified part of their working role. For example, employees attending office parties are expected to be cheerful and vibrant, or in dealing with colleagues are expected to appear interested and attentive (even if they are not). Such management of emotions have use value in creating organizational cultures and demonstrating commitment to the organizational values. Clearly it can be seen that these categories will involve some elements of overlap rather than being mutually exclusive.

Numerous researchers have focused particularly on emotional labour in terms of gender biases. One of the most famous writers on the subject, Hochschild (1983), argued that emotional labour could lead to “alienation on the part of the worker as a result of the commoditisation of emotion, structured inequality in relation to

Chapter Two: Literature Review

customers, and managerial imposition of feeling rules” (Legge, 2000, p.12). In particular the structured inequality interpreted by Hochschild, usually relates to gender as women workers are expected to exercise emotional labour in diverse and more often than not demanding ways compared to men. According to Franzway’s (2000) study of trade unions:

The essence of emotional labour . . . is caring for others and producing appropriate feelings in others and this often describes the type of work women are expected to perform. Combative behaviour, hard-nosed negotiations and conflict resolution are also emotionally taxing aspects of union work but . . . such emotional labour is seen as more appropriately the domain of male and not female officials. . . . there is a clear macho culture that taxes men and women differently in terms of commitment, workload and emotional labour.

(Fulop & Linstead, 2004, p.309)

There is an interesting relationship between the observations made on union work (which could be regarded as similar in some respects to HRM in terms of its concern with employment and people issues) and the research on HR managers’ emotions conducted by Hiillos (2007; one of the only apparent studies on this issue). She pointed out that emotions form an important ‘invisible’ side to HR work on how managers handle their own emotions and those expressed by others. She argued that an “analysis of the gendered nature of emotion handling is important given the ‘feminine’ label attached to HRM” (Hiillos, 2007, p.110). The majority of HR management positions are occupied by women in Western societies, and they are often associated with “caring, nurturing and emotional support, which is culturally associated with femininity” (Hiillos, 2007, p.110). From her research on Finnish HR managers, Hiillos identified two forms of emotion handling among HR managers. The

Chapter Two: Literature Review

first she called ‘mothering’ and the second, ‘guide-following’. These broad approaches for Hiillos are the results of different sets of combinations based on five specific emotion handling processes. In Hiillos’s study, they distinguished between the usual approaches to handling emotions adopted by women and men (with the former tending towards the ‘mothering’ approach and the latter emulating the ‘guide-following’ approach).

The mothering approach

is a concept that lies close to caring and nurturing. Women are often expected to act as organizational mothers. The role of mother is often depicted as an organizational specialist. . . . Typical of mothering is a deep concern for the coping and well-being of the employees.

(Hiillos, 2007, pp.115-116)

In contrast, the guide-following approach is involved in looking

for rules or guidance on which to base their emotion-handling activities. To use a family metaphor we could think of the guide-follower as a child who looks to his or her father for advice . . . references by HR managers to the authorities or to legislation . . . the focus is on guidelines that stipulate the relationship between an employer and employee.

(Hiillos, 2007, p.117)

Each approach was drawn out from different sets of combinations of five emotion handling strategies identified by Hiillos. These included the following:

- 1) *Empathy at a distance*. For this strategy, HR managers ‘handle the employees’ emotions in an empathetic and caring manner. However, HR managers emphasised that they strive to keep a distance from the employees’ problems in order to preserve their own integrity. “Employees should be

Chapter Two: Literature Review

treated as whole persons, thus also taking into consideration their private life” (Hiillos, 2007, p.118). Hiillos claimed that in the sample used for her study, this strategy was enacted only by women.

2) *Mediator/Guardian*. This involves “handling emotions in negotiations with employees and other managers. HR managers act like a “man-in-the-middle” or “bridge”” (Hiillos, 2007, p.119). Hiillos claimed that there are two forms of this strategy. The first strategy involves mediating with an emphasis on the basic principle of fairness or equality and the second focuses on mediating as a medium to draw out a fair and just solution to a problem. This technique was used by both men and women.

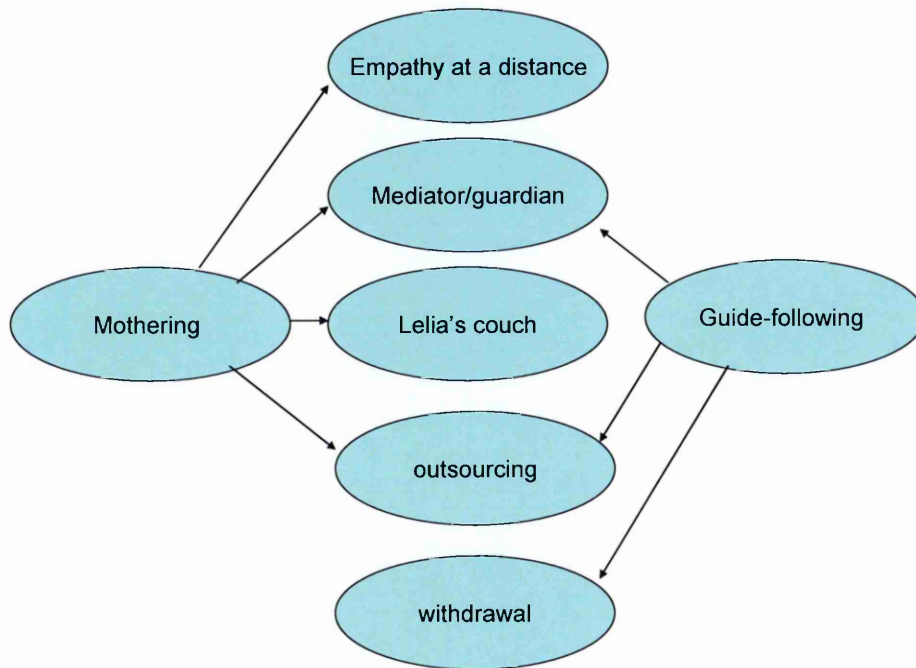
3) *Lelia's Couch*. This refers to a Finnish newspaper column written by an ‘agony aunt’. This strategy was used by females only. In relation to top managers, “the HR managers acted as shoulders to lean on for their superiors, helping the top managers to open up with their problems” (Hiillos, 2007, p. 119)

4) *Active Outsourcing*. Active outsourcing involves the hiring of external consultants, such as occupational psychologists, councillors or priests, to deal with issues that are identified as emotionally difficult (such as redundancy, or stress). “If you can’t deal with a problem yourself, you know where to get help” (Hiillos, 2007, p.119). Hiillos also identified an uncommon form of passive outsourcing where staff members give advices in an informal context although these were not formally recognised by HR managers. Active outsourcing was used by male and female HR managers.

5) *Withdrawal*. Under this approach, “emotions are considered disturbances or deviations from normal practice. It considers bringing of emotions to the workplace as undesirable or completely inappropriate. If emotions do arise, employees are expected to diffuse the strong sentiment or should “cool down” before the HR manager proceeds to a corresponding course of action” (Hiillos, 2007, p.120). This was practiced only by male HR managers.

The overall pattern of emotion handling responses and strategies is shown in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6: The five emotion-handling strategies as derivations of the two logics of appropriateness, mothering and guide-following



Source: (Hiillos, 2007)

Little research has been conducted concerning the effect of emotions in Chinese organization and none has been conducted specifically on HR managers. However, there is some research available that is linked toward the role of emotions in relation to *Guanxi*. This issue is often claimed as being at the heart of the differences between western business practices and those of China and it is therefore necessary to examine its meaning before turning to its emotional effects. *Guanxi* is an important cultural concept which is highly prevalent in Chinese society. It represents an informal social network that influences relationships between individuals in social, political,

Chapter Two: Literature Review

economic and business environments (Parnell, 2005). Originally thought of as a social concept, *Guanxi* is evident in business circles as well. Leung et al. (2005) defined *Guanxi* in terms of personal networks and informal social bonds among individuals with embedded consequences and obligations to fulfil and exchange favours. It is stated that *Guanxi* is an essential condition in China, as even to start a business it is required to establish favourable connections with government officers (Xin & Pearce, 1996). The concept came into use during the period of controlled private ownership where business establishments were rarely given permission to exist independently. Entrepreneurs or different types of businessmen established close ties with government officers to ensure the longevity and growth of their enterprises. Even in free and independent economic zones, *guanxi* is still claimed to be a necessity: “China is a land of *guanxi*, nothing can be done without *guanxi*” (Tsang, 1998, p.67).

However, the exact meaning of *guanxi* is not straightforward as it currently does not have a direct translation in English. Also, in China, it has several nuances in meanings. According to Fan (2002):

It could refer to one of three things: (a) the existence of a relationship between people who share a group status or who are related to a common person, (b) actual connections with and frequent contact between people, and (c) a contact person with little direct interaction (Bian, 1994). However, in everyday communication *guanxi* has a pejorative connotation referring to ‘the use of someone’s authority to obtain political or economic benefits by unethical persons (*The Dictionary of New Words and Phases*, 1989:92).

(Fan, 2002, p.546)

Guanxi, in its present form is often considered one of the major differences between

the Chinese and Western management. In China, it is claimed to be required for the manager to establish strong long-term friendships with stakeholders before engaging in a transaction, whereas in Western society the typical practice is to build up relationships along the way. In other words, in Western business practice, relationships are considered rewards for successful transactions, but in China, successful transactions are considered the rewards of strong relationships (Chen et al., 2004). HRM practices in China appear to be greatly influenced by *guanxi*. For example, in strong relationships with the labour unions, earning the trust, loyalty and friendship of workers may involve ensuring the well-being of their families and life-long employment (Zhu, 2005).

In order to understand more fully the role played by *guanxi* in Chinese HR practices, it is necessary to recognise its key features. Following Fan's identification of different meanings of *guanxi*, these features can also be broken down by their characteristics into the following dimensions:

Bilateral and Private – Alston (1989) stated that one-to-one relationships between two persons are the most basic unit of a *guanxi*. This involves rights and obligations between two individuals even though it may also grow into groups at later stages.

Intangibility - *Guanxi* is mostly intangible in the form of commitments, promises and agreements. The monetary and social benefits that accrue through the use of *guanxi* are typically provided in an indirect manner which Tsang (1998) has referred to as 'beating about the bush'. *Guanxi* requires that the benefits are exchanged in subtle manner. In this respect, it can be seen as being similar to the notion of 'social exchange' (Homans, 1958) in which favours are equally reciprocated. Participating parties expect returns but they do not usually provide specifications in advance (as would be the case in an economic exchange or contract).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Dynamic transmission - It can be noted that even though *guanxi* is fundamentally between two individuals it can be transferred to a third person outside the network. The extent of acceptance of the third person in the *guanxi* network depends on the nature and intensity of the prior agreement between the two individuals. It also depends on the personality and nature of the third person participating in the *guanxi* network (Farh et al., 1998).

Unequal Mutual Benefits – *Guanxi* is typically used by people to gain access to resources. Although it has older roots, *guanxi* became more dominant during the period of the Communist regime when resources were primarily distributed by the government. Those having *guanxi* relationships with the officers had easy access to any type of resources. Although *guanxi* advantages are almost always more beneficial to the weaker party, unreturned prior agreements or unpaid contracts do not expire over time and may be collected later on by the stronger party which may result in dishonour if the 'due' is not paid (Alston, 1989). Thus *guanxi* usually has a cumulative effect over time, 'interest' matures slowly and benefits accrue for both parties but are never equally distributed. Any attempt to strike a balance in the distribution of benefits to the involved individuals is against the principle of *guanxi*.

This complex picture was confirmed by Gamble (2006) whose interviews with employees in China about the concept of *guanxi* received mixed responses among Chinese employees. Some employees believed that *guanxi* was a positive aspect of Chinese culture, and supplementary to performance: an employee who is a high-performer and good at maintaining connections is given preference over someone who is inadequate both at work and relationships. On the other hand, some employees felt that the Western system of objectively relying on performance to determine progress worked better because it would no longer be necessary to compel people to maintain unnecessary connections. In fact it is significant that Fan (2002) argues that, whatever its complex form, *guanxi* has strong emotional dimensions as it works through the

feelings of individuals:

Guanxi is the reciprocal exchange between two persons for a specific purpose. What is exchanged is *qingqing*, *ganqing* or *renqing*/favour. It is important to distinguish these three terms here. Although all refer to human feelings they vary in both nature and intensity: *qingqing* (affection to the loved ones), *ganqing* (emotion to friends) and *renqing* (human debt to acquaintances). A favour can be intangible as advice/information/counselling or tangible as gifts/jobs/houses or any other products or services.

(Fan, 2002, p.549)

This confirms the general point made earlier in this chapter that an understanding of emotions is necessary in relation to HR work. If managers are involved in complex *guanxi* relationships with emotional dimensions, this may make their role even more complicated and potentially compromising than in a Western context. Therefore it is necessary to examine how organisational emotion is understood in a Chinese context.

One of the few studies of emotions in a Chinese organisational context is by Krone and Morgan (2000) who claimed that emotions assume a special meaning in China because of the traditional culture based on spiritual values. They note that in the Western management literature, emotion and reason sit on two opposite ends of the spectrum while in the Chinese context emotion and reason are very closely related. Sun (1991) used the term *xin* to denote a unitary concept, which includes mind and heart rather than bifurcating them (*ying* and *yang*). The relevance of *guanxi* is suggested when Krone and Morgan (2000) discuss the nature of expressions of emotion in China: "Restraining oneself emotionally is not only necessary in developing oneself as a person and in maintaining group harmony, but also in

Chapter Two: Literature Review

acquiring support for the accomplishment of practical, instrumental ends” (p.85). The foundation of this view is based on the observation taken from Chinese society that “human life is realised in the larger social group” rather than thought of as something done by autonomous individuals. In family values, children “learn to understand their place within a network of interdependent but clearly defined role relationships” (p. 85). According to them, there are three main implications for behaviour: i) “in order to maintain face, group harmony and stability, the Chinese appear to neutralise intense inner feeling and to restrain its expression” (p.85); ii) “getting in touch with inner feelings in order to express them to others appears to be relatively unimportant, especially if doing so would threaten to disrupt harmonious systems of relationships” (p.85); iii) “practicing emotional restraint on behalf of a larger social network is not considered self-sacrificial” (p.85). They noted that “while Chinese managers believe in their own feeling as a kind of homeostatic process, they may deploy the language of homeostasis and lesson in ways that result in the simple containment of employee emotion in organizations” (p.97). On the basis of their interviews with Chinese managers they suggest:

The managers in this study appear to understand disruptive emotional experience as a temporary loss of equilibrium and once this occurs they actively work to regain it in their bodies, thoughts and feelings. They strive to “cool” hot tempers and “calm” agitated feelings through a conscious, perhaps even methodical, process. They then seek to “draw a lesson” from their emotional experiences in ways that enhance their own well-being and that of their organizations.

(Krone & Morgan, 2000, p.90)

This study was based on interviews with 48 Directors and Executive Directors of

state-owned enterprises. It will be interesting to see if this type of pattern is also present in HR managers of the current study considering that only a minority of them were from state-owned enterprises. It will also be interesting to see whether there is evidence of the wider range of emotional responses to handling situations identified by Hiillos's study of Finnish HR managers.

In particular, it seems that the HR manager in Chinese corporation may be expected to be affected by emotional issues when formulating policies and procedures and implementing them. Even though the Chinese *iron rice bowl* policies have been discarded in most of organisations, retrenchments and dismissals have typically been received with anger and even hatred towards management by subordinate employees. Similarly, in spite of the increasing moves towards performance based career progress, seniority still appears to be an issue of considerable respect and deference. Thus an HR manager is likely to be involved in the management of both their own emotions and those of employees and other managers within the cultural context where individual emotional outbursts that threaten collectivism are considered undesirable.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the reader with an overview of the recent developments in the field of HRM in general while focusing on how this has impacted on the situation in China. It was noted that there had been limited investigation on the relationship between HR roles and career choices and only a few references concerning the emotional aspects of the role. Both of these issues were shown to be potentially significant for the work of Chinese HR managers and therefore required a better

Chapter Two: Literature Review

understanding in order to establish a full picture of Chinese HR practice. Firstly, they reflect the rapid change in HR practices that have been widely reported but also involve the changing options for individual career development that have emerged since the opening of the Chinese economy. Both of these factors are likely to be of importance for the emerging practice of HRM in China and need therefore to be examined further. Also there is significance in the emotional aspects of HRM in the Chinese context as, although much attention has been given to the role of *guanxi*, the possibly strong emotional dimensions of this practice (and related changes in Chinese employment relationships), have not been researched in any detail. This needs to be understood in order to provide a detailed understanding of HR practice as it is experienced by Chinese HR managers.

The first point is confirmed by Zheng and Lamond (2009) in their extensive review of the literature on Chinese HRM:

While a significant number of studies have devoted to examining the changing role of HR professionals in the western countries . . . little is known about the number and characteristics of Chinese HR practitioners and professionals, and their roles and functions within organisations . . . More research is required to build a better understanding of characteristics and roles of Chinese HR practitioners and professionals.

(Zheng & Lamond, 2009, p.2215)

They also note that “Little is known how the culture and *guanxi* actually influence HR professionals and practitioners, as well as line managers in China on making various decisions regarding people matters such as recruitment, selection, career advance and promotion” (Zheng & Lamond, 2009, p.2215). In another recent review of the HRM

Chapter Two: Literature Review

literature relating to China, Cooke (2009) identifies a number of research gaps:

the changing role of the HR function: What is the pool of HR talent and what are the career patterns and development needs of the HR professionals? . . . What is the level of autonomy and power? What is the level of strategic capability, effectiveness and performance of the HR department?

(Cooke, 2009, p.23)

Having identified these gaps, the current research will attempt to provide some answers to these issues by means of a programme of detailed semi-structured interviews with Chinese HR managers. The intention will be to capture the experience of these managers as the practice of HRM is seen from their perspective. This will not only help to address the gaps identified above but will also contribute to understanding by providing rich qualitative data that is not easy or common in research into Chinese HR practices. As such it will make a contribution to the knowledge of the subject by addressing issues that have been identified as lacking in the literature and by doing so in a way that provides access to an understanding of the issues from the Chinese perspective by letting Chinese HR managers speak for themselves rather than responding to structured questionnaire items (as has characterised much research in this subject area). The research will be guided by three broad research questions to be addressed as follows:

1. How do Chinese HR managers understand their role in relation to their organization and the wider changes in the Chinese economy?
2. How do Chinese HR managers understand their individual career patterns and how do they see these developing?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

3. How do Chinese HR managers experience emotion in their HR activities and how is such emotion dealt with?

These questions will be addressed inductively and patterns of relationships will be identified and compared to theories and concepts within the literature on HRM and organizational behaviour as the analysis progresses. The issues relating to the detailed methodology of the study are discussed in more detail in the following Methodology chapter.

Chapter Three:
Methodology

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological considerations involved in designing the research programme and addresses the research questions posted at the end of the previous chapter. These questions have been shown to have the potential to address gaps in the literature on HR management in China and to offer new insights into the experiences of such managers as they undertake their work. The questions have been stated as follows:

1. How do Chinese HR managers understand their role in relation to their organisation and the wider changes in the Chinese economy?
2. How do Chinese HR managers understand their individual career patterns and how do they see these developments?
3. How do Chinese HR managers experience emotion in their HR activities and how is such emotion being dealt with?

The questions above have already been identified from a review of the literature on Chinese HRM where they were shown to be important but under-researched. It is also notable that many of the studies reviewed (in Chapter Two above and by general review articles) show a dominance of survey-based investigations of Chinese HRM. Several reviewers (e.g., Cooke, 2009; Zheng & Lamond, 2009) has identified the need for more qualitative studies in order to gain a better understanding of the situation, especially that coming from the accounts of Chinese HR managers themselves, rather

than simply conducting further tests of Western theories of HRM in order to determine levels of compatibility or difference (e.g., Farhang, 1999; Tsang, 1995, 1999; Xiao, 1996). This gap is particularly pertinent given that China has the largest workforce in the world, and has many factors which make it culturally and economically unique, particularly with regards to comparisons made with the West which much of the HRM literature hinges on. It therefore follows that a meaningful understanding of HRM practices in China must consider the contextual aspects surrounding the practice of HRM and the ways in which these are experienced and understood from the perspective of the Chinese manager. This means that it will be necessary to put the emphasis on capturing and interpreting the meaning of HR practices rather than merely measuring their presence from a predetermined set of variables.

Research Design

Robson (2002) suggests that it is a common practice to define research as exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. The differences between these three possible forms of study are illustrated in the Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Three types of research

Exploratory studies	Descriptive studies	Explanatory studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Seek to explore what is happening and ask questions about it❖ Particularly useful when not enough is known about a phenomenon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Provide a picture of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs❖ It could also comprise a normative study, comparing the data against some standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Some studies could also be correlative in nature, with the emphasis on discovering causal relationships between variables

Source: Robson (2002)

Chapter Three: Methodology

An exploratory study is undertaken “when not much is known about the situation at hand or no information is available on how similar problems or research issues have been solved in the past” (Sekaran, 2003, p.119), often using qualitative data collected through observation or interviews. Data collected from exploratory study normally reveal patterns of phenomena, develop an existing theory, add more variables and/or generate hypotheses for future testing. This is a close match to the situation pertaining to questions identified above in terms of the need to understand the meaning of HRM in a particularly complex context with limited historical information or data (as established in the previous chapter). As Zhu et al. (2008) stated, knowledge is required of “HRM practices and practitioner’s thoughts” (p.140). However, the intention of this research is to be more than descriptive. It will also aim to identify patterns, if there are any, from the data and systematically connect these through the analysis of the existing theories and concepts. As will be discussed below this will undertaken through an inductive approach (by generating explanations that are grounded in the data and evaluated against existing theories) rather than undertaking the generation of hypotheses from existing theories and testing these statistically for generality. It can therefore be suggested that the research will also involve some elements of explanation (although not in the sense outlined in Table 3.1 above, i.e., in terms of statistical correlations between causally related variables). Rather the explanation will take the form of provisional relationships between factors that are identified through the data rather than defined in advance and the causal links between them will be tentative rather than theoretically deduced. Therefore it seems that the categories in Table 3.1 above should not be regarded as mutually exclusive but as giving different types of emphasis and, therefore, to understand more fully the exploratory approach that will be adopted for this study it is necessary to consider

Chapter Three: Methodology

issues philosophical assumptions which provide the underpinning methodology for the study.

Saunders et al. (2003) define methodology as “the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted” (p.481). Philosophical assumptions relate to how the researcher understands the development of the knowledge relevant to the research. The three broad approaches to research philosophy are usually identified as positivism, interpretivism, and realism. Positivism is a philosophy favoured in the natural sciences and it assumes that the researcher is detached from the research subject. Positivist researchers claim to use an objective scientific method (Remenyi et al., 1998) and they see their role as studying the relationship between facts. It is assumed that facts can be translated into quantitative data (or variables) and measured objectively while the conclusion can be generalised (Anderson, 2004, p.13). As claimed by Bowling (2003), “positivism in social science assumes that human behaviour is, ultimately, a reaction to external stimuli and that positivists therefore regard meanings and interpretation as epiphenomenal and not the main focus of scientific examination” (p.126). It is assumed that the human action is like the world of nature as it is subject to laws of cause and effect and regularities that explain human behaviour (Keat & Urry, 1975). According to Goss (2004):

This is a view that has been criticised by researchers who argue that human behaviour involves a level of autonomous consciousness that invalidate purely external forms of causal analysis and, secondly, that the notions of ‘objectivity’ and ‘scientific neutrality’ ideas that have

Chapter Three: Methodology

developed only within specific contexts and cannot be shown to hold universal applicability. . . . notions such as ‘fact’ and ‘objectivity’ are as much values as other forms of language and meaning and need to be interpreted rather than to be merely accepted.

(Goss, 2004, no page number)

In contrast, ‘interpretivist’ researchers attempt to access and understand an individual’s perceptions of the world. They see all social phenomena (including ‘facts’) as a product of human interactions and an outcome of shared understandings and meanings. As interactions may not always be predictable or rational (Remenyi et al., 1998), it is not appropriate to think that human activity can be reduced to quantifiable regularities. It is considered more appropriate to seek to ‘interpret’ the meaning of the systems that people use in conducting their lives. The focus of interpretivist research is not on quantitative facts but on words, observations and meanings (Cresswell, 1994). It seeks to understand reality as a subjective construction that is meaningful for the research participants. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) claim that interpretivists should “argue for the uniqueness of human inquiry and question the simple naturalistic interpretation of the sciences in favour of the interpretation of meaning” (p.119). The main difference between the positivist and interpretivist approaches are shown in the Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Positivist and interpretivist principles

Positivist principles	Interpretivist principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Work from scientific principles ◆ Analyse phenomena in terms of variables ◆ Start with theory and test/refine theory with data ◆ Data should be collected by ‘dispassionate’ researchers ◆ A highly structured research process should be used ◆ Theories can be used to predict future relationships and behaviours ◆ Quantitative data is preferred ◆ The validity and reliability of data are more for formulating generalisable conclusions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Knowledge is constructed by human beings as they make sense of their environment ◆ Analyse phenomena in terms of issues ◆ Researchers cannot be wholly dispassionate—they are involved and will influence situation to various degree (often unintentionally) ◆ Flexibility may be required to allow the emphasis of the research to change as the process unfolds ◆ Qualitative data is preferred ◆ Generating ‘rich’ data is as important as (or more important than) the ability to generalise

Source: Anderson (2004)

The interpretivist approach has been criticised for placing too much importance on the construction of meaning and for ignoring the forces that influence individuals without interpretations (e.g., natural processes such as weather or biological processes such as illness). Recognising such factors is associated with an approaches referred to as ‘realism’ which considers things as being ‘socially defined’ rather than ‘socially constructed’:

Therefore interpretation is an important part of human action and is necessary to explain how individuals and groups make sense of their world and also explains why different groups can understand similar phenomena in different ways (relativism), but it also accepts that what is interpreted can exist independently of individual interpretation and can exercise a causal influence on them. For example, a cold virus will cause sneezing regardless of whether this is interpreted as a biological infection or the result of witchcraft, although how individuals subsequently react to such an infection will be shaped almost wholly

Chapter Three: Methodology

by their interpretation of what has happened to them.

(Goss, 2004, no page number)

Thus Saunders et al. (2003) argue that “Realism recognises the importance of understanding people’s socially constructed interpretation and meanings within the context of seeking to understand broader social forces, structures or processes that influence the nature of people’s views and behaviours” (Saunders et al., 2003, p.84). It can therefore be argued that a realist approach involves both measurement and interpretation and that these are inter-related processes rather than alternatives. Thus, to be able to explain the particular forms of human behaviour, it is necessary to objectively observe and accurately describe what is happening within a given social context. It is also important to take seriously how the individuals involved interpret what is happening to them and how they see it influencing their actions. Positivism would only be concerned with the former while interpretivism would only be concerned with the latter, but realism takes both aspects as necessary for an appropriate understanding of the human actions (Anderson, 2004).

Usually it is assumed that exploratory research involves an inductive approach to the generating of knowledge whereas explanatory research normally uses a deductive model. Various authors (Bryman, 2001; Creswell, 2003; May, 2001; Neuman, 2003) have argued that the inductive approach is a ‘theory-building’ process which starts with the observation of phenomena, the collection of data, the analysis and the development of theory. They also contended that the purpose of this approach is to obtain an understanding of the nature of the problem through the research context. In contrast, the deductive approach is a ‘theory-testing’ process. It begins with theory, next hypotheses are derived from the theory and these are tested via prediction and

Chapter Three: Methodology

observations. Hence, the logical ordering of induction is the reverse of deduction as it involves moving from the observation of the empirical world to the construction of explanations and theories about what has been observed (Gill & Johnson, 1997). According to Patton (2002) in the inductive approach, understanding the details and specifics of the data is required in order to discover patterns, themes and interrelationships. This is guided by analytical principles rather than rules and emphasises creativity oriented toward exploration and discovery. He argues that one of the strengths of the inductive approach is that it allows for a flexible methodology that accepts alternative explanations of what is going on. By contrast, a deductive research method entails the development of a conceptual and theoretical structure prior to wider testing usually through statistical inference (Gill & Johnson, 1997).

Table 3.3 shows a summary of the major differences between inductive and deductive approaches.

Table 3.3: Major difference between inductive and deductive approaches

Deductive emphasises	Inductive emphasises
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆Scientific principles◆Moving from theory to data◆The need to explain causal relationships between variables◆The collection of quantitative data◆The application of controls to ensure validity of data◆The operationalisation of concepts to ensure clarity of definition◆A highly structured approach◆Researcher independence of what is being researched◆The necessity to select samples of sufficient size in order to generalise conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆Gaining an understanding of the meanings humans attach to events◆A close understanding of the research context◆The collection of qualitative data◆A more flexible structure to permit changes of research emphasis as the research progresses◆A realisation that the researcher is part of the research process◆Less concern with the need to generalise

Source: Saunders et al. (2003)

Chapter Three: Methodology

Researchers have argued that induction and deduction are not mutually exclusive processes but are part of a research cycle. It is argued that most inductive research will be informed by prior theories and knowledge, even if this is not formally tested (as in the notion of ‘theoretical sensitivity’ in grounded theory; Glaser, 1992), and the results can inform the construction of theory-testing designs. Also deductive research often does not only test pre-given hypotheses but can also ‘build’ explanations from unforeseen patterns in the data. Therefore, both can be regarded as overlapping perspectives which can be used pragmatically in real-life research (Robson, 2002), particularly where there is no firm commitment either to theory-testing explanation or to pure interpretation, as is the case with most realist research types.

It can be suggested, given the nature of the research questions, that it is appropriate to adopt a realist style of methodology. On the one hand, the questions are concerned to capture the meanings of Chinese HR managers and to give them a voice to speak about their experiences and their interpretations of the world. On the other hand, it has been shown in the literature that the external context of the structure of Chinese society and economic systems seem to have an important effect on the nature of change. Therefore it will be necessary to assume that these structures have an external existence that does influence the ways in which individual managers think and behave and it will be necessary to document these structures and to relate them to the views of Chinese HR managers by examining how they interpret their effect on their roles and activities. These patterns will be related to existing theories to assess how well the theories explain the patterns and whether the patterns call for the theories to be questioned.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This approach draws inspiration from the idea of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss's *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (published in 1967) introduced an inductive approach to building theory (Creswell, 2007; Douglas, 2003; Locke, 2001). It was an alternative to the dominant deductive approach which emphasised testing hypothesis from existing theories. Since its introduction in 1967, grounded theory has been adopted by studies in a wide range of disciplines (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Cutcliffe, 2005; Douglas, 2004; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Locke, 2001) and has developed in a number of directions (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As there is no agreed orthodox approach to grounded theory, the current research draws broadly on this method in terms of the principle of trying to identify patterns and regularities in the data that can be used to build inductive relationships rather than following a specific 'recipe' (a number of scholars such as Bryant, 2003; Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; and Seale, 1999, contend that researchers can flexibly adopt grounded theory guidelines to conduct diverse studies). Regarding the use of theory, Gray (2004) takes the view that:

Unlike the deductive approach, grounded theory does not begin with prior assumptions about hypotheses, research questions or what literature should underpin the study. This is not to say that grounded theorists embark on a study with no theoretical position. They will have competent level of knowledge about the area.

(Gray, 2004, p.330)

In the present study, the literature was used to identify gaps in knowledge and to allow these to be the focus of the research. However, the emphasis was on using these insights to guide the questions asked rather than absolutely determining them, leaving scope for the respondents to highlight what was important to them, and using this as

Chapter Three: Methodology

the basis for the identification of relationships. This approach therefore is not a strict application of grounded theory (in the sense used by Strauss and Corbin (1990)) but is closer to Glaser's (1992) view that there should be a flexible approach to coding that does not restrict interpretation. According to Tansakun (2010), "Glaser's position allows greater flexibility in dealing with the analysis of the data, and this [is] a quality considered important when dealing with research data that would often be collected in a non-English language context and would need to be translated. This [is] considered to be an important consideration for exploratory research allowing the researcher maximum flexibility to cope with unexpected issues" (p.86).

The data gathered from the interviews was transferred to a matrix analysis sheet to identify themes and patterns that emerged. These themes and patterns were linked back to the theoretical debates in the literature in order to draw conclusions and make comparisons and assessments rather than to test these theories. Zhu et al. (2008) in their literature review of HRM research in China, state that qualitative analysis has been under-used by researchers:

Qualitative methodologies may be used to extend existing theory, to develop theory or to tease out variables for quantitative measurement. Grounded theory, ethnographic study and phenomenology are examples of methodologies that may be employed. We found no relevant studies that have applied a grounded theory approach. Given the lack of theory in Chinese HRM development, grounded theory could be a useful tool to develop theory.

(Zhu et al., 2008, p.149)

The broad approach adopted can therefore be referred to as a combination of

Chapter Three: Methodology

'comprehensive data treatment' or 'pattern matching' (Yin, 2003) and involved the careful examination of the interview transcripts to identify themes, patterns or deviations. Possible concepts and relationships were coded and shown on a matrix for each interview. These were carefully examined and compared against each of the interviews. For the initial stage of the analysis the data for each interview was coded to reflect issues that had been identified as possible of relevance from the literature (in line with the idea of theoretical sensitivity). This included statements that related to the HR role, the expression of emotions, and indicators of career anchors. Similar codes were used for each interview with new codes being added if a new dimension of the theme became apparent. The second stage of the analysis involved developing codes for themes that emerged from the data but had not been identified in the literature (such as different forms of buffering). The third stage of analysis involved the comparison of these different coded items across the interviews, focusing on one theme at a time. When these coded themes had been gathered together, they were examined against the background data of the respondents such as employing organization, age and gender, to identify any patterns. Following this the coded data was also examined to identify any patterns that were independent of the background factors. Once this was done, a decision was made as to which was the strongest pattern and the most important for analysis. This resulted in the refined categories explained later in this chapter. Thus, comparisons were made within and across original groups and possible new groupings and patterns were also identified. The interview transcripts were analysed manually by using search facilities of a word processor. Primarily, this is to highlight ideas and concepts and then group them together under a common heading for each of the multiple interviews. In this way the way in which single respondents outlined a key concept could be examined as could

Chapter Three: Methodology

the way in which that concepts was used by different respondents to allow differences and similarities to be identified. Key concepts were mapped onto large sheets of paper to allow experimenting with possible patterns and relationships to be undertaken. This comprehensive data treatment was intended to inductively reveal novel grounded concepts, but was also supplemented by 'pattern matching' in which ideas from the literature (e.g., emotional responses and career patterns) were defined and then matched against responses in the data.

The research design was based on a diverse sample of Chinese HR managers in order to capture variations in responses. As shown in the literature review there has been much debate about the operation of HRM practices and differences between the different economic sectors within the Chinese economy. This is most obvious between the former state-owned enterprises and the different levels of non-Chinese funding and ownership. The intention of this design was to maximise the chances in identifying differences between the different sectors but also to allow the researcher to identify similarities that might unexpectedly emerge from the results. Therefore, the sector categories were regarded only as an initial organising framework with the possibility that the more important relationships might emerge from the data that are more helpful in explaining the HR manager's experiences. In addition to a diverse sample, it was also decided to adopt a qualitative approach. Silverman (2005) argues that qualitative research is more suited to exploring the life history of people and their everyday behaviour as it can provide a better understanding and deeper meaning of a phenomenon. According to Mason (2002), the main strength of qualitative research is that it produces a general picture of how things work in a particular and complex context, and as a result, generates cross-contextual insights. Due to the complexity of

Chapter Three: Methodology

the Chinese business environment under the economic transition period, a qualitative research approach is appropriate to be used to disclose the deeper meaning embedded in everyday experience. It was decided that semi-structured interviews would be used to capture this meaning. Pre-established broad questions were developed from the main research questions and most were open-ended in order to allow the respondents to develop ideas that seemed important to them. Minimal guidance was given as to what would be an appropriate answer as the focus was to uncover the perceptions and understandings of the respondents themselves rather than primarily to test existing theories. Several researchers have highlighted the strong influence of Chinese culture on HRM practices (Chen & Wilson, 2003; Ding & Akhtar, 2001; Helburn & Shearer, 1984; Taylor, 2005; Warner, 1991; Zamet & Bovarnick, 1986). Such factors might include the influence of Communist ideology on economic and moral attitudes to business practices and the role of the Chinese business concept of *guanxi* (informal social networks that help shape business relationships). Semi-structured interviews were intended to allow these complex issues to be explored and gave a chance for the respondents to explain in detail how they experienced these notions and how they influenced their day-to-day lived activities. As the interviews were often quite lengthy and wide ranging, they gave opportunities for many issues to be explored and for any lack of clarity to be checked by the researcher during the interview. It will be seen in the following chapters that most respondents appeared to be frank and candid in their responses and were often critical to their organisations or policies in general, suggesting that they were not giving a 'socially acceptable' answer to the questions. It can never be determined if respondents are not being wholly truthful. However, the length of the interviews and the ability to cross-check their responses across a range of issues is likely to mean that a better assessment of their genuine views can be

Chapter Three: Methodology

gained from this method than from brief the structured responses to questionnaire items.

Research Instrument

The interview schedules were guided by a limited set of mostly open-ended questions related to the three main research questions and by a list of ‘prompt’ topics which were used by the interviewer to ensure all key issues were covered. The prompts were not used in a set order but were related to the ways in which the respondents gave their answers. If the respondent had fully covered the issue then the prompts were not used. The researcher also used expressions like, ‘Can you please tell me more about that?’, ‘Could you give me an example of what you mean?’ and ‘Is there anything else you think is relevant to this subject?’, in order to establish rapport with the respondents and to encourage the flow of the interview. The core structure of the interview schedule is shown below in relation to the research questions.

Research Question 1. How do Chinese HR managers understand their role in relation to their organisation and the wider changes in the Chinese economy?

Interview questions (for brevity and clarity the questions below have been stated in a more direct fashion than they were asked in the interviews :

How is the company owned and structured?

How has the company developed?

How do you understand the role of an HR manager?

What do you think are the three most important aspects of that role?

How does your role relate to other management functions in your company?

How has this role changed and how is it likely to change?

Prompt for:

Chapter Three: Methodology

Link between business and HR strategy

Strategic vs. operational focus

How managerial power is exercised

Influence of western HR theory and practice

Relationship with other managers

Nature of decision-making

Research Question 2. How do Chinese HR managers understand their individual career patterns and how do they see these developing?

Interview questions:

Age and gender

Educational background

Tell me a about yourself and the job that you do?

How did you come into this kind of job?

Tell me about your job tasks?

What attracted you to take the job?

Where do you see yourself in five years time?

Prompt for:

Choice of career vs. state assignment

Career blocks

Development of career

Commitment to HR vs. commitment to 'management'

Research Question 3. How do Chinese HR managers experience emotion in their HR activities and how is such emotion dealt with?

Interview questions:

What do you think makes a good HR manager?

How does this differ from other management roles?

What are the challenges faced in an HR work and how do these make you feel?

Is *guanxi* important in HR work?

Chapter Three: Methodology

Prompt for:

Emotional qualities needed to manage people

Control of emotions

Situations where emotions are strongest

How *guanxi* operates and why it is used

Feelings involved in *guanxi* relationships

The interviews were mostly carried out in a private area in the respondent's workplace with only the interviewer and the interviewee present. All interviews were recorded and were transcribed into Chinese and were later translated into English (see below). The normal length of each interview was around forty-five minutes to an hour. Before each of the interviews respondents were informed of the purpose of the interview and given an information sheet to keep which explained the process and how the data would be protected. This also gave contact details of the researchers so that she could be contacted if respondents had any concerns after the interview (see Appendix 1). Respondents were asked verbally if they understood what was involved and were asked if they wished to continue. Only if they gave a positive reply did the interview continue.

Sampling

There are two main categories of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. The results gained from the probability samples can be generalised to a known population while the results from the non-probability samples cannot be confidently statistically generalised to a wider population (this will be discussed below).

It has already been established that this research will adopt a largely exploratory

Chapter Three: Methodology

approach and that it is concerned with understanding meanings rather than with the measurement of variables. Therefore, in common with many forms of such studies, a non-probability form of sampling will be adopted. There are two common forms of such sampling: purposive and theoretical approaches. Theoretical sampling is often treated as synonymous with purposive sampling, but it is actually different as “the purpose behind purposive sampling is not theoretically defined” (Silverman, 2005, p.130). The nature of theoretical sampling is that the selection of research participants is determined by the research questions and the construction of the sample is meaningful theoretically (Mason, 1996, cited by Silverman, 2005). Theoretical sampling has three features: “choosing cases in terms of your theory, choosing deviant cases and changing the size of your sample during the research” (Silverman, 2005, p.131). Although this current study is largely inductive and not intended to test existing theory, it is intended to relate to the wider literature issues and is informed by questions inspired by gaps in the existing literature. As such, these issues provide the rationale for a ‘theoretical sample’ designed to allow these questions to be addressed.

Returning to the issue of generalisation, Mason (2002) argues that the qualitative research is “generalisable in some way”, because it “facilitates cross-contextual generalities” (Mason, 2002, p.8). Williams has also developed a sophisticated means of combating the problem of generalisations and qualitative research. He argues that:

generalisations are legitimate if they are treated and made explicitly as (what I term) moderatum generalisations, within the context of a pluralistic approach to research... an affirmation of the possibility of generalisation is an acknowledgement of the limits of interpretivism.

(Williams, 2002, p.125)

Chapter Three: Methodology

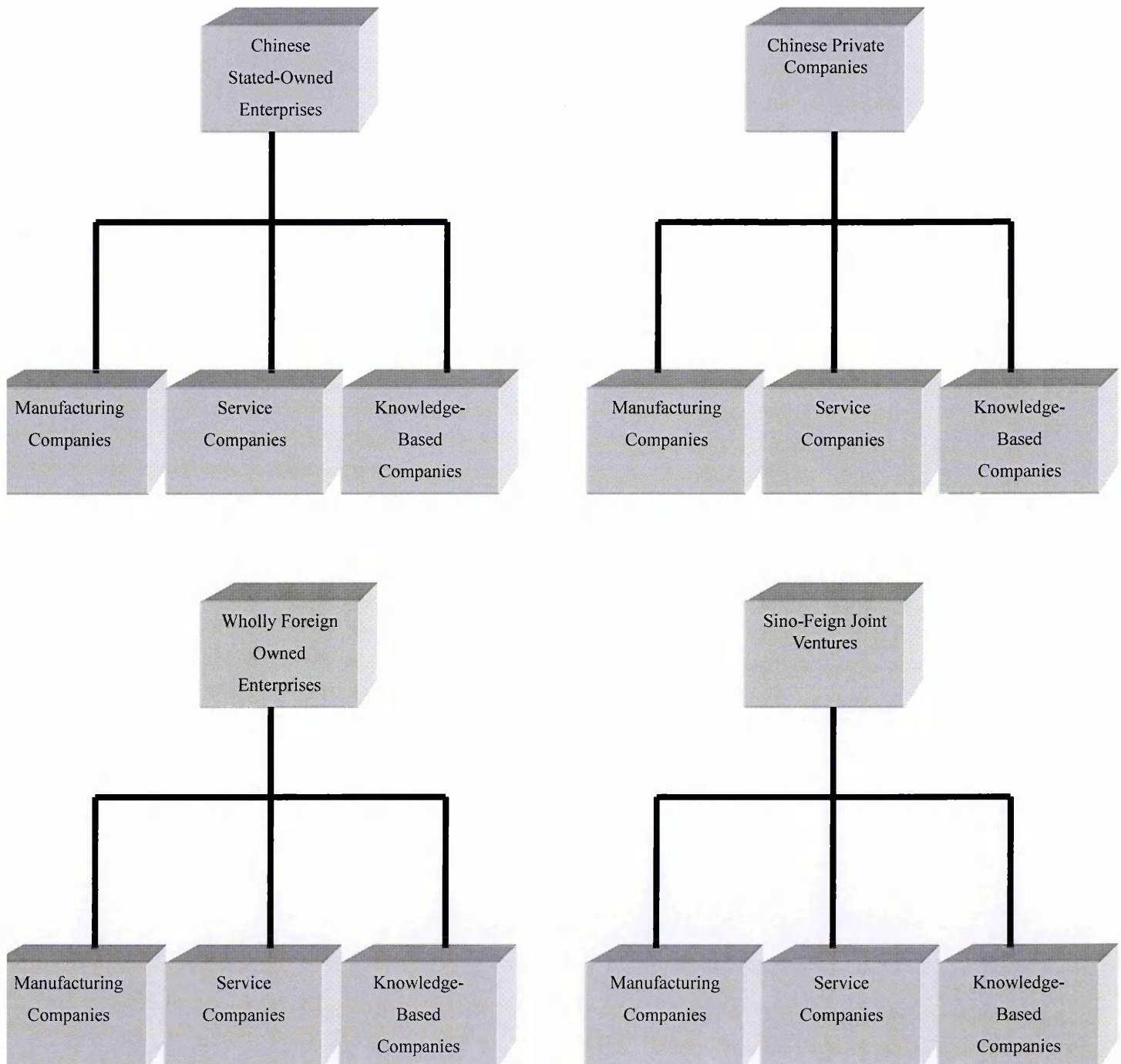
He explains that moderate generalisations can be made with regard to qualitative research which takes into account the nuances of different social and cultural contexts: to make no generalisations would relegate the research to the realm of art and would mean that it could have no means of changing real-world practices, yet to stick to quantitative survey methods which pay no attention to contextual and social factors, would be to try to generate a monolithic scientific truth which bears no relation to the working reality. This seems to mean that generalisations from qualitative data should be cautious and that the conditions involved should be clearly stated so that relevant comparisons can be found. As stated above it is not about statistical probability but about the identifying of principles and relationships that can ensure the contextual conditions are understood which allow comparisons to be meaningful. The key idea is that by understanding a situation in depth it can be compared with other situations and, depending on their similarities, the 'generality' of the key relationships can be asserted. This type of generality is about the matching of patterns such that it can be asserted that organisations under similar conditions are likely to show similar patterns. This cannot be known with statistical certainty but is more of a matter of informed judgement based on evidence.

For the present study, twenty-six companies were chosen from which to select the HR managers. They were chosen not because they were representatives of a larger statistical population but because they represented four different forms of ownership (identified as significant in the previous chapter) and were therefore theoretically relevant. The intention was to examine for patterns both within the different categories (do similar forms of ownership produce similar approaches to HRM?) and between the same categories (what are the similarities and differences). This was

Chapter Three: Methodology

planned to allow it to be decided whether the ownership is the principal factor influencing HR practices or whether other (as yet unidentified) factors are working. Different sectors are chosen within each ownership category to allow similarities and differences of HRM roles to be fully explored. Figure 3.1 below illustrates the structure of the research design.

Figure 3.1: Structure of the research design



Chapter Three: Methodology

Within each category the organisations were chosen from different sectors where this was possible. This was to allow for similarities and differences to be fully explored and to determine whether there was any underlying factor (such as e.g., Chinese values) that appeared to influence all forms of HR role. As statistical generalisation was not to be attempted, variation in the sample was seen to be a strength, as it would expose the variety of approaches existing in Chinese HR, rather than a weakness. Such differences, if found, could be explored subsequently using a larger statistically representative sample.

In each company, the manager responsible for HR was interviewed. The biographical details of these 38 managers are given in the Appendix 2.

The research was carried out in the coastal city of Dalian in Northeast China during January 2007 to May 2007. Dalian used to be one of the most important bases for large SOEs of heavy industry in China. The city is one of the fourteen 'open' cities to foreign investment. It is one of the most important ports in Northern China and now has a thriving sector of private business, former SOEs and joint ventures. As such, it is broadly typical of the developing areas of the mainland Chinese economy.

Validity, Reliability and Ethics

The ethical side of qualitative research methods and of the in-depth interview in particular, has been widely addressed in the social research literature. A key focus is on the balance of power between interviewer and interviewee. The accepted practice is that the interviewer must not try to dissimulate their purposes in any way, nor give the participants any false incentives in order to get them to participate in the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Secondly, the interviewer must make clear the confidentiality of the interview's contents, as otherwise this could significantly skew the interviewee's responses. It is considered good practice for oral and written consent to be obtained from the interviewee, showing that they are aware of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality issues, who they may contact with questions relating to the study, who will see the data gained, and in what manner the data will be used. It should also be made clear that they can withdraw from the study at any stage. This was done in the current study, both verbally when respondents were approached and then in writing following their provisional agreement to take part.

Validity and Reliability are basic criteria for research and are defined by Neuman (2003) as follows:

'validity' is a term meaning truth that can be applied to logical tightness of experimental design, the ability to generalize findings outside a study, the quality of measurement, and the proper use of procedures . . . 'Reliability' is the dependability or consistency of the measure of a variable.

(Neuman, 2003, p.543 & 547)

The validity of the interviews can be assessed both through the linking of questions/topics to issues identified in the research questions (complete with prompts) to ensure full and detailed coverage of each issue and the opportunity for respondents to express themselves fully (when examining the transcripts it became clear that respondents had not been inhibited in making critical comments or identifying weaknesses or problems). At the level of the analysis of the data, the coding of all the interviews and the matrix representation of these and the quotations used in the

Chapter Three: Methodology

analysis allowed for the distribution of patterns and quotations to be checked to ensure coverage and identify over- or under-representation. The inclusion of large sections of verbatim quotation allows the reader also to form their own judgement on the validity of the interpretation that is offered by the researcher.

A further issue to consider is the way in which translation issues were handled. The interviews almost all conducted in Chinese as few respondents were sufficiently fluent in English to fully express their real feelings and concerns in a second language. The tape recorded interviews were firstly transcribed in Chinese and then translated to English by the researcher (they were then back-translated and checked against the original to ensure that no serious errors had been made). The Chinese transcription was translated through 'literal translation' (rather than by the translator's summary and interpretation of what was said), which helps to capture the authenticity, dynamism and connotation of the interviewees. In this way, the English version of the transcripts retains the original expression and meaning of the interviewee, although this often means that the responses may seem rather 'awkward' and ungrammatical in relation to standard English. Where expressions that are unfamiliar in English were encountered and explanation of their English equivalent was provided as an addition comment rather than a replacement. It was considered that this approach allowed the translated transcripts to keep the sense and feeling of what people were saying, and that this was more important than rendering the quotations into artificially formal correct English. In order to capture the full meaning of the respondents most accurately, the initial analysis of the data was based on the Chinese version of the interview.

Chapter Three: Methodology

For reliability, the main insurance was the use of a standard range of open questions and prompts for all respondents. These could be repeated by subsequent researchers and results compared with those from the present study, although of course they would be related in content to context and would not be expected to be exactly similar in the detail of replies.

Preliminary Analysis of the Data and the Development of Working Categories for Further Analysis

It can be seen from the accounts of the above programme of interviews that this study produced a large amount of qualitative data relating to the views of Chinese HR managers talking about their understanding of their work and the role of HR within a range of Chinese organisations covering state-owned enterprises, joint ventures and foreign-owned companies. As stated above it was originally planned to examine the results according to the nature of the ownership of the company for which the HR manager was employed. It was assumed that the type of the company would reflect the approach adopted by the HR function. When the initial analysis was undertaken on this basis it was found that although there were differences between the different enterprise types, these did not appear as being wholly consistent and did not produce any consistent patterns.

This tentatively suggests that the accounts of HR managers' activities cannot be understood only in terms of structural differences, i.e. as determined by the ownership structure of the organisation. It was therefore decided as being necessary to explore for other patterns that might be present in the data. The most major difference to emerge that could be used to group the views expressed by the respondents was the

Chapter Three: Methodology

way in which they conceived of the nature of the HR activity they were involved in. On this basis, it was possible to divide the respondents into three broadly similar groups (that shared a main characteristic but with some small variations within each group) in terms of the level of active involvement that they associated with the practice of HRM. This can be argued to be a reasonably robust form of grouping as it was based on respondents descriptions of actual practices (which are considered to have an objective reality in line with the realist position), rather than their personal subjective opinions about a particular issue. In addition, in organizations where more than one respondent was interviewed, it was apparent that all gave responses that allocated them to the same group.

The first group identified on this basis reported that, for their organizations, HRM was a largely functional activity that was driven largely by the needs of senior (non-HR) managers and with little opportunity to do more than to service the needs of the existing organisation in a reactive way.

The second group identified from the data still reported a strongly functional approach to HRM but described this as a pro-active activity that was used to develop the organisation and to contribute to its effectiveness. This group gave more emphasis to the notion of professional identity and competence and focused on this as the main driver of their activity rather than only reacting to the demands of senior managers.

The third group reported using a more strategic approach to HRM and emphasised a close connection between HRM and business strategy. They reported being actively involved in business decisions and regarded HRM as not only a professional activity

but as a more general business activity.

It was significant that these differences, although not linked directly to the structural nature of ownership of the companies did not either seem to be linked only to individual factors. From the accounts of the respondents in each group it appeared that the way in which they described the activities they were involved did not completely correspond to their personal understanding of how HRM *could* be done under different conditions (this distinction between ‘possibilities’ and ‘practice’ also confirms that they were reporting real differences rather than mere opinions). This therefore suggests that there may be structural factors involved other than those of ownership. It did appear that the activities described by the different groups of respondents were related to the nature of their organisations and in particular, to the way in which the top managers exercised control. Although this was more consistent than the influence of ownership, it was still clear that responses were not wholly determined by this factor as there did appear to be instances where individual respondents reported taking the initiative and ‘making things happen’. This suggests that individual differences could have an effect but were not wholly dominant. It will later be suggested that there are opportunities for individuals with certain personal characteristics to influence the nature of their managerial approaches but these abilities have to be part of a process of negotiating and shaping rather than as an absolute cause of a particular approach to HRM.

In determining these three groups, the analysis focused on the ways in which the respondents described the HR activities in their organisations. The patterns identified were grounded in the accounts of the respondents and were grouped together in terms

Chapter Three: Methodology

of similarities in their descriptions (although it can be argued that these accounts do not necessarily reflect the reality of what actually did go on in these organisations rather than what was said to be going on, the interviews were in considerable depth and allowed these issues to be described in some detail and queried if necessary by the researcher, therefore reducing, but not eliminating the risk of serious misrepresentation).

The factors that emerged were those of '*autonomy*' (the extent to which the respondent claimed to have the freedom to initiate decisions and changes in HR activities); and '*HR positiveness*' (the extent to which respondents were enthusiastic about HR practices as a means of developing their organisation). It emerged that those who claimed to have the least autonomy in their decision-making also tended to be least positive about the practical positiveness of HRM (although they often tended to recognise its value in theory but did not see this as relevant to their situations). In contrast, those who claimed to have the greatest autonomy also tended to view HRM as a strategic tool they actively used to develop their organisations. In between these two positions were a group that was defined by a strong practical commitment to the positive contribution of HRM but saw this in terms of its operational rather than strategic contribution and who claimed to have considerable autonomy within the HR functional area but had more limited autonomy to operate at the level of business strategy.

As such, the three groups will be labelled as follows to reflect the main distinctions between them: a) Restricted Functional group; b) Professional Functional group; c) Strategic Partnership group.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The following chapters will be based on an examination of each group in turn to clarify the different ways in which HRM is understood by Chinese HR managers and to explore other issues related to the nature of HRM in a Chinese context that are identified in the data. A summary of the characteristics of the different groups is presented in Table 3.4 below to give the reader an understanding of the context for the following discussions.

Table 3.4: Characteristics of three different groups

RESTRICTED FUNCTIONAL GROUP

Name	Company	Comments
1. Mr. Zheng	A	Manufacturing SOE
2. Mr. Gao	B	Knowledge-based SOE
3. Mr. Wei 4. Mr. Lei	C	Private manufacturing company
5. Mrs. Zhan 6. Mrs. Shi	D	Private manufacturing company
7. Mr. Zhao	E	Private service company
8. Mr. Lang	F	Wholly foreign owned manufacturing company
9. Mr. Peng 10. Mrs. Yu	G	Wholly foreign owned manufacturing company
11. Mrs. Lian	H	Service JV

PROFESSIONAL FUNCTIONAL GROUP

Name	Company	Comments
12. Mr. Yuan 13. Mr. Hong 14. Mr. Long	I	Manufacturing SOE
15. Mr. Su 16. Mr. Lai 17. Mrs. Sheng	J	Service SOE
18. Mr. Zhong 19. Mr. Kang 20. Mr. Yan 21. Mrs. Xiao	K	Private service company
22. Mrs. Gu	L	Private service company
23. Mrs. Meng	M	Knowledge-based private company
24. Mrs. Yun 25. Mr. Shen	N	Wholly foreign owned manufacturing company
26. Mrs. Tang	O	Wholly foreign owned manufacturing company
27. Mrs. Deng	P	Manufacturing JV
28. Mrs. Mu	Q	Service JV
29. Mr. Yue	R	Service JV
30. Miss Zhu	S	Service JV

Chapter Three: Methodology

Name	Company	Comments
31. Mr. Ma 32. Mr. Fei 33. Mrs. Tian	T	Knowledge-based JV

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP GROUP

Name	Company	Comments
34. Mr. Wan	U	Wholly foreign owned manufacturing company
35. Mrs. Feng	V	Wholly foreign owned service company
36. Mrs. Ning	W	Wholly foreign owned knowledge-based company
37. Mrs. Qian	X	Wholly foreign owned knowledge-based company
38. Mr. Cheng	Y	Manufacturing JV

Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the methodological underpinning of the research design. The exploratory approach was selected to explore the nature and meaning of HRM roles within the complex Chinese business environment. The design also allowed for some elements of explanation, although not in terms of measuring causal relationships between variables. Rather the explanation will take the form of providing patterns identified from the data to suggest tentative causal links. A realist approach was

Chapter Three: Methodology

adopted as the broad epistemology, taking the view that there were likely to be material and structural processes that had an objective existence but that would be subject to somewhat different interpretations by social actors depending on their situation. This therefore involved both description and interpretation as inter-related processes. The realist approach was seen to avoid the disadvantages of strong forms of positivism and interpretivism for understanding human actions. It was also decided to use a combination of both inductive and deductive approaches by viewing these as a research cycle in which the inductive approach could provide patterns of meanings generated from the data that could either be identified as novel contributions or assessed in relation to existing theories and concepts. The research applied a broad form of analysis influenced by grounded theory in terms of detailed coding of the data and the matching of patterns within the data-set and with ideas in the literature.

A theoretical sample of 26 diverse companies was selected and at least one HR manager interviewed from each enterprise. Interviews were mostly conducted in Chinese, transcribed and then translated and back-translated. Analysis was initially undertaken using the Chinese transcripts to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Although the sample was initially structured to ensure a range of different types of ownership (this having been identified as a potentially influential factor in previous studies, it was found after the initial analysis, that this did not produce any consistently clear patterns. However, careful examination of the data did reveal consistent sets of accounts in terms of the role that respondents described their HR functions as playing. As this produced a clearer and more distinct pattern than the fact of ownership of the enterprise, it was decided that this would form the major analytical categories within which to explore the nature of HR roles. Thus it was

Chapter Three: Methodology

decided to use three main groups as the basis for detailed analysis: Restricted Functional; Professional Functional; and Strategic Partnership. These groups are used as the basis for the following chapters dealing with the detailed data analysis.

Chapter Four:
Restricted Functional Group

Chapter Four

Restricted Functional Group

Restricted Functional Group

An account has already been given of the basis for including respondents in this group. It will be recalled that they were identified in terms of their descriptions of a lack of autonomy in terms of decision-making towards HR policies and practices and the very limited role that HR issues played in their organisations. In general by this they meant that HR fulfilled a largely administrative role and was concerned primarily with operational issues (payment, training, absence monitoring, etc.) which tended not to change significantly over time and were not considered part of organizational strategy. This chapter will outline the nature of the HR role that these managers adopted and how this can be compared to established accounts of HR roles, the way in which this influenced their emotional responses to HR work, and the way in which their position was influenced by their career patterns. Because the analysis is largely exploratory and inductive, it will attempt to identify grounded notions from the data but also will attempt to match these emerging patterns with approaches and ideas from the literature covered in Chapter Two or with theories and frameworks that emerge as being relevant to the data itself.

It is appropriate to begin by illustrating the ways in which these HR managers considered the nature of their activity. In these first accounts it can be noted how there is an emphasis on an 'order-taking' approach (Collins, 2004) in which they present themselves as relatively powerless compared to other managers and, in particular, the General Manager (GM). For example:

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

My understanding is that HR has to follow the GM's intention first, other top leaders' intentions second and then the personnel policy and principles in China currently. (Mr. Zheng)

In the middle of the top and the bottom, one cannot display too much innovative leadership, to do what is ordered by the top leaders and secure the work force stability are major tasks that HR takes. (Mr. Gao)

I just stick to what is required by the GM. My job is mainly about taking orders from the GM to prepare employees ready for production and rewarding them with reasonable pay. (Mrs. Zhan)

HR is purely a service department. HR could not enter the GM's decision-making currently. Many HR proposals could easily be denied and even I could not insist. I am always at the position of order-taking and implementing. To be frank, as a middle HR manager, I do not normally provide any suggestions to the GM. He is the boss and the owner. I am not one of the directors. I think it is hard for me to make a voice under a private company environment. I do not want to make any troubles for myself. I think what I need to do is work around the GM's orders and make sure the fulfilment of his demands. Of course I can think about finding a better way of implementing the GM's orders and applying my past experiences to help to implement the GM's orders. I never pose my ideas after the GM makes the final decision, which is a big taboo. (Mr. Lei)

These quotations show the HR managers perceived their role as 'order-takers' as reflected in the level of autonomy they thought they were allowed in developing HR activities. They saw their activities as limited to operational functions associated with managing established formalities (such as organising simple training, monitoring payroll, and employee deployment for routine positions within the company). As

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

such, they seemed to define their roles in conventional functional terms and acted as ‘order-maintainers’ and ‘rule clarifiers’ rather than as independent decision-makers or the initiators of innovations. For example:

HR is about taking charge of daily maintenance management, such as handling personnel formalities, helping employees to go through procedures, and recording personnel credentials. I play the role of suggesting a right person for a right position. (Mr. Zheng)

HR manager should organize staffs to do deployment according to production needs and carry out correspondingly employee motivation and evaluation. There is a system determined by top authority in guiding HRM in aspects of HR planning and employee motivation. (Mr. Gao)

However, it was significant that despite these descriptions of a narrow functional role that was firmly controlled by the senior management, nearly all of these order-taking HR managers were aware of the tension that seemed to exist between what they were required to do and what could be done by an HR manager with greater influence. They seemed to have a reasonably sophisticated understanding of the strategic potential of HRM and its relevance to ‘modern’ issues such as talent management, human capital development, employee motivation, and organisational culture. For example:

I think the current HR function should be more scientific. We should not only do simple recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal and reward. I used to have an idea of setting up a talent reservation bank for preparing talents for company development. Due to many reasons, I could not practice the idea. Besides, I also think that

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

we need to have scientific performance measurements for every position in order to link everyone's performance with his/her pay. (Mr. Zheng)

I think HR should be responsible for talent absorption and utilization. Besides, HR should pay attention to human capital management. The HR manager should know how to operate human resource as a kind of asset. Also, I believe strategic HR plans are quite important. (Mrs. Shi)

I prefer employees having innovation at work. I want them to do their works with innovation instead of repetition. I think HR should not remain at recruiting employees, signing contracts with them and distributing wage. HR should research how to connect the benefits of the employee and the company together. HR should play the role of mobilizing employees' motivation. In one sentence, HR should help to distil the corporate culture. (Mr. Wei)

However, although they appeared to understand the potential of HRM (as seen by contemporary western theories), only a few felt that this was a realistic possibility under their current conditions. As one respondent explained, this was an issue that was of interest to 'people in universities' – not in the real world. The following are typical examples of how the respondents explained the tensions:

The HR department provides some evaluation suggestions to the GM over some personnel deployment matters. At most times, the final decision is made according to the GM's opinion. Therefore I say I have high enthusiasm at the very beginning of taking this job, but the real situation is rather cruel that I could only do what is prescribed by the GM. For example, the GM would consult me whether someone is suitable for doing a certain kind of job, then what I need to do is to provide the relevant information for the GM's reference. Being in this

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

position, I can do only a little work. So I feel that what I can do now is to finish the tasks allocated by the GM and make him happy, that's all. (Mr. Zheng)

It is my working responsibility of knowing other department's demands to HR department. I have to coordinate with other departments to fulfil their requirements. (Mr. Gao)

HR should then take good responsibility of cooperating with other department's work. I educate every staff in my department to cultivate the service awareness. I educate them in morning and evening meetings to pay attention to communication skills and personal quality improvement for better meeting other departments' requirements. (Mr. Lang)

Thus, when they talked about practice, these HR managers' views presented HR as mainly a functional 'service' department that fits to the production needs in which the aspirations for a more strategic approach were impractical:

The HR department was once called Labour and Wage Section. The name of HR is learned from international JVs in China. However, I think most companies just changed the name of the department. HR department still carries out most functions such as wage distribution and personnel recruitment and selection in the old way. I think a HR department needs us to think more about integrating human resources with other resources to generate capital for the company. (Mr. Wei)

HR functions carried out in practices were mainly about 'labour and wage management' in a service position for other departments:

HR provides service for production which is one of the major

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

departments in a manufacturing company like ours. I feel at the moment HR is still a functional department taking charge of employee deployment, wage management, labour insurance, labour statistics, documents management, etc. I do not attend much strategic decision-making. The job I am doing now is normal management but not HRM. In terms of HRM, I can not say my current management job is in real meaning of HRM. (Mrs. Zhan)

HR has not been a strategic department yet. It still places at the grass-roots. You learn and argue the strategic HRM in the university. However, it is another case in the company. You see the sign out of this office saying 'HR department'. It actually takes charge of 'labour and wage' issues. We cannot fight for a higher position. What we need to do at the moment is to think more about the practical instead of the strategic thing, such as how to fit to the requirement of employing workers to guarantee normal production. (Mrs. Lian)

It is important to note in these quotations that, as stated above, these HR managers were well aware of the theoretical idea of the strategic importance of HR but that they regarded the current situation as only able to allow them to undertake simple support functions. This was further elaborated upon by the other respondents:

HRM in the company is caught in the middle. I mean the GM influences HR decisions to a large extent and most of HR manager's time is spent on dealing with employees' grievances. (Mr. Zhao)

HR effectiveness is reflected in providing services for other departments. What HR is doing now is routine and trivial work. I have been trying to create new ways of managing HR by combing advanced theories, national personnel policies and current company situation. But these attempts are always ended in proposals instead of practices. The proposals could be denied easily by the GM and I am unable to

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

insist. (Mr. Lang)

HR is only a supportive department for production. I take charge of basic HR functions such as recruitment and selection, interviews, examinations, training, performance appraisal, labour insurance, rewarding and complaint solving. I shall say it is important for HR to attend strategic decision-making and HR should share more strategic decision-making power with top managers. But I have few chances to attend strategic decision-making. (Mrs. Yu)

From the discourse above, HR seems generally to have been regarded as a service department. HR managers were aware of the importance of strategic HRM and even raised proposals but were resigned to the likelihood that their opportunities to realise that these were limited. In this respect there was a very strong pragmatism in the way HR was understood by these managers. This is well captured by Mrs. Shi whose account focuses on dealing with the current situation and the limitations this imposes:

HRM is described as complex in theory but it is quite simple in practice. The recruitment is simple. For this low profit farm chemical manufacturing company, we could not employ proficient employees and university graduates because of high labour cost. Most employees are migrant farmers who are hard to retain and motivate due to their high rate of mobility and low personal competence. There is no systematic training. The performance appraisal is simple. To be frank, we normally do not eliminate employees carelessly by putting them at the fail level. We have to consider the general employment situation. So if they are up to the lowest standard, we normally keep them on the job by putting them at the pass level. (Mrs. Shi)

Mr. Lei's comments are of interest because they illustrate the lasting legacy of the

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

state regulated employment policy and, in contrast to much of the debate about HRM in the USA and UK, the way in which issues of 'performance' are regarded as ultimately secondary to issues of social welfare or 'humanized management'. There is a possibly an interesting parallel to be made here with Gouldner's (1954) classic study of bureaucracy in the USA of the 1950s and his identification of the so-called 'indulgency pattern' of management, as will be shown below.

However it is first necessary to consider the roles outlined above in more detail because as the respondents talked about their position as 'order-taker' in their organizations, it became clear that this was potentially a more complex processes than merely following commands. This has been given the grounded label of 'buffering' as this describes what was actually undertaken in the process of maintaining the chain of command. The 'buffer' can be understood as a dual communication process between the HR manager and the top leader and between the HR manager and employees. HR managers 'buffer' by not only passing down orders from the top to the bottom but also reflecting concerns from the bottom to the top as one respondent introduced below:

I believe HR plays the role of connecting the top and the bottom. I have to help to pass down the GM's decisions to employees and reflect employees' feedback to the GM. (Mrs. Zhan)

However, although it might appear that 'buffering' is no more than acting as a conduit for information flowing up and down the organisation (in the classic bureaucratic form), it became clear that it was, in practice, a sophisticated social process involving subtle judgement on the part of the HR manager. Forms of buffering have been often described in relation to the HR role (sometimes referred to as being the 'person in the

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

middle'; Torres & Delmar, 2006; McConville & Holden, 1999; Hiillos, 2007), but as it was discussed by the HR managers in this study it emerged as being a more complex notion than simply acting as a 'go between'. To understand what the buffering role adequately involves it is necessary to consider the so-called "negotiated order" approach to employment relationships. This was outlined by Strauss (1978) who claimed that social order is the result of dynamic interactions or "negotiations" between actors (Hallett & Ventresca, 2004). According to Fine (1984):

'In observing organisations from a distance, we may believe we see a stable, unchanging system of relationships. Yet, the negotiated order approach has sensitized researchers to the fact that these relations are ultimately dependent upon the agreement of their parties and that they are constructed through a social, rather than entirely policy driven, process.'

(Fine, 1984, p.243)

However according to Hallett and Ventresca (2004) it must be remembered that this does not mean that such sorts of social interactions are voluntary: 'Though interactions create (and recreate) social order, these interactions take place in contexts that enable, constrain, and shape them'. In their study Hallett and Ventresca (2004) study Gouldner's (1954) account of employment relationships in a US gypsum mine and his model of an 'indulgency pattern' of management. They cite how Gouldner (1954) states that the mine was "enmeshed in a network of kinship relations":

The workers themselves describe how "the supervisors here have known each other for a long time. They grew up together. The same with a lot of the men. You walk around sometimes and talk over old times" (1954: 39). Because so many of the workers were related and/or

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

grew up together, interactions were personalized and informal. As a result, “everybody’s sociable” and Gouldner describes “friendly and highly egalitarian relationships between supervisors and workers. ‘You see,’ explains a mechanic, ‘the bosses associate with the men’ ” (1954: 39).

(Hallett & Ventresca, 2004, p.15)

They present how Gouldner shows how these long standing relationships lead to a negotiated order that he terms the ‘indulgency pattern’ in which “routinised interactions involved responsiveness by the management towards the workers, leniency and the flexible application of rules, second chances, and a blind eye towards pilfering” (Hallett & Ventresca, 2004, p.16). As will be discussed below, the situation for Chinese HR managers was not the same as that described by Gouldner in the US mine, but there were similarities. In particular, these similarities seemed to be associated with the residue effect of state-regulation prior to the market reforms and the fact that in most of these organisations the reforms were not well developed. This meant that there were still strong cultural expectations from workers and many managers that organisations were underpinned by egalitarian principles rather than by simply the search for profits. This seemed similar to the situation described by Gouldner where workers and managers had gone through similar experiences which made them feel close to one another and created a sense that there had to be strong mutual consideration not to undermine the principle of unstated egalitarianism that was associated with stability. However, for the Chinese HR managers this seemed to be more of a tension than for the original managers of the gypsum mine (prior to the appointment of the ‘new’ manager who attempted to remove the indulgency pattern) who appeared to endorse this form of negotiated order in a passive manner. In the present case, the Chinese HR managers appeared to take a more active role in the

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

negotiating process as they had to 'translate' the policies of senior managers and the external State into a form that would maintain the order of the organisation. It seemed that the senior managers would implicitly allow this translation process to take place but they did not always seem to endorse or support it explicitly (maintaining what seemed as a more conventional 'managerialist' position) which placed the HR managers in the possibly difficult position of 'buffering' the demands for managerial control from above with the implicit expectation that these would be implemented in a way that did not create industrial problems:

Workers used to be masters of factories under planned economy. We shared great freedom to pose our proposals for the factory director. The factory director encouraged us to propose opinions to improve factory development. Now we are not masters anymore. We are working here for the private boss. We can not make a voice under this situation. The GM makes decisions not us. If he has some problems, he might come to me and ask my opinion. At most times, when everything goes on quite well, he does not need to consult my opinion. We worry about offending the GM. I think it is difficult to make suggestions under private company environment. (Mr. Lei)

The economic reform to free the SOE from 'three irons' [iron rice bowl (lifelong employment), iron wage (egalitarian pay) and iron chain (central labour allocation)] and the interference of Party leaders on company level decision-making, to give more freedom to the company itself to response to the market demands and to set up the market economy has been implemented so many years in China, however, the result is that the HRM issue is not managed well by the company itself. The GM does not pay attention to HR. How should I talk about HRM? When you ask me, I feel so sad to see the miserable condition of HR under some privatized SOEs. We HR people have been working hard for our whole life under SOE environment in the

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

past but now I have nothing to say. I don't know how to say. (Mr. Lang)

To understand this tension for HR managers it is necessary to examine the process of buffering in more detail. The first assumption of 'buffering' appeared to be that the company comes first and HR managers should always support the top and make sure the smooth 'interpretation and implementation' of top leaders' decisions:

My working style could be summarized as interpretation and implementation. Due to different standpoints, as a HR manager, I have to stand by the side of the company at most times. If conflicts are essential, I could only stand by the side of the company. (Mrs. Lian)

It seemed that challenge to the top leader was not part of this process, a standard practice in hierarchical structures, but there was also a second dimension that involved trying to minimise conflict from below by 'tactful transmission' (a notion grounded in a comment made by Mr. Lang below). HR managers saw the accomplishment of this as an extremely skilful process requiring careful management and judgement. They would bridge the top and the bottom not by simply issuing orders but by carefully translating and rewording national personnel policy or GM's instructions into a form that was likely to be acceptable to the employees and sufficiently flexible to allow the meeting of objectives and, hence, avoiding the need to send 'difficult' feedback back up the hierarchy. Mr. Lang illustrated the importance of 'careful wording' within 'tactful transmission' as follows:

I have to make sure of authenticity of the information as well as being tactful. If employees do not agree with the GM, I shall report at least

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

the general meaning of the disagreement to the GM. But I shall report in a tactful way. I could not report what employees say to me directly to the GM, which may irritate the GM sometimes. This tactful transmission is applicable to the other way round. If I need to ask employees to follow the GM's intention, I shall also do it in a tactful way instead of ordering them rudely. (Mr. Lang)

Careful wording was only one part of the meaning of 'tactful transmission'. The second dimension was explained by Mr. Wei as the careful and flexible application of national personnel policy. As such, this seemed to be more than simply standing in the middle, but rather a 'balanced' position had to be deliberately constructed. This could not be found by strictly abiding by national personnel policies or by just trying to be impartial between the top and the bottom. It needed to be constructed through the HR manager's judgement and experience about how flexibly a policy could be interpreted and applied in practice without breaking the basic principles prescribed by the formal policy:

Besides, I feel really hard to set up a fixed standard for all situations. It is also hard for me to stand purely in the middle. So I always try to seek a point by which the GM and employees could understand each other better. I say the effort of seeking such a point is a great art for HR manager. (Mrs. Shi)

We need to adopt a flexible manner in HRM. If we always follow the national personnel principles, it is too difficult for us to do HRM. We can choose to think about applying certain principles flexibly. However, before we carry out the principles flexibly in practice, we need to report it to the GM or the Deputy GM (HR), get their instructions or grant. (Mr. Lei)

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

This need for 'tactful transmission' also applied to horizontal communication and the ability to serve demands coming from other departments:

First of all, a HR manager should have wonderful communication competence, because he has to select right employees for all departments within the company. Thus he has to know every department of the enterprise. In some way, HR provides service for other departments. The HR manager should do timely coordination in accordance with company needs, for example, during the time that the company needs technician, or it needs employee redundancy. (Mr. Wei)

The HR department has the most frequent communication with the finance department. The communication with finance department is mainly for wage issues. HR department is in a disadvantageous position in the communication with finance department, because some proposed wage policies could be constrained by the tax and financial regulations. As a result, I often need to communicate with the finance department, to consider more of the tax regulations when make some wage policies, and to make the wage items easy for finance department to process. I normally do a lot of preparations before I pass the wage issue to the finance department. In this way, I keep good communication with the finance manager. (Mr. Zhao)

This would again challenge the notion that the apparently passive and reactive role in communication with other departments involves no more than mechanistically following hierarchical orders. Considerable communication ability seemed to be needed to secure an appropriate labour supply and to overcome barriers towards crucial HR policies:

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

Each person has its own thinking mode, which leads to different ways of recognizing the world. So as a HR leader, in order to do motivation or persuasion work with the bottom or to do reporting work to the top, one does not need to have deep understanding of certain knowledge but need to have comprehensive knowledge in all aspects. (Mrs. Zhan)

It is very useful to know some basics in other management areas, such as finance, marketing and operation management to enhance recognition and coordination. In an engineering company like ours, I also need to know some engineering knowledge; otherwise I cannot deploy employees well according to different work requirements, for example, the work requirement for office staff managing engineering project and the work requirement for engineering workers are different. (Mr. Wei)

In fact, when the issue of communication was explored further, it became clear that these HR managers shared a view that when dealing with employees it was important to convey a sense of 'sympathetic caring'. Again, this can be seen as a dimension of 'tactful transmission' and as a continuing part of the legacy from the system of state control and the ethos of paternalism. The conveying of sympathetic caring seemed to involve a mixture of persuading, sympathizing and comforting in the way ideas were communicated:

In order to care for employees and try to solve their problems, a HR manager needs to show sympathy to employees and also needs to have good communication skills. (Mr. Wei)

I am quite patient, careful and considerate. I am good at explaining company decisions to employees and I could always understand their difficulties and could try to help them to finish tasks allocated to them. I always try my best to understand and sympathise employees.

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

Although communication is very important for a HR leader, I think I am still not very good at it. I need to improve the communication skills. (Mrs. Yu)

Mrs. Yu's [another HR manager] doing is in everyone's eyes; she is older than other employees and seems more like their sisters or aunts at home. She always thinks of employees' benefits when she communicates with them; she does very well on employee caring. (Mr. Peng)

The last two quotations are particularly interesting. That of Mrs. Yu gave a clear indication of how important she considered this aspect of 'tactful transmission' and regarded it as one of the key aspects of HR leadership. This confirms the view of the importance of the buffering role within this group and gives a sense that this remains a likely key area for the future rather than the more 'strategic' business partner concerns that, whilst understood (see above), remain more of a 'theoretical' notion rather than a practice directly applicable within these types of environment. The comments of Mr. Peng (talking about Mrs Yu) also reflected the importance of the paternalistic tradition within many areas of Chinese industry. In fact, his comments suggested the persistence of long-standing traditional values, such as the wisdom of age, that predate the Communist period and appear still to carry considerable weight in securing the compliance of employees, particularly when this appears to be coupled to the principle that the State should be seen as protecting the interests of employees and not exploiting them. As has been stated previously, it suggests parallels with the role of the 'indulgency pattern' described by Gouldner in traditional sectors in the USA in the 1950s and with views of the personnel manager associated with the early days of the profession in the UK, i.e. that of the guardian of employee interests (Torrington et al., 2008).

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

However, this account of the buffering role does not fit entirely neatly with existing typologies of HR roles. For example, Storey's (1992) four HR roles (tactical/strategic and interventionary/non-interventionary) can be recalled from Chapter Two-Table 4.1:

Table 4.1: Typology of HRM function

	<i>Tactical</i>	<i>Strategic</i>
<i>Interventionary</i>	REGULATORS	CHANGEMAKERS
<i>Non-Interventionary</i>	HANDMAIDENS	ADVISORS

Source: Storey (1992)

It would seem that these Chinese HR managers would be expected to be closest to the 'handmaiden' type, as they have already been identified as having little autonomy to make strategic decisions and do not regard HR policies as strong tools for intervening in the organisation to improve performance. In fact, if their initial accounts of their lack of power had been taken as the whole of their activities then this would have seemed to have been an accurate representation. However, as it has been shown, there is more to what is involved in simply 'taking orders' from senior and other managers and it would be inaccurate to think of these HR managers as being completely non-interventionary as their interventions take the more tacit or partially hidden form of careful translations of orders and regulations into a form that will maintain order. Although this is not 'intervention' in the form of adopting new or innovatory HR policies, it can be seen as a form of active participation that involves more than merely serving the interests of management in the way that the handmaiden role suggests. Also, they do not fit neatly into the other tactical role of the Regulator, although this is possibly closer to their activity than that of Handmaidens. The Regulator role is defined by Storey (1992) as being "managers of discontent",

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

seeking order through temporary, tactical truces with organised labour” (p.169). Although this can be seen as part of the role of these Chinese HR managers, it also seems to imply that they are working in a simple instrumentalist way to impose order on behalf of the management. As has already been suggested, and will be explored further below, the forms of intervention adopted by the HR managers were not only guided by instrumentalist concerns but also seemed to reflect a deeper concern and understanding for the position of employees, similar, as was stated above, to Gouldner’s indulgency pattern which was formed out of shared experiences (in the Chinese case of the experience of the ideology of socialist egalitarianism). Whereas the Storey type of Regulator appears to have an unambiguous understanding of how conflicts should be managed, this was more complex and subtle for the Chinese HR managers.

A similar argument can be made in relation to Ulrich’s (1997) later typology (Table 4.2) which also distinguishes four roles in terms of strategic/operational focus and process/people emphasis:

Table 4.2: Ulrich’s typology of HR Roles

	<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Operational</i>
<i>People</i>	Change Agent	Employee Champion
<i>Process</i>	Strategic Partner	Administrative Expert

Source: Ulrich (1997)

Like the Storey typology this seems to cover some aspects of what was involved in the Chinese HR managers’ roles but also tends to treat it in a form that is too simplified to fully understand the real complexity of their activities. The managers in

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

this study appear to be closest to the Employee Champion type but this implies that their role is one of “maximizing competence and commitment” (Ulrich, 1997, p.124). As has been seen this does not emphasise the genuine tension that has been identified as being at the heart of ‘buffering’. It assumes a unitarist conception of management-employee relationships involving only representing the interests of employers (which are assumed to be the same as those of employees). Whilst it could be suggested that Chinese organisations of the types discussed here would be expected to have unitarist assumptions, originating in the philosophy of state socialism, it can be argued that this is increasingly coming under strain as market reforms spread (even if not completely) into most sectors of the economy. This can be seen as one of the main factors that has made the buffering process more complex and needing approaches that involve the active negotiation of order. Also these HR managers do not seem to fit the Administrative Expert role which “constantly improves organisational efficiency by reengineering the HR function and other work processes” (Caldwell, 2003, p.987). These HR managers did not see themselves as actively using HR policies to develop performance as they were more absorbed in the negotiation of order associated with buffering.

To sum up, the initial view of these respondents’ HR roles as simple ‘order-taking’ from above has been shown to conceal a number of complexities. Thus, although HR managers do not seem to have great freedom in independent decision-making, they do have the power to ‘buffer’ potential conflicts and tensions between the top and the bottom. This, in turn, was seen to involve careful and flexible application of national personnel policies alongside the wishes of the GM in order to achieve a balance between the top and the bottom (involving processes of monitoring, asking for

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

information, and constructing this into a form that could be ‘tactfully transmitted’). As such, when this role was undertaken successfully, it could appear to an observer, and to other managers, that it was little more than a simple and trivial activity – only when it fails is the real complexity of the role likely to be revealed. This therefore creates something of a paradox for HR managers in this position – being effective means that they are actually perceived as not undertaking a very sophisticated or important role.

What has been shown here most clearly is that this does appear as a process of active negotiated order rather than simply a reflection of structural factors, although these, and their historical background, provide the context for the negotiations. However, one part of this process of the active negotiation of order that has often been overlooked is that of the significance of HR managers’ emotions. It was suggested above that some of the tensions involved in the process of buffering were associated with the identification between managers and employees resulting from previously strong traditions of State control and egalitarianism that were increasingly under tension from the emergence of the market reforms that challenged these established practices. It is not surprising that under such conditions these activities seemed to involve a possibly strong emotional effect associated with the consequences of change (Doorewaard & Benschop, 2003).

In one of the few studies of the role of emotions in HRM, Hiillos (2007) claims to have found two main forms of emotion handling from her study of Finnish HR managers: “mothering” and “guide-following” (p.110). It will be recalled from Chapter Two that Mothering ‘is a concept that lies close to caring and nurturing’ and Hiillos claims that in her study this approach was strongly gendered: “Women are

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

often expected to act as organisational mothers. The role of the mother is often depicted as an emotional specialist . . . the mothering activities that I first detected in the data were enacted by female HR managers” (p.114). She states that “Typical of mothering is a deep concern for the coping and well-being of the employees” (p.116). In contrast to this she found that none of her male HR managers in the study used this method for handling emotions but tended instead to use the Guide-Following approach. Here HR managers were likely “to look for rules or guidelines on which to base their emotion-handling activities . . . the guide-follower is asking for instructions and guidance from an authority” (p.117).

In relation to both approaches, Hiillos (2007) claimed to have found five patterns through which each was made up: Empathy at a distance (ED: empathising by treating the employee as a whole person but ‘keeping their own integrity’; this was enacted only by women in Hiillos’s study); Mediator/guardian (MG: acting as the ‘man in the middle’ between managers and employees and attempting to be just to both; enacted by men and women); Lelia’s couch (LC: giving a ‘shoulder to lean on’ to senior managers; only women); Outsourcing (OS: the use of outside experts such as psychologists to deal with crisis emotional issues; male and female); Withdrawal (WD: not confronting emotions but regarding them as ‘deviations’ that would ‘cool down’ if left alone, something to be controlled rather than expressed, particularly in a workplace; male). She shows from her data that Mothering tended more to involve ED, MG, LC and OS and that Guide-following involved only MG, OS and WD.

However when the responses from the respondents of this study were examined to identify any evidence of how they handled their own emotions as well as that of other

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

workers, it became apparent that there were no clear patterns of the sort shown by Hiillos in terms of clear differences between men and women. However, although the patterns were not as distinctive (in Hiillos's study the groups divided 'cleanly' between mothering and guide-following in terms of men and women), there were some indications of differences based on gender although these were not as distinctive and clean-cut. In the following part of the analysis, extracts have been taken from the interviews to illustrate how these HR managers spoke about the ways in which they related to organisation members and about their own emotions. The interviews were not designed specifically to 'measure' emotional responses but, following Hiillos's approach, to identify the meanings and relevance of emotions from interviews based on the way respondents talked about their experiences. The approach therefore follows the notion of 'pattern matching' (see Chapter Three) in which Hiillos's categories form the main pattern and the accounts of respondents are examined against these to determine the extent of similarity or difference. This is an interpretative process but it is hoped that the extent of the quotations will establish the validity of the patterns being suggested.

It was suggested above that part of the process of buffering involved 'tactful transmission' and that a part of this appeared to be based on the respondents' ability to become engaged in conveying sympathetic care towards employees. This was something that would be displayed during interpersonal contacts and communications and was described by Mr. Wei (below) as a form of 'moral integrity' which was seen as an effective way of gaining trust with both the upper and lower echelons of the organisation. As Mr. Wei described this it seemed that it conformed to Hiillos's Mediator/guardian reaction, particularly when in a conflicting situation. The fact that

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

Mr. Wei regarded this as being different from the notion of 'capability' suggests that involved a more emotional response than one that involved only technical knowledge:

In order to deal with the conflicts between the top and the bottom, generally speaking, the key point is a HR manager's moral integrity, rather than his capability. I think the key point is his moral integrity which can make both the top and the bottom trust him. The key point is a HR manager's moral integrity, for example, respect others and communicate sincerely with others. (Mr. Wei)

The emphasis for Mr. Wei was on his own personal integrity as a mediator between different groups of interests, but it did not seem to involve an explicit 'Empathy at a Distance' response of focusing on the employee as a whole person. A similar form of response was made by Mr. Lei:

I always stick to one belief that I should not break through major personnel principles and at the same time do not let employees feel disappointed. Only if I consider and balance well both principles and employees' interests, I could do HRM well. (Mr. Lei)

However other respondents did appear to also associate this notion of moral integrity with the idea of personal 'affinity' with employees which could help to make persuasion and education (see below) easier, suggesting that this could be closer to Hiillos's 'Empathy at a distance' reaction (also see the quotations of Mrs. Yu and Mr. Peng described above for more examples of this approach; see pages 15-16 above):

I think for a HR leader that one must be honest, kind and hardworking. One should always bear fair standard in mind and should sympathize

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

the employee. (Mr. Peng)

Sometimes, employees are not satisfied with my explanation. Then I have to move them by affection, which is a kind of ability that is cultivated from many years' working experiences in persuading employees. (Mr. Zhao)

It's significant to undertake strict management based on the premise of a loving heart. When they are in trouble, to be honest, as a manager from work I can give them a hand or just leave them alone. But I always try my best to help them. For example, they may come across some difficulties or their families or relatives need help concerning some social matters. If they turn to me, I will normally mobilize all my social relationships to help them to solve those problems or remove some obstacles. (Mr. Lang)

In order to soothe employees' fury, I need to control my emotion. I need to help them to overcome their negative emotions towards company decisions. I respect them. And I also sympathise them. I give them a channel for releasing their angry. When they calm down, they could finally accept even the unfair decisions made by top managers. (Mr. Zhao)

Of noteworthy significance in comparison with Hiillos's findings, is that in the present case these examples of Empathy at a distance were associated with male HR managers whereas in the case of Finland, Hiillos found them only associated with females. The reasons for this are difficult to determine with certainty but may reflect the small size of Hiillos's sample or could be related to different cultural patterns. The latter, however, is surprising as Hofstede's characterisation of differences in masculinity and femininity usually places China as positioned midway between the two positions and Finland as clearly feminine (i.e., strong concern for relationships),

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

therefore suggesting that the gender differences identified here reflect a larger and more diverse sample.

There were also additional differences to Hiillos' study as there appeared to be no evidence in this group of ways of handling emotions based on Lelia's Couch, Outsourcing, or Withdrawal and the reasons for this will be discussed at the conclusion of this section. However, there was evidence of different ways of dealing emotionally with HR issues that were distinct from those identified by Hiillos and these are labelled inductively here as 'Modesty' and 'Concern for Correct Attitudes'.

Modesty was referenced by several respondents as a necessary response to situations with both senior managers and workers that involved the presentation of a 'steady' emotional display that did not appear to be either controlled by strong unstable emotions (e.g., anger, depression, arrogance, excitement). Here it seemed that the HR managers were again emphasising the buffering nature of their role as they seemed to view Modesty as a way in which they were controlling their own emotions but being also involved in controlling the emotions of others by giving a steadying and calming influence. For example, Mr. Peng emphasised that HR managers should make an 'inner contribution' by always appearing as 'steady' and 'hardworking' and being a 'role model' for employees and Mr. Zhao pointed out the importance of 'emotional constraint' (by which he meant not losing one's temper or showing overt anger) and of 'setting a good example for employees'. In addition the following were typical responses from the respondents in this group:

The ability of a HR manager to be a leader who could motivate employees charismatically is constrained. Only the Board Chairman or

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

the GM could publicise the company's vision in a charismatic way. HR has been confined to the work of supporting the top and managing the bottom. Due to the nature of the work, the role of HR is inevitably limited to balance the relationship between the top and the bottom. This person should be very modest. It is better for a HR manager to have a down-to-earth manner towards people management. (Mr. Gao)

In terms of HR leadership, HR has to be the GM's capable assistant. A HR manager has to pay attention, to be patient and careful when doing the explanation and persuasion. Solving knotty problems is the best opportunity to test a HR manager's tactics by which could make both GM and employees happy. A good HR manager should not be drawn in to conflicts from either side. (Mrs. Shi)

I believe steady working is crucial for a good HR manager. Besides, I think a HR manager should know the direction of the GM's feelings and be attentive to these. This will give them more attention than behaving in an angry or demanding way. (Mrs. Yu)

The role of Modesty as a means of handling situations appeared to reflect the general power of GMs in these organisations and was a way of dealing with the expectations of employees for egalitarian treatment. However, it was also an approach that appeared to create tensions for some of these managers as they felt that the need to conduct their behaviour in this 'modest' way caused them frustrations in terms of their personal ambitions. For example:

I believe if Chinese HR managers could be more assertive and outspoken, it could be more effective in HRM. But perhaps I do not feel competent enough to change the current situation. Maybe some other competent persons could do much better than me but I shall say it's hard to change the current situation and I feel sad for that. (Mrs.

Yu)

I feel it is difficult to manage HR here because of the general climate of the company and the bias towards HR from top managers and other departmental managers which means it always has to behave like it is a servant with no opinions of its own. I feel my enthusiasm to HR could not be fully released. I feel depressed and I normally take out my extra energy in sports. (Mrs. Lian)

Although only two respondents (in the examples above) spoke in this explicit way about the tensions of Modesty in the HR role, this does seem to question one possible explanation of the function of Modesty, namely as an expression of 'emotional intelligence', that is, as an expression of the ability to control one's own emotions in order to handle the emotions of others more effectively (Gowing, 2001; Higgs & Dulewicz, 2004). In fact, the account of Mr. Zhao (above) would seem to support the critics of emotional intelligence who have presented it as a form of management manipulation to gain greater control over employees (Fineman, 2004). The responses above suggest that rather than a form of EI, Modesty in the HR role could be regarded as a form of 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) in which the individual is needed to use their emotions, possibly to their own psychological damage, for the benefit of the organisation. The account given above by Mrs. Lian seems to fit the reaction described by Fulop and Linstead:

Emotional labour has its costs for those who cannot reconcile how they privately feel about the public performance required of them, especially if they feel pressured or coerced into performing the emotional act. They might feel confused and uncomfortable about their self-identity or the self-concept that the performance violates.

(Fulop & Linstead, 2004, p.309)

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

Therefore, although Modesty appeared to be an accepted response for these HR managers in the context of their organisations and that some appeared to accept as a legitimate part of their role within a strongly hierarchical organisation, it also seemed that there was some limited evidence that for others this did create a tension that influenced the extent to which they engaged with the HR role as an active professional. It can also be recalled that, earlier in the chapter, many of these HR managers spoke about the distinction between theory and practice and how, in theory, HRM could play a strategic role but could not be put into practice in their current organisations. This perhaps could be seen as one consequence of the need for Modesty and also as a source of tensions and loss of enthusiasm among individuals. For example, Mrs. Yu gave a sense of frustration about this position, seeming to question her own ability:

It is possible for HR department to participate in strategic decision-making in some other companies. However, it is a bit different here. I think HR should have certain strategic functions. But unfortunately HR carries out very few strategic functions in reality currently. I don't think I can break out this position. Perhaps some other HR managers could manage much better than me under the current situation. (Mrs. Yu)

A similar view of frustration was given by Mr. Zhao:

Normally HR should have a HR director as the second key person of a company, below which is the HR department and its HR manager. The HR director should have certain decision-making power. At least some HR policies should be made by a HR director. However, in this company the GM makes almost every regulation and decision. He can

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

almost control everything directly. If he says he wants to distribute the reward in this way, I could not change to another way. I have my ideas but I always have to follow him. The biased distribution always leads to negative emotions and low morale among employees and I have tried my best to solve the problem, however, I think the problem could not be solved. (Mr. Zhao)

Therefore it seems that the need to display Modesty, although it secured stability and harmony within the organisation, was also a source of individual tension for HR managers and one possible reason for their acceptance of a passive role within the organisation. However, as the above analysis has tried also to show, this is not because of a lack of knowledge of more sophisticated HR techniques on the part of the HR managers, but because of the context within which they were required to operate. It seemed that the need to act with Modesty could be regarded as one of the emotional dimensions of the more general buffering role.

The second response to handling emotions that appeared from the data (but was not identified by Hiillos) has been labelled Concern for Correct Attitudes (CCA). This was also referred to by respondents under the label of 'ideological education' (which was a notion in common use before the market reforms, discussed further below). This was identified as an emotional reaction because of the focus on 'concern' - unlike Hiillos's notion of Empathy at a Distance which focused on the well-being of the employee, CCA seemed to reflect an anxiety on the part of the HR manager regarding the possible consequences (for them, and other members of the organisation) if employees challenged the legitimacy of the employment system. Ideological education was described by the respondents as a means to explain and persuade employees to overcome personal difficulties and to cooperate with company

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

decisions. It seemed to be aimed at reducing employees' negative emotions towards company decisions and at the same time mobilising employees' motivation to cooperate with company arrangements. It was seen by the HR managers as a 'humanised' and caring way of encouraging employees to cooperate with company demands but it was underpinned by a sense of 'concern' that failure to adhere to these 'correct' attitudes would create emotional instability:

I can deal with conflicts between company and employees well. The company is an SOE. It never gives orders to employees rudely. Instead, we adopt a method called 'ideological education' to motivate employee to sacrifice and contribute to the company. (Mr. Gao)

Currently I do not do as much ideological education as I did before 1990s. However, some employees are certain to feel unfair in wage distribution and work arrangements sometimes. So I will give them some explanation and persuade them to fit to the condition of the enterprise and the whole wage level in society. I also need to strengthen employees out from the prejudice to the work arrangements such as the night shift. (Mrs. Zhan)

Sometimes I have to communicate with employees to grasp their dynamics, for example, I have to know how they feel about their salaries. If they are unsatisfied with their salaries, I have to explain the company situation and let them understand. I have to make sure they are well motivated for their job. I have to publicise top manager's demands among them, motivate them to work around company targets and try hard to solve any conflicts that could affect the fulfilment of the company targets. From time to time, I send some training materials and journal articles to them in order to improve and motivate them. 'Ideological education' for both employees and managers helps to arouse their working motivation to cooperate company production

needs. (Mr. Wei)

This notion gives an indication of how different aspects of HR work are from that practised in western developed countries without a legacy of state control. Although it appeared a normal and commonplace term to the respondents, the idea of ideological education appears alien and even sinister to those familiar with capitalist democracies. If it were attempted openly in such contexts it would be likely to be seen as patronising at best, and as an infringement of basic liberties at worst. However, there are a number of points to be noted here. The first is one of terminology. The notion of ideological education has been commonly associated with political dictatorships of various kinds, but in practice, attempts to influence the thinking of employees towards their employer's vision of the world are not new in western societies. Early examples could be associated with Quaker employers who established workplace systems based on their religious principles of tolerance and moderation (e.g. 19th century Cadbury's; Mullins, 2010, p.122-126) and care for welfare and were generally regarded as 'progressive'. Others have pointed to initiatives such as the 'Sociological Department' of Henry Ford in the early 20th century which monitored employees' out of work habits and lifestyle to ensure 'moral decency' (May, 1982). More recently, many commentators have pointed to the ways in which HRM has attempted to promote the notions of 'unitarism' and 'corporate culture' as ways of conditioning employees to accept the values of the company rather than challenging them for individual or collective gain (Legge, 2005). The latter could be seen as a response of western HR managers to the concern for correct attitudes, although this would possibly be more likely to be founded in market logics than in the legacy of political control. In fact, as Mrs. Zhan noted above, it may be that this is a practice of politically backed 'education' that is in decline in China and could give way to a more market-driven

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

individualist form of 'education' (which would possibly support a 'convergence' theory of international HRM; Ding et al., 2000; Warner, 1997). In fact it can be noted that in the following chapters this notion of 'ideological education' did not occur in any other of the interviews and does therefore seem to be a legacy from the time of state control. However, in the current context, it remained the case that to be effective, CCA depended on the way in which the HR managers managed their own emotions – showing 'mildness' – in order to make the sense of 'correctness' convincing. Thus, there was an emphasis on motivating employees and solving conflicts by 'explanation' and 'persuasion' in a 'soft' way:

When I deal with cases of complaints due to conceived unfairness in wage distribution, I always carry through the humanized notion. Normally I explain and analyse patiently the reason of discrepancies in wage among different employees and encourage those with lower payment and negative emotions to get better performance in the next round of wage adjustment. After my explanation, most employees could finally accept the decision made by the company. Their working motivation is not harmed very much. This is a good example showing my mildness. (Mrs. Yu)

As a HR manager, I have to show my patience by listening to their complaints, which is a kind of great care, consideration and respect for employees. The next time when I want to persuade them to accept some decisions, they would like to cooperate with me and could accept those decisions easily even though those decisions seem not quite fair for them. (Mr. Zhao)

In the accounts of this group of HR managers there were no statements that seemed to be similar to the Lelia's Couch approach. But this is not surprising given what has

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

been already said about the nature of hierarchical authority in these organisations. In fact, when asked about their relationships with senior managers and especially the GM, the accounts of the HR managers did not give an indication that these were close relationships in which the senior manager would expect support or 'heart-to-heart' discussions with the more junior HR manager. In fact several respondents gave an impression of apprehension or, in some cases, fear, about coming into direct contact with senior managers. For example:

I feel stressful when having a meeting with my top managers. I often feel very nervous and constrained. . If we are not cautious enough or make some small mistakes, the GM may scold us. Even sometimes we have done the work as the GM told us, we can't escape his complaint because he temporarily changed his idea at that time and we failed to follow him in time. We have no right to retort or explain, but we have to endure it. In this situation, we often feel constrained. Therefore, I'm not willing to have meeting with top managers, when I'm with top managers, I will feel nervous. (Mr. Lang)

The GM's support is very important. The relationship between the GM and our middle managers are very intensive. We have to take his order. If we do something wrong, he will scold us immediately. We are so afraid of making mistakes in front of him. (Mr. Peng)

So normally we do not pose proposals under the private company environment. We worry about offending the GM. I think it is difficult to make suggestions under private company environment. (Mr. Lei)

It seems from the above discussion and previous evidence from respondents' accounts, that these HR managers did not fall into the pattern of emotion-handling found by Hiillos in Finland. Firstly, there was no evidence of the range of approaches

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

that Hiillos found. In this study, no evidence was found of the Lelia's Couch approach nor of Outsourcing. The lack of the latter could be seen as reflecting the relatively undeveloped nature of the HR profession in China compared to western countries, particularly in the availability of independent HR consultancies that would offer the psychological assistance that Hiillos identified. Also it was found that there seemed to be limited accounts of Withdrawing in a simple sense, although there was some limited evidence of this in the notion of Modesty but this seemed to be better understood within this wider notion that captured their emotional response to their status within their organisations. Moreover, the addition of Concern for Correct Attitudes was introduced to understand how the HR managers had to control their own emotions in order to carefully manage employees' feelings that might be hostile to the organisation and the expression of which could damage their own positions. Thus the pattern identified from the present study can be summarised as Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: Pattern identified from restricted functional group

Empathy at a Distance	Present, often linked to M
Mediator/Guardian	Present, often linked to CA
Lelia's Couch	Not present
Outsourcing	Not present
Withdrawal	Limited, linked to M
Modesty	Present
Concern CA	Present

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

Taken overall, these responses do not clearly fit with Hiillos's over-arching patterns of Mothering or Guide-Following although elements of each were present. However it could be argued that a more appropriate way to describe the overall pattern of emotional responses of these Chinese HR managers would be in terms of 'Fathering' rather than Mothering. This would reflect the type of paternalistic approach that appeared to be present in these organisations that involved a combination of strict control from above with a concern to give respect to the status of the workers. This was seen as taking the form of the father who disciplines children 'for their own good' in order to make them understand and accept the situation as dictated by the father. This would also explain the importance of Concern for Correct Attitudes rather than simple coercive force, as the former emphasised the need for subordinates to understand and accept their position willingly, therefore maintaining the legitimacy of the system, even though most people recognised its problems. As Mr. Zheng explained:

Now we advocate 'harmonious enterprise' and 'harmonious society' and to satisfy everyone's demands. We do not lay-off workers but secure their full employment. I shall not say the old policy is wrong or the current is right. It depends on which angle you perceive the issue. However, China has such a large population. If the enterprise manages employees in a very paternalistic way, the enterprise will be very difficult to develop. Therefore the emphasis is maintaining stability while talking about progress so that the authority of the top leaders is secure. (Mr. Zheng)

Therefore it seems that the emotional responses used by these HR managers strongly reflected the organisational context in which they were employed and in which they had to negotiate a form of order. However, it can be asked to what extent their

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

responses were simply a reaction to this external context or were influenced by individual factors such as their own attitudes and aspirations (as can be seen above, although the responses were similar, they were not identical, suggesting some role for individual differences). To explore this issue, respondents were asked about how their careers had started and how they saw them developing in order to gain some insight into their individual motivations and concerns.

As outlined in Chapter Two above, in one of the very few studies of career patterns in an Asian context, Wong (2007) provided an analysis of careers using Schein's (1978) notion of 'career anchors' to understand the career choices of Chinese managers. However it will be recalled that this was a study of managers who were ethnically Chinese but had been brought up and were living in Taiwan. Although there are many parallels between Taiwan and mainland China (particularly in the interventionist role taken by the state in restricting career choices through controlling entry to higher education), China, until recently, kept much tighter control over how graduates were deployed into the workforce. For many, other than members of the most recent generation, graduates were 'assigned' by the state to a designated organisation and role. Thus Wong (2007) maintains that in Taiwan, the level of central state "determinism raises the question of how far the use of the Career Anchors concept can be justified in the present study given that it assumes that individuals have the freedom to pursue their values" (p.1225). This is likely to be even more applicable to the case of mainland China.

In many ways it can be seen to be interesting to examine the idea of career anchors in a situation where the initial choice of a career is not seen to be an option for

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

employees. As career will not have been an expectation to be considered from an early age, it is more likely that initial experiences of employment will shape career anchors to a greater extent than might be the case where employees have to make active choices before entering the workplace (particularly for those embarking on higher education). It will be recalled from Chapter Two that Schein (1978) defined Career Anchors as patterns of self-perceived talents, motives and values which guide, constrain, stabilise and integrate the individual's career' that are generated from the accumulation of life and career experience and are critical in helping the individual make career decisions. These anchors are long-term in nature, and are claimed to maintain a relatively steady state irrespective of the chances and changes that occur over the course of a career. Although Schein used a 40-item questionnaire (the Career Orientations Inventory) to help individuals to identify their Career Anchors, in the current study this was not incorporated into the original design and therefore the interviews have been evaluated to see whether they provide statements and accounts that appear to indicate a preference for one particular type of anchor. Therefore this must be taken as only a tentative assessment and is intended more for exploration than to provide absolute indications of career anchors that would be comparable with studies undertaken using Schein's questionnaire. However, as the interviews are reasonably detailed on the issue of careers, it was felt that these basic frameworks allow for some consistency of definition that would allow the three groups of respondents in this study to be compared, even if the comparisons with other studies are more limited. Schein (1978; 1985) designated eight Career Anchors:

- Technical and Functional Competence (TF);
- General Managerial Competence (GM);
- Autonomy/Independence (AU);
- Security/Stability (SE);

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

- Entrepreneurial Creativity (EC);
- Pure Challenge (CH);
- Service/Dedication to a Cause (SV);
- Life Style (LS).

In common with most managers in China, the HR managers in this group had mostly been assigned to their positions rather than coming to them by free choice in the labour market. Usually the assignment was through the national job assignment scheme after graduation from university or college, or by assignment between functions by the top manager in their organisation (e.g. having been assigned to a finance position by the national scheme but then reassigned to HR by the top manager). For example:

I was assigned to this company and HR department after graduation.
(Mr. Zheng)

I started my career in the administration department after graduation. I had been working in HR department since I was selected to be HR manager by top leaders six years ago. (Mr. Gao)

I was assigned to do Youth League Management and Party Affairs Management in the company after graduation. Later I was assigned to do HRM in 1996. At that time, the company was still an SOE. I started to work as the Deputy GM (HR) since 2000 when the company was privatized. I was appointed by the Superior Party Committee to work as the Deputy GM (HR). (Mr. Wei)

For the old generation and people at similar age as me, we were mostly assigned to a SOE after graduation. We did not have much freedom to choose the job we like to do. When I was in the SOE, I used to be

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

assigned to do Party Affairs management and administration in company office. I was forced to take the HR position later. (Mr. Lei)

In only one case, Mrs. Yu, did there seem to be some amount of choice. But even here this seemed to be more a matter of chance:

I majored in medication but I started my career in HR by giving up the assignment to SOE after knowing that some private companies were looking for HR staff. I felt that I might be suitable for HR. I was a green hand at that time. I ran into this career by a mere fluke. I am quite happy to be a HR manager now. (Mrs. Yu)

Therefore it seems that for most of the respondents they were only in a position to establish career anchors once they had become established in their assigned position and even then they could not be sure that they would not be reassigned to another area. There were few indications that they had given much consideration to their specific career possibilities before the assignment had taken place. Therefore it is not surprising that most of the respondents typically expressed the view that they were trying to learn to like their assigned activity (rather than expressing a very strong commitment to HR as a profession). For example:

I gradually have great enthusiasm in doing HRM well since I was assigned to this job, I enjoy the aspect of performance-related pay, employee training and deployment. (Mr. Zheng)

I should say I gradually start to like the HR job since I am assigned to the position by the GM. I am quite steady and experienced in doing HR over the past six years. I can solve HR problems patiently. I am working very hard but do not always feel excited. That's ok for me. I

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

do what is ordered by my leader. (Mr. Gao)

Since I came to HR, gradually I found I need to learn more to adjust to the new job. HRM is a changing and interesting job so that sometimes I have to strain my brain to think new leading methods. It is different from some technical jobs which have certain modes and formulas to follow. (Mr. Wei)

Only one respondent, Mr. Lei, expressed a strong dislike of his assigned profession:

I was appointed to HR by my former superior. To be frank, I've never loved the job since I took the job. I hate dealing with wages and numbers. I hate it very much. After the system reform, I was laid-off by the Group and recruited back by the privatized branch company of the Group. (Mr. Lei)

By contrast only Mrs. Yu displayed a strong commitment to gaining more expertise and progressing strongly in the HR profession, stating that she wanted a passionate and challenging career instead of just passively meeting job requirement:

I think I still have a long way to go. I am searching for chances to upgrade myself, because this job involves many new concepts and we have to accept them one after another. What's more, what I once did was just relatively simple management, which cannot form a solid and extensive basis for the HR profession, so I have to keep learning without stopping. I will try to be a better HR manager. I don't think I will change my job in the rest of my life. (Mrs. Yu)

However, for most of the HR managers in this group, they were most likely to talk about their future careers in terms of remaining in HR and becoming competent in

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

what they were required to do:

Q. Where do you see yourself in five or ten years' time? Will you still be in HR?

A. I think so. I will carry on my job. I am suitable for HR. My personality is suitable for HR. As you know, to be a HR manager, one has to be quite conservative in expressing one's emotion, to do what is ordered by the top leaders. (Mr. Gao)

To be frank, when I was young, I didn't have great ambitions. I am from the countryside. My only ambition when I was little was that I wanted to work and live in the city. Actually I have not many ambitions in HR. I have tried my best to do the job. (Mrs. Zhan)

Q. Where do you see yourself in five or ten years' time?

A. I've never thought about this. I do not have special plans now. I work here in HR just to do the best tasks I can. I am not sure about the future. (Mr. Peng)

From these responses, which represented the typical views of this group, it can be seen that in terms of career anchors the dominant response appears as being a desire for Security/Stability with only some limited evidence of Technical/Functional Competence or General Managerial Competence and limited evidence of any other of the anchors described by Schein. This would seem to be consistent with the general characteristics that were used in the initial stage to identify this group, that is, of having little sense of autonomy and having limited positive responses towards HRM. Therefore the result of the analysis of career anchors gives support to validity of the initial classification of this group and, as will be discussed in the following chapters, shows a different pattern of career anchors to the other two groups to be discussed.

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

However, as will be seen below in the following chapters, it is difficult to explain why this group should have a strong tendency towards Stability/Security rather than the Functional/Technical Competence which dominates the second group and the more Entrepreneurial/Challenge anchor of the third group, as the majority of each group had relatively limited choices in the deciding of their initial occupations so that the process of assignment would not seem to be responsible for the current group's relative lack of commitment to the profession. Therefore one possible explanation could be in terms of the organisational context and the fact that the companies in which these HR managers worked were strongly hierarchical and bureaucratic in their form, either because of their past existence as state-owned enterprises and/or because they operated in markets that were not highly exposed to competition from other organisations, therefore making relatively little pressure to change from traditional ways of organising. It can be remembered from the discussion of emotional responses above that these respondents tended to feel the need to express themselves with Modesty and to show Concern for Correct Attitudes, i.e., that did not challenge the dominant authority of the organisation. This response was also likely to reflect the strongly hierarchical nature of authority within these organisations in which the control of senior managers was exercised very firmly and with clear dominance.

One possible way to explain this apparent lack of strong commitment to their profession may be to draw on Collins's 'Interaction Ritual Chain' theory (2004). This idea is introduced at this stage because it shows a potential fit with the emerging patterns in the data that had not been anticipated in the initial literature review. This theory has been summarised by Goss and Doern (2009) as follows:

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

Collins's interaction ritual chain theory (2004) postulates social order as the outcome of an ongoing stream of ritual interactions that, when successful, generate 'collective effervescence' (a sense of shared emotional engrossment and excitement). If sustained, this translates into the outcomes of collective solidarity, individual emotional energy, group symbols and standards of morality. In contrast, where all or some of these 'ingredients' are missing or weakly developed, the situation is likely to take on the characteristics of an 'empty ritual', generating, at best, ambivalence and, at worst, disengagement, psychological withdrawal or resistance.

(Goss & Doern, 2009, p.4)

These researchers claim that emotional energy (which Collins [2004] defines as a long-term emotional tone ranging from an 'up' tone of excitement and happiness to a 'down' tone of depression and sadness) "can be regarded as synonymous with motivation . . . Thus, successful interactions stimulate emotional energy and, hence, motivation; empty rituals dissipate it and engender inertia" (Goss & Doern, 2009).

They go on to argue that the

most common form of dissipative interaction is what Collins refers to as a "power ritual". Here actors engage on the basis of unequal resources (material, ideological and emotional). In such situations these inequalities will usually mean that "some give orders and some take orders, or more generally dominate the immediate interaction". Collins (2004:112) argues that when the order-takers are forced to participate in the power ritual 'the situation of taking orders, of being coerced, is in itself alienating'.

(Goss & Doern, 2009, p.5)

Thus it can be tentatively suggested that these Chinese HR managers are being

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

required, because of the nature of their organization, to participate in power rituals with senior managers where they are put into the role of ‘order-takers’ (see above). This can be confirmed further by examining how these respondents responded to the practice of *guanxi*. Here it seemed clear that the notion of *guanxi* was deeply embedded in the hierarchical structure of the organisation and seemed to cross-cut almost all parts of their work. As such it appeared to operate as a series of power rituals in which the HR managers had to work as order-takers, particularly when dealing with senior managers, often causing tensions with their duties as HR professionals. For example:

I normally recommend people with outstanding organizing, coordinating, and management competences. However, I just do the recommendation. The final decision of the personnel selection is made by the GM. I am only an advisor but not a decision-maker. If the GM picks up someone that I do not agree with, I can do nothing about it. He also has his own preference in personnel judgements. What’s more, he needs also to consider someone’s *guanxi* before making the selection decision. (Mr. Zheng)

Other HR managers in this group also talked about having to deal with complex and cross-cutting *guanxi*. Due to the necessity of following firstly the GM and then other top leaders’ intentions, HR managers needed to build good *guanxi* with all top leaders (i.e. being prepared to be part of a ritual relationship as an order-taker, given the superior power of the top leader). However it became clear that the building of good *guanxi* with some top leaders could result in difficulty in implementing HR principles. The necessity of taking orders from both the GM and other top leaders, at the same time as maintaining good *guanxi* with all of them, particularly when the latter were

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

often in conflict with each other, seemed to place HR managers in a delicate position.

The following quotations illustrate these issues:

In terms of *guanxi*, as a HR manager, I have to have compatible *guanxi* with top managers, for example, the GM, all the Deputy GMs, etc. I am always trying to do HRM firstly based on the GM's intention and secondly other top managers' intention and then personnel policies and principles, so sometimes to carry out effective HRM conflicts with maintaining good *guanxi* with some top managers. From time to time, I feel it is a conflict to conform to personnel policies and principles and to build satisfactory *guanxi* with some top managers. For example, if a Deputy GM asks me to deploy a person from a position to another position, what should I do if that person is not suitable for the position or if this deployment violates national personnel management principles? Sometimes the result is that although the person does not completely meet the requirements for that position according to his performance appraisal records, I still deploy him to that position. This is how *guanxi* influences HRM. (Mr. Zheng)

Due to the influence of *guanxi* to talent selection and deployment, the most talented but unsociable employee could not be allocated to the most suitable position, however, due to many practical reasons such as top requirements, their special expertise could not be fully explored to generate the greatest benefits for the company. Under the current system framework, we have to obey the top and maintain orders. (Mr. Gao)

Regarding reward, if I do not consider *guanxi*, it is easy to do in a simple way as $1+1=2$. However, many things could not be managed simply according to normal regulations. Due to the need to keep good *guanxi* with certain people, special consideration should be given to their reward regardless of performance. It's quite complex and hard to deal with. I have to consider the *guanxi* with the GM. (Mrs. Zhan)

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

Although it cannot be proved objectively from the present data of this study, it might be tentatively suggested that one reason for the compliant behaviour of this group of Chinese HR managers and their lack of positive commitment to their career as a positive career anchor may be related to the strong need within these very hierarchical organisations to participate in power rituals both for the normal administrative processes of managing HR and for the need to undertake 'informal' power rituals involved in *guanxi* relationships. Therefore it seems that, following from the ideas of Goss and Doern (2009), because the HR managers do not have the freedom to choose not to participate in these power rituals, and because they appear to be always defined as order-takers, this is likely to have the effect of dissipating emotional energy which, in turn, would reduce their enthusiasm for developing their careers in an innovative or creative way. Rather they would be more inclined to seek stability and security as an attempt to conserve emotional energy as much as possible (as any challenge to dominant authority would be likely to cause a more severe loss of emotional energy; such a reaction was reported by Goss and Doern [2009] in their study of Russian businesses; see also Summers-Effler, 2002). Such a tentative suggestion would be consistent with the idea suggested earlier in this chapter that the process of establishing a negotiated order within an organisation has structural elements (in the form of established power rituals that reflect the distribution of hierarchical power and control) but also has a individual element that was associated with the emotional reactions of the individual to cope with the situation within which they had to operate. However as will be seen in the following chapter, the responses found in this group of respondents were quite distinctive from those of the other groups which suggest that the organizational situation may be vital in shaping individuals responses (Collins, 2004).

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis of the group of HR managers who were identified as showing the response pattern labelled 'restricted functional'. It was noted initially that for these managers there was a description of their roles as involving mostly 'order-taking' from senior managers and, especially, the GM. They considered their role to be that of a functional service that had little involvement in strategic decision-making. However, it was also shown that although this role involved compliance with the demands of others, it could not be regarded as merely passive or lacking in sophistication. The notion of 'buffering' was introduced from the accounts of respondents to describe the subtle ways in which they were required to balance the demands and needs of those at the top and the bottom of the organization, one key element of which was the practice of 'tactful transmission'. Of particular importance was the fact that, by exposing these quite sophisticated but largely tacit processes, it was shown that the role of these managers did not neatly fit into any of the established typologies of HR roles which tended to describe only rather superficial accounts of such activities. In addition it was shown that, through the process of 'tactful transmission', there was also an insight into the ways in which these managers used their own emotions and sought to influence the emotions of others in the organization, this also exposing a complex dimension of the HR role that has had limited exploration elsewhere in the literature. A comparison was made with one of the few studies of HR emotions, that of Hiillos (2007) and some differences were noted from her study of Finnish HR managers, particularly in relation to gender differences. These differences were suspected to be due to the small size of Hiillos's sample. In addition, two new categories of emotional reaction, 'Concern for Correct Attitudes' and 'Modesty', were identified as grounded in the data, providing a further new

Chapter Four: Restricted Functional Group

insight into the nature of Chinese HR work. Finally an examination was made of the nature of the careers of these HR managers, making a comparison with Schein's Career Anchors. Here it was found that little choice had been exercised in selecting a HR career and the commitment to HR as a profession appeared to be limited, with the closed match to a career anchor being that of Stability. It was suggested that this could be an effect of the nature of the strong hierarchical power exercised in these organizations both in formal terms and through the more informal processes of *guanxi*. These were tentatively suggested as being possible examples of 'power rituals' (Goss & Doern, 2009) that, because HR managers were compelled to participate as 'order-takers', resulted in a loss of emotional energy and, therefore, enthusiasm to develop an innovative and enthusiastic approach to HR as a career. As such, this response pattern was suggested as being likely to be linked to the situational context of the organizations involved. This idea can be further explored by now moving to the second set of HR managers identified from the analysis.

Chapter Five:
Professional Functional Managers

Chapter Five

Professional Functional Managers

Professional Functional Managers

The previous chapter analysed data from a group of HR managers who saw their role mainly in terms of 'following orders' from senior managers – the Restricted Functional Group. However it was also shown that even within this restricted role conception there were numerous tacit skills that these managers used in performing their duties. It was also shown that many of these skills were pragmatic and focused on ensuring the smooth operation of the organisation without causing conflict between the top and bottom of the hierarchy. This situation was different from the group of managers to be discussed in this chapter. It will be recalled from the account of the initial category identification (Chapter Three) that the current managers still took a strongly functional view of HRM but regarded this as a pro-active activity that could be used to develop the organisation and to contribute to its effectiveness. This group had a stronger sense of their professional identity and competence and focused on this as the main driver of their activity rather than only reacting to the demands of senior managers. These managers shared many of the concerns about 'buffering' the top and bottom of the organisation but, in contrast to the previous group, they had a much stronger sense of functional purpose, i.e., they saw the HR function as a more distinct unit with a potential contribution then went beyond effective buffering alone. As with the previous chapter, this chapter will begin by examining the nature of the role of these respondents, and will then consider the emotional effects of this type of role and, finally, the career implications.

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

In particular, this group regarded HR as an 'executive agency' and as an indispensable functional unit that guaranteed normal operations but also created positive benefits for company:

In modern times, we have three important functional departments, HR department, finance department and logistics department. These three departments are the three most important departments. HR is leading as well as a functional department. It passes orders from the top decision-maker. At the same time, it also allocates tasks to lower level departments. HR adds value to organizational benefits, such as in the aspect of performance management, HR development, employee motivation, retirement pension calculation and networking with governments. (Mr. Long)

As what I have said before, the HR department is in the stage of transforming now. It hasn't taken the real function of HRM. It could not be called a HR department completely in this sense. It is now going through the process of transforming from personnel department to a HR department. HR is no longer confined to a department of controlling employees. We are trying to do systematic HRM and would like to be a strategic business partner in the future. (Mr. Su)

HR positions are at an intermediate stage between the old and new ways of management. We have considered breaking through the unsystematic way of recruitment and selection and the egalitarian pay system. We have designed reform plans. We are now still trying different implementing ways. (Mr. Lai)

As such they saw their departments as being involved in a transition from merely undertaking 'labour and wage management' to something closer to the western notion of HRM:

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

HR provides a service for the enterprise, which is a connecting department between the top and the bottom. It is responsible for the employee as well as the GM. I shall say HR should be a strategic department and HRM should be part of the strategic management. However, as far as I know, currently, HR departments in many places in China can not play a strategic role, for example, 90% HR departments in Dalian Development Zone and Dalian Free Trade Zone still play the functional role. (Mrs. Yun)

Along with economic development and social changes, HR has evolved. It does not just do wages allocation or checking on work attendance. Instead, it gradually starts to play the decisive role in personnel allocation across various departments. HR should be placed at the core position. However, it has not reached the position yet. It is now approaching to the core position. Demands for HR managers and staff engaged are higher and higher. In the past, if a person is meticulous enough, he/she could fit for this job. But now, in order to adapt to the new requirements given to HR, the inherent requirements to HR managers has been raised up to a high standard. (Mrs. Tang)

In an interesting comment, one respondent makes a connection between this form of transition and the shift towards a more market-driven economy (the idea of being ‘in the middle’ will be discussed more fully below in terms of the emotional approach of being a ‘mediator/guardian’):

I used to work in HR department in an SOE. I find great differences of HRM in a SOE and in a private company. In a SOE, I manage HR like playing on a seesaw. One side is the enterprise leader, and the other side is employees. I am in the middle balancing the seesaw. In a private company, I am working for my boss, thus I always have to consider the gains and losses from the boss’s point of view. Take the seesaw as an example again. I have to stand nearer to the boss’s side on the seesaw but

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

at the same time I also need to keep the relative balance of the seesaw.

(Mrs. Mu)

It can be noted that these accounts of the 'old style' HR approach fit well with the descriptions given by respondents in the previous chapter. However, the data in that chapter also revealed that although it might be tempting (as the respondent above did) to associate this position with that of State ownership, this appeared to be an approach that was also found in private companies and, as was suggested in the previous chapter, seemed to be associated more with the authoritarian and hierarchical style of management than with ownership alone.

It was significant that many members of the present group emphasised the 'professional' aspects of HR work and in particular its status as a 'scientific discipline' with an academic basis. This meant that it was seen as more than a selection of activities and more as a complete functional discipline which connected various processes such as recruitment, selection and retention, training and HR development, performance management, incentive mechanism design and employee motivation, and HR planning. This was summarised in the following way:

If a HR manager manages HR as a way of distributing wages to employees every month, it is not meaningful to do HR anymore. HR is a kind of science and knowledge, with courses offered in universities. It is a systematic project, including recruitment and selection, training, performance management, incentive mechanism establishment, reward design, employee motivation and leading art. (Mr. Ma)

The key value of HR is recruiting competent employees that fit to the requirements in each department. The recognition of other departments

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

to the HR manager's ability in employee selection is rather crucial. Training is an effective way of transferring top leader's intention of organizational culture to employees. Another effective way is setting performance standards and regulations and then evaluating and rewarding each employee's performance according to those standards or regulations. (Mr. Yan)

HR could not produce any visible profits. However, it produces profits in an indirect way. In the case of conflicts between employees and the enterprise, HR displays its value in solving conflicts and lubricates both sides to work towards one goal. HR also displays its value in employing the most suitable employees for the company, which is a kind of expertise that surpasses the judgement of employee selection by other departmental managers. (Mrs. Tang)

This idea of being in transition was also expressed in the ways in which these managers considered how they approached aspects of their activities. In particular there was a strong emphasis on what has been termed the 'humanistic' approach to HR which emphasised internal motivation from employees and their development rather than simple obedience to hierarchical control. This emphasis on individual motivation can be considered as quite significant in the context of a society that has traditionally emphasised the priority of collective approaches to organisational issues. In the following quotations, the idea of 'spiritual' rewards can be seen as closest to the western notion of 'psychological rewards' rather than to a religious notion:

Besides, I am cultivating my ability in deploying people according to their talents and characteristics. Another important action in HRM now is establishing the incentive mechanism to maintain talented crew. I am now trying to connect the theory with practice to design good methods of employee motivation. I want to retain them by using both the

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

spiritual and materialistic encouragement methods and would like to make them feel respected in the working environment. (Mr. Lai)

There are many ways of doing employee motivation. I think at present Daxian Group generally gives two kinds of incentives. On one hand, spiritual incentive, like some titles and other corresponding awards for outstanding workers; on the other hand, material incentive, like the establishment of annual salary system for top leaders in branch companies and salary promotion system for staff. However, the most important is to explore little by little the incentives that are the most affordable and best suit for the company's characteristics. (Mr. Ma)

I am now trying my best letting employees understand the link between their performance requirements and the pay they get. I am also trying my best making all staff realise their performance gaps, and tell them how they should make efforts to improve their personal capabilities to get higher pay. (Mrs. Sheng)

Actually I do HR recruitment plans ahead of the organizational strategy made by top leaders for the coming year, as the old Chinese saying goes 'food and fodder should go ahead of troops and horses', which means to do proper rear-service preparations ahead of time. In the case of HRM, I mean to propose recruitment plans to the top leaders and let them know that HR is ready to secure the fulfilment of the organizational strategy. (Mr. Kang)

In a similar way to the previous group, these managers also saw HR as fulfilling a buffering role, but when they talked about this they saw it in a more positive and progressive way (not just as a pragmatic need) and gave an impression of greater self-confidence in their own functional abilities to be able to contribute positively to this process. In this respect they seemed to have greater freedom in suggesting, and applying different forms of policy implementation, and also seemed to share a greater

role in the decision-making process with top leaders. The following are the ways these HR managers tended to describe this form of ‘buffering’:

I advise the GM to change the wage level comparing to other companies in the same industry in order to retain talents. I do not want employees side-tracked by higher payment in other companies and then could not focus on their current job here. (Mrs. Meng)

First, I will think about the GM’s instruction carefully. Then if it’s reasonable and legal, I will carry it out without hesitation. If it’s not reasonable or even illegal, then I will report the feedback to the GM, I try my best to balance the two sides by using flexible techniques. (Mrs. Xiao)

I have one principle in doing HR, which is to balance the top and the bottom well. That is to say considering both sides equally. In other words, neither breaks principles, laws, regulations, nor upset employees. I could try to apply principles flexibly to satisfy employees, in which way that both sides are happy. (Mr. Yue)

Mr. Yue’s words above imply that satisfying employees remains fairly important and it was interesting to note how this was balanced against the need to maintain the authority of the senior management. This suggests that there is a need to consider further what seemed to be the individualist notion of spiritual/psychological reward that appeared to be suggested initially by these respondents. Many HR managers pointed out the importance of caring for employees’ feelings, *renqing* (doing favours) and investing in employees’ affections as a form of motivation. It was interesting that among this group there appeared to be a sensitivity towards the tension between individualistic and collectivised notions and they were keen to emphasise that their

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

approach towards it was sensitive to Chinese traditions, especially of 'harmony':

I agree that modern HRM is very strict and systematic. Things like personal affection should not be enclosed too much. However, I think HRM in most Chinese enterprises has a section of management with affection. Harmony among people at different levels is very important because it determines effective HRM. (Mr. Long)

Other enterprises may adopt purely institutionalized management. However, I combine institutionalized management with humanized management. It brings out great employee satisfaction. (Miss Zhu)

Due to Chinese people's characteristics, very centralized leading style could lead to innovation draining and very decentralized leading style could lead to social chaos. An effective HR leadership should be leading by means of affection based on sound management institution. The key point is how to keep the authority and show affinity to employees at the same time. (Mr. Ma)

Initially, these views appear to be similar to those expressed by the managers in the previous chapter, but on closer inspection they can show some subtle differences. In particular, it can be noted that the above managers placed a more explicit emphasis on the role of institutionalised management practices as a counter-balance to caring behaviours. In the previous group the need for a caring attitude was expressed in less abstract terms and usually associated with a personal competence or individual ability rather than as a part of an over-arching and explicit management practice. This greater level of abstracted thinking about the nature of HR leadership supports the characterisation of this group as having greater awareness of their role as part of a distinct functional specialism with a particular identity and contribution to the

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

organisation. This will be discussed more fully below under the consideration of emotions.

This 'professional' focus was also apparent in the greater detail with which these managers discussed the strategic nature of HRM. The managers in this group were trying to practice a systematic way of managing the function, but there appeared to be many drawbacks that they had to face during this transformation process. It seemed that when they discussed strategic issues there was relatively little concern with business level strategy and a greater concern with what could be called 'semi-autonomous' HR strategy, that focused on functional concerns rather than real organisational level issues. For example:

HR managers should work hard to design effective reward incentives to mobilize employees' enthusiasm. It does not always mean that high payment equals high standard performance. It is a kind of wisdom to work out the link between performance and reward. (Mr. Hong)

HR leadership is a profound concept that should also contain a dimension of leading to the future. Huge profits will be generated to the company as long as you completely excavate employees' potentialities and mobilize their enthusiasms. (Mr. Su)

The strategic importance of HR is mainly related to giving play to the subjective initiative of people. The enterprise's benefits could be increased only when the potential enthusiasm of people was mobilized. HR could not produce millions of profits directly. HR adds value to organizational performance in an indirect way by mobilizing employees' enthusiasm through some incentive mechanisms. (Mr. Ma)

According to my understanding, HR effectiveness is investment in HR.

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

Now people pay more attention to human capital management. We shall establish a talent development strategy in the company. Human-beings could generate benefits for the company if we operate them well like operating capitals. (Mrs. Sheng)

These HR managers emphasised the need to deepen the HRM system reform by finding creative and cost-effective ways of improving employees' sense of responsibility, strengthening organisational culture and limiting the use of *guanxi* in HRM practices. But the focus remained on HR (rather than organizational) strategies and tactics:

HR managers should lead in creative ways, for example, we should think about cost effective ways of doing talent selection, employee motivation, etc. In one sentence, try best to make minimum input but the maximum output. (Mrs. Mu)

We should use the minimum cost to finish the maximum benefits of employee selection and rewarding issues. We need to lead HR in efficient ways. We need to improve our service qualities. We need to enhance team spirit, employee cohesion and sense of responsibility, employee psychological consultation and organizational culture cultivation. (Mrs. Xiao)

This became particularly apparent when they talked about their aspirations to maintain their professional standard and the training they undertook. Here the focus was very strongly on the applied management of employees, i.e. operational practice, rather than on strategic issues. As such it seems that their aspiration towards strategic involvement was framed more in terms of professional competence than in the currently fashionable western notions of being a 'business partner':

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

I often attend some training events on HR hosted by big hotels in service industry, such as Swissotel Dalian and Furama Hotel Dalian. My purpose to attend the training is to enrich myself and to do HR work better. As for other training, I follow my interests and time. If I have time and am interested, I will go. I am fifty now. For HR managers at similar age as me, we shall keep ourselves up-to-date; otherwise we will fall behind to lead HR strategically. (Mr. Kang)

I should equip myself with more knowledge and improve myself continuously. I need more professional knowledge. You know, I am only a college graduate, and I am not a HR major, so I am weak at this and I need further continuous study. Besides, I need to have further improvement on my leading ways, for affinity, I am OK. But for strictness, I still have a long way to go. I prefer the motivational leadership instead of leading by using punishment or giving coercive orders. I hope employees could follow rules voluntarily and happily. I have to talk to staff timely to know about their achievements, puzzlement and problems and help them solve their problems timely in a better way. (Mrs. Xiao)

HR managers should lead different people by using different leadership styles. However, I found it hard to do in practice. I still need to cultivate myself from learning by doing. Leading different individuals by using different ways is of strategic importance to employee motivation which should be the key part of strategic HRM. (Mrs. Tian)

HR is an important functional department. In recent years, I take the initiative to make chances to attend more strategic functions of HR, such as asking initiatively to attend strategic HR discussions on talent selection and cultivation. (Mrs. Tang)

In fact the reality of this ‘professional strategy’ became clearer when these managers spoke about the issue of motivating employees in more detail. Here it emerged that

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

the established notions of paternalism (as discussed in the previous chapter) remained an important consideration even within the context of these more progressive HR functions. It was apparent from the interviews that the need to show ‘care’ and ‘affection’ towards employees appeared to be a deeply held value and not merely a pragmatic requirement, and several linked this to the distinctiveness of Chinese culture. This will be discussed further below in the consideration of emotional responses. As was noted in the previous chapter, this seems to have similarities to the notion of ‘tough love’ (Goss, 1991) and Mr. Kang cited a Chinese idiom to characterise this as ‘a combination of favour and disfavour’, giving the example of having to deal with employees who had to be laid off from their jobs:

This section in HR department is called ‘Internal Lay-Off Employees’ Service Centre’. Some lay-off workers come to my office to report their difficulties in life. I will always try to help them. What I could do is listening patiently to the lay-off workers’ complaints and trying my best to care for them with affection, to help them to get a new job and to set up the confidence. To be frank, most of the work is showing my understanding and sympathies to those employees and making them feel positive towards the company and the society. In short, I lead the department with great affinity and love to employees. (Mr. Hong)

Others expressed similar views:

Although it is a JV, its mainstream of organizational culture is Chinese. We care employees a lot. The HRM is filled with affection or what we call ‘*renqing*’ in Chinese. (Mr. Yue)

Generally speaking, I chat with employees like with my friends. I put myself in an equal position with them and care for their feelings and also help them when they have some difficulties. (Mr. Ma)

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

Effective HRM is based on showing affection to employees, which is the prelude of their cooperation and understanding. Otherwise, orders could not be implemented smoothly or employees would not like cooperating with you or even criticize your work. (Mrs. Tian)

However, in at least one case, it seemed clear that this caring approach was not unrelated to the requirements of labour market conditions and here the notion did appear to have been turned into an explicit strategy for gaining employee commitment under difficult conditions. It is interesting to note that this may be the response of this more progressive group of HR managers when faced with changes in business conditions and may be pointing to an evolutionary nature in HR practices whereby those with a greater functional understanding adapt and develop traditional practices to suit the changing demands of market situations:

Although HR is a functional department at the moment, I feel that HR shall not be taken only as a functional department. It is an important guarantee and foundation for the assimilation in market competition and market share. If employees are not given play to their own potentials, the role of the enterprise in market competition and market share will be influenced. (Mr. Yuan)

Employees could influence directly company leaders in management offices. Employees' requirements for leaders are increased gradually. Simple and rude ways of management by setting regulations and making punishment without taking into consideration of concrete situation of each employee could not work effectively nowadays. There is now a popular notion of 'affection investment'. The philosophy is easy. Currently, in the crew labour market, demands exceed supply. Thus we need to put more effort to care about employees' feelings. We are now trying to do this along with the change of the market. Human beings have feelings. For example, if

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

other shipping companies offer crew 10,000 Yuan per month (around 1000 pounds) and we offer him 9,000 Yuan per month (around 900 pounds), why he still chooses to work for our company? This is what I call 'affection investment'. All of these requires HR department to build trust among our crew. This kind of 'affection investment' is rather crucial for motivating and maintaining our crew at the moment.
(Mrs. Sheng)

It can be noted that this type of contingent response might be considered as the normal practice in western economies, but in the Chinese context where HR policy and practice traditionally has been driven by centralised state policy and plans, this can be seen to mark a significant shift from the conventional approach. However, it also seemed that the underlying paternalistic attitude remained present even where there was more of an attempt to make adaptations to market conditions. In fact, it could be suggested that the parallels with 'tough love' are not an exact match with the western notion. For example, it seemed in the quotations above that the emphasis on 'affection' (*renqing*) towards employees appeared to reflect a genuine feeling rather than only an instrumental concern or a form of 'emotional manipulation' (see below for greater consideration). For example:

My leading style is assigning tasks to employees and let them provide opinions and ideas. I normally let them write proposals to some problems in the way which could mobilize their initiatives. (Mr. Kang)

I won't prescribe in great detail how employees should do their work. I normally let them do according to their own opinions. If they follow company's main guidelines, I will disregard their minor mistakes. (Mr. Yue)

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

In terms of their upward relationships, these HR managers tended to have a more functionally focused view of their role and how it had to be exercised. In particular, they emphasised not only their responsibility to the upper hierarchy (which remained important and dominant) but also their need to balance this against professional standards and expectations. As such they appeared more proactive in their approach to dealing with other managers than was the previous group of HR managers who maintained a more reactive position (consistent with their emphasis on taking orders from above):

I provide suggestions on HR plans of recruitment, personnel deployment and reward schemes. I may make suggestions to the top before, during or after the implementation of a HR policy. (Mrs. Meng)

I always advise top leaders on good practices of HRM. I will definitely report whatever I think I should say. Reporting the affairs of my department is my business. (Mr. Ma)

I do a lot of proactive coordination with other departments to help them to find any problems related to HR. I always communicate with them to know their demands for the HR department. In addition, I always develop new rewarding plans in advance each year to meet every department's requirements based on analysis of their business plans in the coming year. (Mr. Yuan)

Normally I organize a coordinating meeting among all departments every week to gather some information related to HR in each department. Based on this information, I improve HRM later. (Mrs. Tian)

However as with the previous group, this type of coordination was also permeated by

the expectations of *guanxi*. However it was noted that for the previous group, *guanxi* tended to be mostly operated internally within the organisation. For the present group there was a greater focus on how this operated externally, particularly towards government agencies that had the power to intervene in the administration of HR related matters.

Drawing on the same theory of interaction rituals developed by Goss and Doern (2009), used in the previous chapter, there appears to be a somewhat different process at work. It is interesting to note that the need for these Chinese HR managers to have regular contacts with officials seemed to be similar to the pattern that Goss and Doern (2009) describe as taking place between business owners and state bureaucrats in Russia. They found that business growth was limited by the involvement of state officials because of the emotional dynamics that were involved in the kinds of encounters that were needed to acquire the resources that the officials controlled. They described these meeting in the context of Russia in terms of ‘power rituals’ in which the different parties participated on very unequal terms with one being defined as an ‘order-taker’ and the other (state official) as an ‘order-giver’. They note that because business owners were forced to participate in these rituals in order to acquire needed resources, this had the effect of creating a sense of shame that was transferred either to ‘helpless anger’ or ‘humiliated fury’. In both cases the effect was for the subordinate individual to lose emotional energy and to reduce their motivation to continue with the growing of the business (this being similar to the effect which was suggested as being present in the HR managers discussed in the previous chapter through their dealings with internal senior managers).

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

Although, as stated above, there seemed to be a similar situation facing the current HR managers (of having to interact with state officials in order to get the necessary permissions to enable their work to be conducted effectively) the data suggested that despite the appearance, the situation was not entirely similar. In their research, Goss and Doern analysed interview transcripts to find indicators of shame amongst order-takers which they associated with low emotional energy and a tendency towards inertia. In the interviews with these HR managers such indicators did not appear to be seen as being present. There were no statements of open hostility towards the State officials or any sense of finding the meetings to be humiliating or creating a feeling of 'us and them' in terms of opposition (all of which were present in their Russian respondents and were apparent also in the way in which the HR managers of the previous chapter talked about their superiors). It seemed for these Chinese HR managers that, rather than acting as a 'power ritual', their encounters with State officials were more similar to what Collins (2004) terms a 'status ritual'. Whereas power rituals define the participants as order-givers and order-takers, status rituals define them in terms of centrality or exclusion from the ritual activity. In fact, in the HR managers' cases, this seemed to be confirmed as most respondents emphasised their desire to 'get close' to the officials rather than treating their encounters as 'being summoned' by a superior and having to participate only by being coerced out of necessity:

It is very important to build good *guanxi* with many government organs. Doing HRM in China has frequent contacts with these organs. Government administration in providing regulations and guidance on HRM in companies is still very common in China. Good *guanxi* with them benefits the work, which could make the internal HRM clearer and easier. (Mr. Ma)

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

Due to the large amount of administration from government on company management including HRM, dealing *guanxi* with governmental institutions occupies a major part of HR manager's daily work. A smooth *guanxi* with them make the contacts with them much easier and helpful. (Mr. Yan)

HRM in China is different from that in Western countries. Here we need to do a lot of contacts with the local Labour Bureau and other administration authorities. We also need to contact the local Trade Union, but major contacts are made with the administration authorities. As a HR leader in China, one must have the competence to communicate with these authorities; otherwise, one could not do HRM effectively. (Mrs. Yun)

From these responses it seems that the respondents demonstrate a deference towards the officials which suggests that although they accepted them as having power in relation to employment issues, this was regarded as largely legitimate. Here it can be argued that in the case of China, what makes these sorts of necessary encounters with officials different to those discussed by Goss and Doern (2009) in the Russian context is the widespread acceptance of the notion of *guanxi*. As has been already discussed, the notion of *guanxi* involves expectations of social exchange in terms of the reciprocal giving of favours based on notions of obligation. From Goss and Doern's work it seems that the exchanges that took place were mainly in one direction rather than reciprocal in their nature, as the order-givers demand respect from the order-takers as the price for their cooperation, but they make no secret of their superiority, therefore denying the order-takers any opportunity to 'save face' and forcing them to admit their weakness at every encounter. In contrast, the practice of *guanxi* requires the parties to establish a sense of balance so that the relationship can continue with both parties showing respect to the other and maintaining face. This does not mean

that the relationship is not usually based on differences in power, but there is an acknowledgement that these are legitimate and accepted willingly as beneficial for both parties rather than being used to openly humiliate the less powerful. For this reason, *guanxi* relationships can frequently last for years and are entered willingly rather than through coercion. This is what makes them appear to be closer to the notion of a status ritual as it focuses on the “dimensions of inclusion or exclusion” (Collins, 2004, p.115). It appeared that maintaining some level of ‘inclusion’ between parties was important so that parties felt they were members of the *guanxi* relationship. For example:

Lubricating *guanxi* with governments is a must of doing HRM in China; otherwise, it will be very difficult to manage HR within the company. Having good *guanxi* with them, they will try to apply policies or regulations flexibly to fit to special conditions in your company without breaking the major principles of those policies or regulations. Without good *guanxi* with them, we can not grasp certain policies or regulations concisely, which makes a lot of barriers to deal with HR policy and practice issues in our company. (Mr. Shen)

A good *guanxi* with administrative institutions is based on many years’ contacts and cooperation. People I know directly or indirectly through acquaintances in those institutions gave me great help on HRM. (Mrs. Xiao)

Mr. Shen’s use of the word ‘lubricating’ gives this sense of an ongoing relationship that has to be carefully maintained so that participation ‘flows’ smoothly and this is also emphasised in Mrs. Xiao’s emphasis on the long-term nature of these relationships. The fact that the respondents described their relationships with these officials as ‘helpful’ and constructive also suggests that, unlike those described by

Goss and Doern (2009), they did not have the effect of draining emotional energy but appeared to be more 'neutral' in their consequences for the HR managers' motivation. This would seem to be consistent with Collins's (2004) notion that where there is "relative equality" (in ritual participation terms) the emotional effects will be stable rather than involving substantial gains or losses for either of the parties (p.116-117). In this respect it seems that respondents were using the term *guanxi* in the first of the three meanings identified by Fan (2002) as "the existence of a relationship between people who share a group status or who are related to a common person" (p.546), rather than the pejorative connotation referring to "the use of someone's authority to obtain political or economic benefits by unethical persons" (p.546). This would be consistent with identifying the relationships involved as those characteristic of a status ritual.

However it was interesting that the discussion of *guanxi* appeared to be subtly different when applied to the internal operations of the organisation rather than to the external relationships with State officials. Here it seemed that HR managers in this group had a greater sensitivity when dealing with internal relationships to the possible conflicts with their professional role. The following were typical:

I believe every leader has to consider *guanxi* in China. I don't think there is a leader who could stick to principles completely all the time. Human-beings have feelings. Thus *guanxi* that offers special favour has to be considered sometimes. (Mr. Long)

Considering *guanxi* is necessary but should not be overused, which could make HR manager works very passively. One could gain benefits by considering *guanxi* but could also loose benefits by doing

so. As a result, one should balance well principles and *guanxi* to do good HRM. (Mrs. Tian)

According to the principles, I should fine some employees whose work could not reach the performance standards prescribed in organizational regulations. However, I have to compromise one or two times to save the face for them. My consideration could encourage them to work hard to reach the standard. (Mr. Yan)

Resources are limited. A HR manager has to face the tough issue of decision-making of the resource allocation. Weighing different employees' interests is an important ability that HR managers should have, which could influence employees' feelings and working motivation. Although *guanxi* is sometimes considered, the majority of decision-making is based on fair principles. (Mrs. Meng)

A HR leader should have a strategic view of the overall situation. A HR leader cannot make decisions just for the interests of people within his inner group who have good *guanxi* with him. He must think about problems from the standpoint of the development of the whole company. (Mr. Hong)

Here the usage of *guanxi* does seem to be closer to the pejorative sense identified by Fan (2002) ('the use of someone's authority to obtain political or economic benefits by unethical persons'). As such, this illustrates a possible shift in meanings that could be explained by reference to the notion of power rituals. As has been suggested, the relations between HR managers and external parties seemed to involve greater focusing on reciprocal benefits such that both parties benefited by 'being close' to the other and being sensitive to their needs, therefore emphasising the notion of inclusion of both parties and the maintaining of 'face' that this involves (i.e., a status ritual). However, within the organisation, as has been already established, relationships were

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

organised on more hierarchical principles, either as with the previous group of managers, along the strict lines of order-taking (from the GM) or, as with the present group in terms of order-taking from the GM but mediated through the process of functional expertise. In this respect it seemed that the managers in the present group showed a more ambivalent approach to the internal use of *guanxi* by recognising that this could compromise their professional standards as HR managers. They indicated that they could use a certain amount of discretion in whether to accept the expectations of an internal *guanxi* relationship but, it can be suggested, the existence of a strong functional identity may have served to reduce the intensity of internal power rituals. From the accounts of the HR managers above, there was the impression that not using *guanxi* relationships consistently was not a difficult situation for them and one that they could justify by reference to professional standards. It can be suggested that this sense of professional identity seemed to limit the necessity to be complete order-takers within the power rituals of the internal hierarchy by allowing a formal justification for adopting an occasionally non-complying position. As such, it can be tentatively suggested that within Chinese organisations that maintain strong hierarchical power rituals that involve the use of *guanxi* in what is considered as an unfair way, the existence of a strong functional/professional identity may provide one way in which this can be resisted (on an occasional basis rather than in every case). This may suggest that the development of such a professional identity is a necessary requirement for the development of a strong HR leadership role and the move towards the greater incorporation of HR issues in the strategic operations of the organisation. Thus although this position may seem to be rather traditional when compared to many western approaches, it can be seen as part of a positive progress in the Chinese context, especially in organisations that have had limited exposure to western

management influences.

Given the nature of such relationships and the possible tensions involved between functional and hierarchical relationships, it will be useful to examine how this was translated into the emotional effects that these HR managers felt in relation to the undertaking of their duties and responsibilities of the HR role. Here, for the purposes of comparison with the previous chapter, use will be made of Hiillos's concepts of emotional reactions in HR roles. To briefly remind the reader, it will be recalled that Hiillos (2007) identified "mothering" and "guide-following" (p.110) and found five patterns through which each was made up – Empathy at a distance (ED); Mediator/guardian (MG); Lelia's couch (LC); Outsourcing (OS); Withdrawal (WD). Mothering tended more to involve ED, MG, LC and OS and Guide-following involved only MG, OS and WD.

However when the responses from the respondents from this group were examined to identify any evidence of how they handled the emotions of themselves and other workers it became clear that there were again no clear patterns of the sort shown by Hiillos in terms of clear differences between man and women with the groups dividing between mothering and guide-following in terms of women and men respectively. There was some indication of differences based on gender but these were not as distinctive and clean-cut. In the following part of the analysis, extracts have been taken from the interviews to illustrate how these HR managers spoke about the ways in which they related to organisation members and about their own emotions.

In the case of Mrs. Sheng, there were signs of the Empathy at a Distance approach

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

and a lesser indication of the Mediator/guardian approach. This former was illustrated by the use of the term 'affinity' and the emphasis on the 'whole person' (which appeared in several of the other interviews):

First of all, the leader must have a kind of affinity. Give a simple example, employees could speak straightforward about their opinions to the company, and the HR leader could understand, this is essential. . . . HR managers do not need to be experts in specific business operation but must be experts in mobilizing employee's working enthusiasm. Based on thorough understanding of every employee.
(Mrs. Sheng)

The Empathy at a Distance approach was demonstrated by several respondents who clearly emphasised the balance between 'caring' and maintaining their professional position. The following were typical:

To lead HR department well, one needs to stick to principles on one hand. On the other hand, one also needs to have an enthusiastic, steady, optimistic, patient and sympathizing attitude towards employees. HR is a functional as well as a service department. HR manager should know how to influence and at the same time how to respect employees. As a HR manager, one needs to have a clear understanding of what their authorities are. (Mrs. Tian)

A HR manager, one should not keep big distance with employees; otherwise, it could bring difficulties to the work. Showing affinity to employees is one of the HR working principles. Showing affinity and care to employees is an indispensable behaviour and ability that HR managers must have. However, it should be based on comprehensive managerial abilities. (Mr. Fei)

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

I think it is very important to fully understand each of our employees, and then one can optimize HR employment and the distribution of resources. (Miss Zhu)

It's much easier to solve some employees' matters through a considerate and humanized way; otherwise the conflict might be intensified and could also cause bad effects. Besides, as a HR manager, one should pay more attention to dynamics of employees' psychological status. Sometimes I believe HR manager shall be a psychological consultant. (Mrs. Yun)

Some respondents also emphasised the importance of recognising the whole person and involving employees in organisational processes 'as people' rather than merely as operatives with limited responsibilities:

I believe a word that I have repeated many times, 'sincerity'. Your sincere smile and sincere treatment to every person and every relationship would get you rewards. No matter you are engaged in what specific part of HR department, your first impression and evaluation of each employee should be made based on your respect for him/her. Only through this, you can cultivate a habit of respecting others. First, you should have affinity, falling into the habit of 'turning up the corners of your mouth'. You should always smile to your employees with sincerity. (Mrs. Gu)

This also seemed to arise from an empathy for the employee's position and, in contrast to Hiillos's findings was most clearly expressed by two male respondents (other examples of male respondents demonstrating the concern for empathy were also mentioned above in the earlier section of this chapter). The second quotation is given at length because by coincidence it describes in lay person's terms the effect

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

that was predicted in the theory of power rituals by Goss and Doern (2009) and used above to analyse the relationships in this study (key section in italics):

I oppose the way of using coercive orders, in which way that I am the leader and then you must listen to me. How to unify various kinds of people around me and let them give full play of their talents depends on the leader's leading art. (Mr. Hong)

I lead the HR department differently from other companies. I think my approach is very effective. I know a private company in early days. I am not going to point out its name. Its management method is that I command and you follow. *In other words, I am the HR manager and I tell you to do something, then you just follow my intentions, you don't need to know why you should do in this way. What you need to do is just follow my intentions. By using this management method, everyone becomes like passive beads on an abacus. Working under such an environment, every staff in the HR department is very tired. The passive following results in rust in mind and no creativity. Consequently, everyone has formed a character of obeying. I think this phenomenon is bad.* I have been adhering to the principle that the leader and his subordinates are equal in discussions of business, policies and academic questions, and the subordinates may air their opinions irrespective of whether their opinion is right or wrong. I empower them to speak out their opinions. Furthermore, I think the leader must learn to hear opinions different from his, and I do so. It is easier to motivate employees in a way of giving support to their works instead of giving orders. I shall be the 'collector of all wisdoms' or an expert but not a commander in HRM. (Mr. Yuan)

In two other cases the emphasis seemed to be more in terms of the Mediator/Guardian approach. This was a quite prevalent response that for further illustrations should be referred back to the discussion of 'buffering' above:

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

A HR manager should be kind, earnest, impartial, and upright. I am quite self-disciplined and very strict with myself. (Mrs. Gu)

Basically, the HR manager should be very honest, magnanimous, open and impartial. He/she should know how to be an upright man and how to conduct oneself in society. (Mr. Zhong)

However in the case of Mrs. Tang, there seemed to be a combination of the ED and MG approaches:

Sometimes I think my words could open the heart's window for the employee. I comfort their hearts. I won't let any employee work with anger, which harms their working motivation. So I would like listening their grievances, which is an effective guarantee for the normal production. If a HR leader could not touch and warm employees' hearts, or could not treat them equally, it would be very difficult to get good results from employees' work and it would bring bad effects to the company. . . . A successful HR manager should guarantee a smooth communication channel with both the GM and employees. HR should be a good companion for employees and should also be a useful assistant for the GM. HR should transmit innovative thinking of employees to the GM correctly and should do the same thing another way round. (Mrs. Tang)

This was also the case with Mrs. Xiao who expressed her tendency to secure mutual understanding in a way that seemed consistent with the Mediator/guardian approach:

Good communication skill is important to HRM. It helps to solve conflicts, enhance mutual understanding and reach consensus on effective HRM policies. It helps to secure HRM policies smoothly. It also helps to make employees cooperate with HRM practices. (Mrs.

Xiao)

But she also, however, showed some signs of adopting an approach that appeared as being similar to that of the Withdrawal approach:

It's important to regulate emotions, but I am not so good at it. Anyway, I am trying my best to do it better. We should deal with problem on its own merits and take the job itself as the mainstay. I should not bother employees with bad moods, which could influence their working motivation. (Mrs. Xiao)

In fact a similar response was also shown from Mrs. Tang in an even more complex approach which combined approaches, including Withdrawal. Thus she showed initially a close sense of the ED approach:

HR is guiding employees on site, appeasing employee's fury and improving their treatment and working conditions subsequently. In these areas, the value of HR is reflected. it is more effective to chat with them like friends in other times and through other ways, like during lunch time or other informal occasions. Human-beings have feelings. If you chat sincerely with them and show your affinity to them, they will trust you and tell the deep truth in their hearts to you. The basis of any form of employee motivation starts with knowing employees' subtle feelings. I could talk proudly that most employees could confess their true feelings to me, no matter they feel happy or depressed at work. (Mrs. Tang)

However, she also combined this with the Mediator/guardian role:

My role is to safeguard employees' interests and maintain enterprise's

profits. I think I am not able to stand in employees' positions completely, because if I stand in employees' positions completely not in enterprise's, there will be gaps between my leaders. However if I stand in the leaders' positions entirely, employees will think I am not their big sister they ever trusted, because they consider me as their big sister in the company, I may neglect their trust. Thus I have to measure the degree by myself. . . . There is a familiar saying in China, 'the main river is full and then the stream will never dry out'. Generally speaking, I could only balance interests based on the premise of not damaging the organizational benefit. I believe only through this way, I could maintain and guarantee a healthy employment relationship and company development. The top leader is at the top. He is the person who takes most times think about the strategic vision. Thus he might not be able to hold employees' emotional stability. So I am the person playing the role of negotiating with the top leader and stabilize employees' emotion. (Mrs. Tang)

Here there are interesting points to note. First is the way in which Mrs. Tang sees her role as the 'big sister of the company'. This is very similar to the view suggested by Hiillos regarding Mothering as a potentially powerful and important role (rather than just a submissive one). Next is the way in which she connects 'empathy' ('holding employee's emotional stability') with the importance of mediation, which suggests that these approaches may merge into each other rather than being totally separate. In fact Mrs. Tang also gave an indication that managing emotions was important to maintain the necessary 'distance' from the effect that might be created:

HR managers should always keep a calm mind state, which means not too exciting nor too upset. It is harmful to disseminate disheartening feelings or lose temper among employees. To be HR leaders, one must know how to adjust one's emotion under pressure. (Mrs. Tang)

It could possibly be suggested that the last comment of Mrs. Tang (and Mrs. Xiao above) do also suggest an element of Withdrawal in terms of the lack of desire to engage with emotional situations until they have “cooled down” (Hiillos, p.120). This would be a significant difference from Hiillos’s findings where this response was not associated with female HR managers. However it can be suggested that what is being suggested here by Mrs. Tang and Mrs. Xiao is subtly different from the notion of Withdrawal identified by Hiillos. Here for Mrs. Tang the issue appears to be not the concern with not confronting the emotions of others (as identified by Hiillos) but rather the control of her own emotions in order not to have a damaging impact on the feelings of employees. For this purpose it is necessary to introduce a category of emotion handling to supplement those identified by Hiillos and this will be termed ‘*Withholding*’. This term is used to suggest a similarity with the approaches identified by Hiillos but also to distinguish it from Withdrawal, as the main difference from the latter is that Withholding involves the attempt to control emotions on the part of the HR manager not only as a form of keeping distance but, most importantly, to avoid the open expression of extreme emotion from influencing the emotions of employees (whereas in contrast, Withdrawal involves the HR manager not responding to the emotional expressions of employees, i.e., the path of influence is reversed). In fact this Withholding approach was also apparent in the responses of four other HR managers:

It is very important to control emotion at work. HR managers shall not be impulsive but need to be calm and careful when dealing with human issues. The emotional controlling is reflected on how HR leader judge different situations. The most important point is that one must be able to keep calm at most times. One must always have a cool mind state. No matter facing what kinds of difficulties, one could always keep

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

cool. Extremist behaviours and decisions would make one's future work more mistakes and land oneself in a passive position. Leader is leader. You are not a common employee. You have to set a good example for the others. (Mr. Yan)

As a HR manager, without the basic ability to control emotion, I think all the other abilities such as organizing, communication and coordination abilities could not be displayed well. I should say a qualified HR manager should be capable to manage his/her emotion. (Mr. Kang)

HR managers should pay attention to their behaviours and expressions, which could bring very bad emotional results for employees. (Mr. Hong)

Actually, I am very good at controlling my emotion. The GM is very short-tempered. He always loses his temper during morning meetings. Sometimes I am also scolded by him. However, after the meeting, I always recommend him to change this way of criticizing the subordinates. I never vent my anger or upset to my subordinates. I never bring bad emotions to the office. I am always smiling to my subordinates. I think the bad temper could ruin employees' working motivation. (Mrs. Mu)

Thus as was suggested in relation to the remarks of Mrs. Tang, Withholding can be regarded as being close to Empathy at a Distance as it is influenced by the need to care for the impact on others and could be seen as the way through which the 'distancing' is achieved. It can also be noted that this ability to 'withhold' emotion is often associated with the relevance of emotional intelligence to leadership behaviour and is seen in this literature as a positive attribute of leaders (Palmer et al., 2001). This will be discussed further below.

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

It is significant that the Lelia's Couch approach did not appear as being part of any of the accounts of these HR managers. Given what has been already said about the nature of hierarchical authority in these organisations and the existence of power rituals as a part of the operation of these relationships (although mediated by functional expertise) this is not a surprising result. In fact, when asked about their relationships with senior managers and especially the GM, the accounts of the HR managers did not give an indication that these were close relationships in which the senior manager would expect support or 'heart-to-heart' discussions with the more junior HR manager. The following extracts suggest that these relationships tended to be more 'distant' and formal than the relationships outlined by Hiillos (2007). For example:

I have frequent contacts with the GM no matter by formal meetings or informal discussions. I always have informal discussions with him when I have some HR problems at work. Sometimes, he calls for me directly. He gives me tasks to do and I report and reflect feedback to him. I also make suggestions and provide HR plans to him to make some decisions. The interaction with him is very normal, not too relaxed not too nervous. (Mr. Kang)

When I talk with the GM, he is at the highest level. He won't talk to you purely on HRM. I could get information more than HRM from the chat with the GM. When he mentions those projects, I have to think about what kinds of talents we have and whether they could do those projects. So the communication with the GM gives some hints on HRM. (Mr. Su)

I would not like having long meetings with the GM. I could grasp his intention in three to five minutes. It is very difficult to make him change. I could try my best to persuade him for the sake of HRM. (Mr. Yuan)

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

It seems from the above discussion and previous evidence from respondents' accounts, that these HR managers did not fall into the pattern of emotion-handling found by Hiillos in Finland. Firstly, there was not evidence of the range of approaches that Hiillos found. In this study, no evidence was found of the Lelia's Couch approach nor was any found of Outsourcing. The lack of the latter could be seen as reflecting the relatively undeveloped nature of the HR profession in China compared to western countries, particularly in the availability of independent HR consultancies that would offer the psychological assistance that Hiillos identified. In fact, Mrs. Yun spoke of being a 'psychological consultant' as being an important part of the HR manager's role. It seems likely however, that as the HR profession develops and the market for independent consultancy increases, that this may become more apparent for the future. Also it was found that rather than Withdrawing, there was evidence from both male and female respondents of a process of Withholding that was subtly different from the approach identified by Hiillos. Thus the pattern identified from the present study can be summarised as Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Pattern identified from professional functional managers

Empathy at a Distance	Dominant (male and female)
Mediator/Guardian	Prevalent, often linked to ED (male and female)
Lelia's Couch	not present
Outsourcing	not present
Withdrawal	not present
Withholding	Newly identified (male and female)

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

On this basis of results it does not seem that the clean-cut, Mothering/Guide-following distinction based on gender was apparent. However, it could be seen that there was some more subtle gender patterns although these were more in terms of tendencies rather than clean-cut distinctions. In particular it could be noted that in terms of the Withholding approach, this was more commonly mentioned and more clearly stated by male respondents and may suggest some parallels with Hiillos's finding that Withdrawal was restricted to males. Although Withholding and Withdrawal are not exactly similar, both do involve the controlling of emotions and as numerous studies have suggested (Scheff, 1990; 1997) this is often something more associated with males. Also it was apparent that male respondents often tended to place greater emphasis on the need to conform to regulations and to look to the authority of others for guidance. This was apparent in female respondents but the latter tended to give greater emphasis overall to their Empathetic and supporting role (being the 'Big Sister' as it was put by Mrs. Tang). They also tended to use more explicitly emotional language and talked more freely and deeply about emotional issues. As the following statements show, it was the male respondents who tended to speak more freely about the need for regulation and control (although many of them also recognised the need for empathy):

The leading art of a leader could influence staff. The company development is closely related to the leader. Staff normally follow the leader's steps. These rules could also be applied to HR manager. (Mr. Lai)

As a HR manager, one must understand the national personnel policies and regulations. Sometimes policies prescribe only the basic principles of dealing with some typical HR issues. The comprehension of the

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

policies firstly and then the flexible implementation of the policies according to different situations is a kind of leading art which is important for a HR managers in China. (Mr. Zhong)

It depends on a HR manager's personal ability in understanding and flexible implementation of national HR policies, regulations and systems to achieve HR effectiveness. It is a very important ability for a HR manager to link the national guidelines and principles with real context, which could benefit both company and employees. I prefer a directive leadership. If there are some tasks, firstly I will utter a principle and give my possible instructions to my employees and then I will empower them to finish the task in their ways. (Mr. Fei)

It seems that it can therefore be said that there may be some support for the idea that Mothering and Guide-following do represent different gendered approaches to the handling of emotion among Chinese HR managers but that this pattern is much less cleanly cut than in the study of Hiillos and seems to be more in terms of a tendency linked to gender differences. However as both Hiillos's (2007) study and the present one used only small samples (although the current study used a bigger sample), it must be concluded that this can be only regarded as a tentative result that requires greater investigation with a standardised instrument and large sample to produce a definitive result.

It can now be considered whether these issues and differences in terms of emotional responses were also apparent in the ways in which this group of HR managers saw the development of their careers. As with the previous group this will be explored by using Schein's (1978) notion of Career Anchors as patterns of self-perceived talents, motives and values which guide, constrain, stabilise and integrate the individual's

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

career. It will be recalled that he designated eight Career Anchors: Technical and Functional Competence (TF), General Managerial Competence (GM), Autonomy/Independence (AU), Security/Stability (SE) and Entrepreneurial Creativity (EC); Pure Challenge (CH), Service/Dedication to a Cause (SV) and Life Style (LS).

Although nearly this entire group of respondents had been assigned to their initial positions by the government, it appeared that most had found their way into HR by two possible routes. First were those who had been assigned to a HR job initially and who had then found that they were competent at the work and/or enjoyed doing it and therefore stayed in the profession. Second were those who had been assigned to a different position originally and who found themselves attracted to HR work because they 'enjoyed working with people'. It is not surprising that this latter group tended to speak more positively about their role in the profession.

As such it can be suggested that even under conditions of restricted choice, career anchors that orientate an individual towards a profession (rather than simply their own individual fulfilment) do seem to be associated with an element of choice driven by a belief in what they have a personal interest in or feel attracted to. For example, for the following respondents it appeared that they had come into the profession without any particular desire to find a career here and although they had now made themselves 'comfortable' they did not express a strong aspiration to develop further professionally although they appeared committed to what they were doing:

At the beginning, I don't like this job, for it's under planned economy system, you have no choice in selecting your job, after graduation, I was assigned to the company. The leader here had a simple assessment

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

on us, and he arranged me and three other classmates of mine to the same department, from the perspective of the leader, he might have his own idea by putting me to this job. (Mr. Su)

Even though I did not favour this job, I've been working on this position for more than ten years. I am very familiar with the job. Along with the maturing of the HRM system in China, I shall say it will be easier to do HRM in the future. I should say I like HR now. Otherwise, I could not continue it anymore. (Mr. Kang)

I was assigned to do administration in an SOE after graduation. Later, I moved to work in a wholly foreign owned company. Later, I came to Pfizer Dalian in 1997. In this company, I firstly worked as the GM's assistant, and then switched to the job of training by the top leader. I found at that time I like HR. (Mrs. Deng)

In terms of Schien's career anchors it can be suggested that these respondents had developed anchors that were closest to Technical/functional and Managerial Competence (TF/GM) – their interest was in performing their activities competently rather than in the detailed content of the HR profession itself. It is not possible to tell with certainty but it is possible that this is one effect the lack of career choice, namely that some individuals who were assigned to a specific career found it most pragmatic to remain in that position and to develop their general technical skills to the best effect that they could. This could be regarded as a desirable position as it meant that there was a commitment to competence, but it may also be the case that it created a certain level of conservatism towards the profession itself, as the concern was with becoming technically proficient rather than being inspired to innovate new ways of undertaking professional activities. Some evidence of this can be seen by comparing the responses above with those respondents who talked of 'searching' for a position in HR following

their initial assignment. These respondents either developed an enthusiasm for the profession as a result of being exposed to its operations in practice or they already felt that they had the personal attributions that suited them to the profession and therefore sought to find opportunities to develop this. In the case of the first type of experience, Mrs. Yun recounted how a desire to work for a foreign company led to her 'discovery' of HRM:

I was assigned to work in Dalian city government dealing with foreign affairs after graduation. I wanted to work in wholly foreign owned enterprises or JVs, so I quit the job in the government and went to Wal-Mart in 1996. HRM was new to me at that time. I was attracted by the HRM notions of Wal-Mart, which were respecting individuals, people first, satisfying customers, and pursuing excellence. I felt I wanted to experience these new notions so that I went to the job interviews for HR manager in Wal-Mart. (Mrs. Yun)

In a similar way Mrs. Gu explained how she was originally assigned to work in HR but only developed her real enthusiasm when she moved to a company outside the state sector:

I like HR. I chose to obey the assignment to work in HR since I graduated. I used to be assigned to HR in an SOE and then I moved to a head-hunting company in Shanghai many years later to experience advanced notions of HR in one of the most developed areas in China under market economy. Then in 1996, I chose to work as the Deputy GM (HR) in this private company to explore and lead HR more at a strategic level. (Mrs. Gu)

However, in the cases of Mr. Yuan and Mr. Shen, the desire to work in HR appeared to have been established earlier in their lives. In the former case it was not entirely clear

if the desire for HR employment was the result of a clear cut choice or whether the behaviours Mr. Yuan claimed to show were used to determine his initial assignment. However his account does suggest that even if this had not been deliberate, he felt a high degree of fit between his personal abilities and his assigned profession:

I have a personality of sociability. I like making friends. This kind of personality explains only part of the reason why I like to work as a HR manager. I felt that I had the capability to undertake HRM. I had the wish and the ability to carry out the task in HRM. Furthermore, I had been the class monitor since my primary school until my college. I was assigned to the HR department and later to be HR manager by the higher authority and the top leader. (Mr. Yuan)

I choose to enter HR by myself. I am a sociable and agreeable person who can get along well with everyone. I chose to work in HR because once I looked forward to a HR job of talent management and leadership. (Mr. Shen)

These respondents, who were ‘searching’ to establish themselves as committed HR professionals (rather than merely ‘professionals’), seemed to have developed career anchors that were similar to those of Schein’s ‘Service/dedication to a cause’. This could be also seen in the ways they talked about their feelings towards the job. For instance, Mrs. Gu used very emotional language:

The love towards HR comes from my deep respect for life and people. I am happy with my position of being a Deputy GM (HR). I would like to be a consultant to help the GM to choose and develop best talents for company development. (Mrs. Gu)

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

This commitment was also expressed in strong terms by Mrs. Yun and Mr. Shen:

There is a saying which goes ‘the top leader looks like a bird flying in the sky and employees look like pigs running on the ground, you will not catch up with your leader unless you attempt to make yourself a deer or even a bird’. HR knowledge is the basis that enables any sort of innovation HR. (Mrs. Yun)

The role of HR, how to say, I think it is just like an invisible hand. Staff in HR do not need to be seen as busy as bees. Instead, they should nourish and irrigate the whole company everywhere, just like water. We have spread HR spirit in each department. (Mr. Shen)

But in contrast, those respondents who gave more emphasis to the ‘competence’ anchors expressed their approach to HR without such references to innovation and more in terms of maintaining standards and keeping stability:

HR managers should enhance their abilities in knowing newly issued labour regulations and learning more labour legislation knowledge to guide employees and to solve employees’ problems more properly in order to better fit to the requirements of the strategic development of the company. (Mrs. Tang)

It is a very important ability for HR manager to link the national guidelines and principles with real context, which could benefit both company and employees. I shall say different HR managers achieve different implementation results, for example, procedures could be simplified, costs could be saved, violation could be avoided and etc. (Mr. Fei)

The data revealed in this group two main patterns of career anchors: firstly those who

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

were assigned to the HR profession and who then appeared as being anchored in either a functional or managerial competence approach; secondly those who had been assigned to HR and non-HR professions but who had then appeared to adopt a 'searching' approach that committed them to developing the specifically HR functional competencies but in a more innovative and dedicated form of aspiring to progress their professional insights rather than accepting basic competence (the latter approach appearing as more anchored in 'dedication/service' form). Thus, this supports Schein's notion of anchors even in a situation of initially restricted choice - even the limited existence of different forms of anchor suggests that individual inclinations or differing experiences do shape how individuals develop their careers once they are in situations where an element of self-determination is possible for them to exercise.

Conclusion

In summary therefore it has been shown that this group of HR managers showed distinctive patterns of how they understood their roles from the previous group examined and that in particular this focused on the role of professional functional identity which appeared to show an impact on how they managed processes such as *guanxi* and also on their emotional reactions to their role and their patterns of career.

For this group of HR managers, it appeared that their roles would be located on the 'interventionay' dimension of Storey's typology with an emphasis that varied from tactical to strategic (see Table 5.2). In particular, those who had adopted a TF/GM career anchor tended to be more towards the tactical position, adopting a position of regulators, whereas those with a more SV career anchor tended to suggest a more

strategic, changemaker approach (see Table 5.3), although this remained somewhat limited and should be seen as a weak rather than a strong form of this position.

Table 5.2: Typology of HRM function

	<i>Tactical</i>	<i>Strategic</i>
Interventionary	REGULATORS	CHANGEMAKERS
Non-Interventionary	HANDMAIDENS	ADVISORS

Source: Storey (1992)

Table 5.3: Ulrich's typology of HR Roles

	<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Operational</i>
People	Change Agent	Employee Champion
Process	Strategic Partner	Administrative Expert

Source: Ulrich (1997)

However in terms of Ulrich's typology, this group of managers could be seen as being in an ambiguous position spanning different cells. All the respondents demonstrated some concern for people and there was, as noted above, a mix of operational and strategic positions (although stronger towards the operational), but there was also a strong concern for process, which defined their sense of professional identity. It seems that therefore their role could be seen as a combination of the four positions in the typology, with the greatest emphasis in the area spanning the Employee Champion and Administrative Expert cells (as demonstrated in their emotional reactions) but also with some representation in the Change Agent and Strategic Partner positions (with latter being strongest amongst those with the SV career anchor, as noted above).

However, like the previous group it was not possible to identify any clear factors that

Chapter Five: Professional Functional Managers

seemed to determine this pattern of response as a dominant cause and this further suggests that such patterns may be the result of a contingent mixture of individual and structural factors rather than a single issue such as individual personality or industry/organisation structure. In particular, two possibilities could be suggested as alternative or overlapping explanations. On the one hand was the possibility that the possession of a well developed sense of professional identity provided individual HR managers with the ability to act proactively to ensure HR issues were taken seriously within the organization (this possibly being related to individual career anchors). On the other hand was the possibility that the relatively weaker form of hierarchical authority that appeared to exist in these organizations allowed a more active and interventionist form of HRM to develop. Given what has been suggested about the role of power rituals, in particular, in diminishing individual levels of emotional energy and enthusiasm, it seems possible that the latter factor (reduced hierarchical authority) could be regarded as the necessary condition for an active HR role as, without this, the effect on individual motivation may be to discourage the active development of a professional identity, as seemed to be the case in the previous chapter. With this as a consideration the final grouping of respondent HR managers can now be examined.

Chapter Six:
Strategic Partners Group

Chapter Six

Strategic Partners Group

Strategic Partners Group

It will be recalled from Chapter Three that the third group was defined by its description of HR practices as more strategic with a close connection between HRM and business strategy. They took a much stronger view about the need to be involved in business decisions and regarded HRM as not only a professional activity but as a more general business activity. To explore the characteristics of this group the same basic pattern will be adopted as with the previous chapters.

It was of interest that only in this group did the respondents speak of themselves (rather than in general and abstract ways) as being Strategic Business Partners. For example:

I can talk proudly that I have played the role of 'strategic business partner'. (Mrs. Feng)

I have been a 'strategic business partner' already. The company's policy enables me to take part in the strategic decision-making regarding both HR and business. I think I have participated in the strategic business decision-making in both HR and business myself. (Mrs. Ning)

In order to propose professional HR suggestions related to business development, the senior HR director must be familiar with specific business needs; HR suggestions no matter how professional they are, if they could not be communicated or explained effectively by senior HR leader, or could not be understood thoroughly by other senior

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

managers, they would not be implemented by other departments. Thus it is futile to design some superficial and beautiful HR plans that are far from the company's practice. Plans from HR department now have high chances of acceptance by other senior managers because HR leaders are very business focused when design HR plans. What's more, in order to provide useful suggestion on strategic business and operation meetings, HR director needs to have all-round knowledge from other management areas, such as financial knowledge. Only if you know how to understand some financial statistics, could your suggestion on improving HR related problems in finance department be taken seriously by the financial manager. This is a very simple example that HR manager exert influence to others by combining HR knowledge with other business and management knowledge. (Mr. Wan)

The previous quotation is of interest because it clearly illustrates how different was this group of respondents from those of the previous chapter who placed far greater emphasis on the importance of HR related knowledge alone and even, in one case, claimed that knowledge of other business functions was not required for effective HR work. In contrast, for this group, as the quotation above makes plain, there was a far greater explicit focus on business relevance and broad business knowledge. The respondents spoke in greater detail of how they regarded this strategic role and what it involved. For example:

HR plays an important role. For example, what kind of staff the enterprise wants, what type of talents the enterprise wants, whether these talents can be retained, all need HR to analyze. During the process, the analysis directly drives the changes in enterprise business policies and influences company market demand. Information collection and something like directions ought to be done by the HR

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

department. I should say HR is the 'motive force' for company development. It surely plays the role of 'strategic business partner'.
(Mrs. Qian)

HR does not only play the role of 'strategic business partner' but also the role of developing employees. I focus on their development in this company environment. Provide them chances to development, otherwise they may think about job hopping. I think a HR manager should provide good service to both the company and employees and to guarantee both of their interests. (Mr. Cheng)

Of course I should yes, that HR should intervene in strategic business decisions especially for a relatively mature company like us which has developed for more than fifteen years. HR is rather important during the company's introduction stage. It is more important when the company is at its growth stage. HRM is essential to improve common employees' quality and to managerial talent cultivation, which are of strategic importance to company's sustainable development. HRM is the internal motive force for company's future development. So I believe business issues take a major part among HR discussion topics.
(Mr. Wan)

I need to try my best to grasp their expertise and it's good to the company. So I am energetic to know the detail of every employee's work. That's to say, what they are responsible for respectively. Every effort of mine is for the benefit of the company. (Mrs. Feng)

However, when these accounts are looked at carefully, it can be suggested that although they use the rhetoric of *strategic HRM*, the respondents are actually talking more about what would usually be referred to as *HR strategy*. This approach would be consistent with Schuler and Jackson's (1987) 'external fit' model of HR which emphasises the need to first identify the strategic objectives of the business, as

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

determined by its environmental conditions, and then to determine the behaviours that are needed from employees at different levels in order to meet these objectives. The latter being the job of the HR function, in terms of developing policies and practices that develop these behaviours. The 'external fit' model, however, does not have the more developed strategic innovation focus of the so-called Resource Based View (RBV or internal fit) approach where the emphasis is to identify the unique core competencies of the workforce and to develop these to provide new strategic directions for the organisation by shaping the external environment rather than reacting to it (in the quotations above, references to developing the workforce tended to be regarded more in terms of reactions to market pressures rather than separate innovations). This can be further confirmed in the respondents' statements explaining the functional content of their approaches. For example:

HR is not the only in charge of recruitment and training. HR helps the company development by making short-term, medium-term and long-term HR plans. HR does not only take charge of common employee recruitment. It also takes charge of managerial staff and manager recruitment and selection. We have to consider every aspect, so we know well about business and operation. This is beneficial for us to make appropriate plans and make other departments to follow smoothly. (Mr. Cheng)

We also organize various training opportunities for employees every month. One of them is called 'team building'. HR provides the funding to each working team to encourage communication between different team members. They can choose whatever activities they like, through which the team cohesion can be enhanced. It is important to cultivate their teamwork spirit to respect others' habits and cooperate well at work. (Mrs. Qian)

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

The relationship among reward design, employee motivation and retention is a deep philosophy. The reward package design is thus crucial for talent retention. Of course, we do not want big labour turnover. Instead of organizing purely HR training activities, HR encourages employees to organize activities which are closely linked to their real business and operation practices. Employees organize activities around product quality improvement out of office hours by themselves. I should say the encouragement system of improving product quality made by HR department really improves the whole employees' working motivation, which also nurtures the corporate atmosphere and culture. The image of the company is deeply planted in everyone's heart. (Mr. Wan)

An example would be the account of one respondent, Mr. Wan, which suggested an approach somewhat similar to Ulrich and Brockbank's (2005) notion of Centres of Excellence within the HR function (but only in an underdeveloped form) and from his account, it was unclear if this was the result of a strategic initiative or simply the result of the bureaucratic processes of the organisation:

There are divisions of labour in the HR department. We have a recruitment and selection section chief. We have a training section chief. We also have a reward section chief. As the HR director, I overlook the department as a whole. My job is mainly about coordinating various HR sections. The objectives are initially raised up by various middle level managers and the purpose of the HR department is to bring the initiatives of these middle level HR managers. So I do not give them orders, instead I let them analyze factors in their departments themselves and then set up practices to help them from the relevant section of the HR department. (Mr. Wan)

The employees' commitment to the company was seen as part of the needed

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

behaviours of employees in an organisation. As Mr. Wan's account suggests, this could be seen as having both an instrumental reason (above - avoiding costly labour turnover) and a position expressed more in terms of meaning and attitude (company image 'implanted in the heart'). The latter was also reflected in the views of other respondents. For example:

I think HR creates intangible assets for the company through employee spirit, motivation and culture building and maintenance. The company has its own employee action rules. For example, employees are not allowed to wear working uniforms after office hours so as to avoid damaging the company's image outside. This is the first point. Secondly, for example, as one employee of the company, if he sees garbage in or out of the company, he/she should pick it up. Thirdly, human orientation is the operation philosophy of the company. HR takes responsibility of educating all of these to employees and let them follow these rules voluntarily. This is potential fortune that HR creates for the company at present. (Mr. Cheng)

Besides, we should be responsible for others, namely enhancing the integrity. Thus our company can be operated well. There are several other big enterprises in this building. Sometimes their employees eat, drink, have ice creams, make phone calls or even shout and laugh in the lift; and some of them even wear jeans to work. I don't think these are good habits. (Mrs. Ning)

Like the earlier groups of HR managers, this new group of respondents does not fit with ease into the conventional typologies of HR roles. In the case of Storey's (1992) model (see Table 6.1), Regulators (tactical-interventionist), Handmaidens (tactical-non-interventionist), Changemakers (strategic-interventionist) and Advisors (strategic-non-interventionist), it would seem inaccurate to treat them as pure

Changemakers. Although they did have some limited opportunities to initiate changes, in most cases this was part of a more complex process of management decision-making that involved other business interests to be considered. Also, they did not clearly fit the Regulator role as they had adopted an often very strong unitarist perspective rather than the pluralist notion that the regulator role entails. The new group did not also fit easily with the non-interventionist roles as all the respondents in this group were actively involved in promoting HR policies with senior and other managers.

Table 6.1: Ulrich's typology of HR Roles

	<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Operational</i>
People	Change Agent	Employee Champion
Process	Strategic Partner	Administrative Expert

Source: Ulrich (1997)

As such, this group seemed closer to a combination of Ulrich's Strategic Partner and Employee Champion roles. They had shown a clear strategic role in shaping HR policies to meet business objectives in the external fit style (rather than the RBV form) but also showed a strong concern for employee behaviour in a unitarist form, as the quotations above demonstrate. As with the previous chapters, these results suggest the need to regard HR roles and complex and changing with, at the best, only partial covering of the main categories suggested in established models.

These managers also discussed the organisational aspects of HRM and how their practices were integrated within the organisation. They were generally interested to emphasise how closely their roles were integrated with other organisational activities

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

and with other areas and departments within the organisation. For example, Mr. Wan spoke of the importance of understanding business activities beyond the HR function and Mr. Cheng spoke of his own experiences of operations management:

HR managers at all levels are often cultivated and promoted gradually from within the HR function, but I should say working experiences should take priority over professional HR knowledge. Of course the professional HR knowledge is also important. But one should also have rich grass-roots working experiences in knowing and foreseeing employees' dynamics and communicating with employees. People who can only deal with operational HR transactions like paying wages are not preferred. (Mr. Wan)

As for the training, I think professional HR training is indeed very necessary but I learn and know the operations management. The most important point should be learning business and operations management. I think it is necessary to learn more to guarantee the growth of my career development. (Mr. Cheng)

Mr. Cheng's account regarding his career is of interest and the issue of developing a career that is not necessarily restricted to HR is a more general issue that will be tackled in the discussion of HR managers' career patterns, below. In addition to the wider understanding of business issues that these managers suggested, there was also an emphasis on their close relationships with other non-HR departments within the organization. In their accounts of these relationships, it appeared that they were adopting a role that was similar to that of the 'internal consultant', as outlined by Wright (2008):

Implicit within depictions of the model of the HR 'business partner' is

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

an emphasis upon consultancy skills As an internal consultant, the HR ‘business partner’ is seen as advising senior managers and facilitating major organizational changes which involve considerations of the key strategic issues facing the business. Depictions of the HR ‘business partner’ as an internal consultant also stress how the legitimacy of this role is based on senior management acceptance of the individual’s expertise rather than the power that derives from their bureaucratic position. As a result, advocates emphasize the need for HR managers to develop superior influencing, relationship and networking skills.

(Wright, 2008, p.1069)

The emphasis that is placed on the legitimacy from general expertise was reflected in the views of Mr. Wan and Mr. Cheng and, in the following statements, it can be seen how there was also an emphasis placed on ‘influencing’ and ‘relationship’ skills with the senior managers in other departments:

Normally I communicate with other departmental managers and employees before making any regulation that is relevant to them. I attend the meetings of every department, collect the suggestions concerning HR and cooperate with others in management systems or regulation formulation. I believe HR should support other departments to assist them to work better. (Mrs. Qian)

I do not want to do my work in a way of giving others coercive orders. I think communication is the basis of any type of coordinated management. HR and other departments are at the same level. After working together, others know me very well. Before I make a draft for a regulation, I normally go and ask for other managers’ opinions. After I make the first draft, I normally discuss with other managers and also with the GM and Deputy GMs. If everyone agrees with the draft, then

the regulation will be implemented. (Mr. Cheng)

Generosity is an essential requirement for a HR manager. When we have conflicts with other departments, I adopt such an attitude that whose responsibility is whose responsibility. No one could escape it and I do not like shirking my responsibility to others. I always take my work seriously. This means I must always try to persuade others, particularly the managers at the head office, that what is being suggested is appropriate for the organization. (Mrs. Feng)

To enable a proposal to be acceptable, you should have deep consideration and give specific data to prove your proposal. And even mobilize other departments to support you, and unite to sign for approval or unite to propose. Provided that you've got specific data to make your case credible to other managers, if the data are persuasive, the expected effect is realized. (Mr. Wan)

Although there are similarities with the Ulrich typology, there is less of a clear match with the more recent work of Ulrich which relates the changing HR role to the more dynamic changes in an organisation. The latter suggest a possibly interesting difference from the approach to business partnership that has been developed based on Ulrich (2007) in the UK and promoted by the CIPD. This presents a three stage model of the HR function where the role of the Strategic Business Partner is supported by Centres of HR Excellence and Shared Services (as described in the literature chapter). In the organisations of the present HR managers, there was no evidence of the 'shared services' (i.e. outsourced) approach or of real centres of excellence in the sense of highly specialised HR 'consultants' who would run 'projects' on specialised topics for line managers (although a very limited possibility of developments in this direction were suggested above). Rather, these HR managers

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

still appeared to be operating conventional 'generalist' HR departments that despite the greater connection with strategic objectives than the previous Functional groups, were still operating in the conventional way of providing a broad range of HR services. This seemed closer to the approach that Ulrich et al. (2008) associated with the HR provision of a 'single business unit' rather than large corporate entities. This would appear as possibly making these HR managers seem unsophisticated as only a few were not employed in organisations that were part of large multi-national corporations, and might therefore have been expected to have HR based on the 'shared services' model, this being an indication of best practice. However, it can be suggested that in the context of China, these actual plants themselves (although formally parts of large multinationals) were relatively small and did not experience the levels of staff mobility, particularly at the non-managerial level, that would normally be found in multi-national corporations in developed nations. As such these organisations could be suggested as operating more along the lines of a single functional business and therefore, as is argued by Ulrich et al. (2008), a rigorous functional approach may be the most appropriate way of delivering HR. If this is the case, then it can be suggested that these HR managers had a stronger sense of their connectedness with business objectives, creating a stronger and more explicit focus on an integrated (fit) HR strategy and, therefore, distinguishing them from the previous 'functional' groups. This is consistent with Ulrich et al.'s conception of their functional business model which emphasises how "HR specialists create policies that will work across the enterprise to deliver the company's overall strategic agenda" (p.832). In this respect, it may seem that these HR managers were, in fact, following an approach that would be regarded as well fitted to their organisational conditions. As Ulrich et al. (2008) suggest, this approach "should not be abandoned in favour of

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

the more popular shared service organization unless the structure and strategy of the business mandate the choice” (p.832).

This may also be an approach that is well suited to this Chinese context, not merely because of the strategic fit with the business and its competitive environment, but also with the more general cultural expectations of individuals in China. This is because one of the criticisms that has been made of the ‘strategic business partner’ model in the shared service organisation form is the risk that the ‘employee champion’ role will be ignored or marginalised in favour simply of meeting business objectives at the expense of employees. Francis and Keegan (2006) pointed out that Ulrich was aware of this danger:

‘Noting the attractiveness of the ‘strategic partner’ role amongst HR professionals in the UK, Ulrich and Brockbank call for practitioners not to lose sight of the employee champion role, and argue that employee relations ‘is not just window dressing’ and that ‘. . . caring for, listening to, and responding to employees remains a centrepiece of HR work’ (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005b: 201). Here, attention is drawn to the need for fair treatment of employees and to treat individuals with dignity.’

(Francis & Keegan, 2006, p.234)

These writers also noted that the view of Ulrich and Brockbank is based on the “unitary” frame of reference and that “like their earlier modeling of business partnership, arguments remain underpinned by a strong notion of mutuality between different stakeholders, guided by the belief that managers, employees, consultants and HR professionals will all work collaboratively towards a common goal of efficiency and high performance levels” (Francis & Keegan, 2006, p.234). This can suggest that

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

the Ulrich conception of the employee champion is closer to Legge's (1978) role of the 'conformist innovator' rather than the alternative 'deviant innovator':

'The conformist innovator attempts to relate his/her work clearly to the dominant values and norms in the organisation aiming simply to satisfy the requirements of senior management. The deviant innovator subscribes to a quite different set of norms, gaining credibility and support for ideas driven by social values rather than strict economic criteria.'

(Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005, p.131)

The case of this group of Chinese HR managers does not appear to fall clearly into either of these different groups. It has been shown above that these HR managers were absolutely committed to satisfying the 'requirements of senior management' but this did not mean that this was their only concern, in opposition to a consideration of the needs of employees according to principles that were not purely economic. For example:

Employees have some ideas of doing their jobs. I normally say 'go ahead and try your ideas'. I never approve or deny their ideas. I just let them have a go first. Take the recruitment as an example. I normally let my staff design plans. When some problems happened during implementation, I would then try to correct those problems and remind the employee what to pay attention to the next time, from which he can learn how to make a judgement. Actually, no matter a country or an enterprise, they should lead in by using a similar method, which I believe is empowerment. Empowerment is process of employee cultivation, training and also evaluation. (Mr. Cheng)

As in the case in the previous chapters, it is possible to explore this issue of complex

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

commitment through the emotional responses of the HR managers as these give a potentially greater insight into the real complexity of their actions rather than simple accounts of policy approaches. By using Hiillos's (2007) categories to allow comparisons with the previous chapters, it emerged initially that in this group there did seem to be a 'Withholding' approach (as found in the previous group). It will be recalled that Hiillos (2007) claimed to have found five patterns: Empathy at a distance (ED: empathising by treating the employee as a whole person but 'keeping their own integrity'); Mediator/guardian (MG: acting as the 'man in the middle' between managers and employees and attempting to be just to both); Lelia's Couch (LC: giving a 'shoulder to lean on' to senior managers); Outsourcing (OS: this was the use of outside experts such as psychologists to deal with crisis emotional issues); Withdrawal (WD: not confronting emotions but regarding them as 'deviations' that would 'cool down' if left alone and as something to be controlled rather than expressed, particularly in a workplace). 'Withholding' (WH) was identified in the data from the previous chapter to apply to a response which involved the control of emotions to avoid influencing the emotions of employees. The Withholding approach was seen in three of the present respondents. First, Mr. Wan emphasised the need to balance emotions not as a means of avoiding confrontation but as a form of adaption to send the right message and to ensure that judgements were made in a considered way. Secondly, Mr. Cheng explained how controlling displays of his emotions could help him to change the mood of employees and not endanger mutual trust and he also expressed his attempts to understand others' responses as a means of assessing how he himself should react. Finally, Mrs. Qian also talked of how her 'balanced emotions' helped her to maintain relationships and behave professionally:

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

I believe that to be a competent HR leader, the person should not be too introverted. Too extroverted is not suitable either. Especially for a higher level HR director, I think it's better to have a dual personality. A HR manager should be extroverted but not too flippant. He must be very prudent in considering problems thoroughly and carefully. The overall judgement of competence for a HR leader is also very crucial. He must possess the ability to judge from the overall situation, for the reason that HR matters are always serious human related matters. I have a personality of both introversion and extroversion. (Mr. Wan)

I try to control my emotions to enable employees to become delighted when they are in a bad mood. Likely, if I always get angry with my subordinates, this will bring about a crisis and my subordinates will not say true words to me any more. . . . In order to reach a consensus and let others accept my suggestions, I need to know everyone's character, their advantages and disadvantages, and what they like and dislike. In order to fulfil my purpose, I need to think about how I talk with them. I make my communication flexible to meet the preference of everyone's personality and taste. There is only one aim that is to unite everyone for better work. Chinese and Japanese have different thinking modes, so to communicate with people in different cultural backgrounds, I need to pay attention to their different emotions. (Mr. Cheng)

I think I should control my emotions at work because I believe I should take a professional attitude towards my job. I devote a lot of affection to my employees. I build up the trust with them for a long time. As I remembered, it is said that 85% happiness of one person come from the influence around him/her. As a manager, you shall never affect others with your emotional changes. So, in staffs' eyes, I am always sanguine, happy and optimistic. My optimistic and positive mood or everyday emotion influences everybody around me. What's more, I influence everybody with such an optimistic and positive mood and they spread this happy mood and high morale among each other too. (Mrs. Qian)

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

I always build useful internal *guanxi* with top managers in the head office in Shanghai. You know, I am very good at social networking. My strong point is to make friends. I mean, for example, I can easily start conversations to someone I don't know in the lift. This is my strong point. I like communicating with others. Especially in the company, I think I should communicate with top leaders in the head office just because it's good for the branch company. Sometimes I feel they are rather hard to get on with, and I have to pocket my pride. Sometimes they are so arrogant and disregard my opinions. Sometimes I won't give in to them if I am in an ill temper. But this does not happen frequently. I can put up with it most of the time just for the good of the company. (Mrs. Feng)

In addition to this Withholding approach, respondents also indicated responses that were close to Hiillos's notion of Mediator/Guardian although this was also often accompanied by elements that appeared as being similar to Empathy at a Distance. For instance, Mr. Wan spoke of his need to deal fairly with all sides but also identified his sense of 'affinity' with employees as a means of treating them with respect as individuals as this contributed to the smooth running of the organisation. Similarly, Mrs. Qian also joined the notions of fairness and impartiality with the need for 'amicability' and a sense of integrity which valued both the employee and the organisation. Finally, Mr. Cheng appeared to give more attachment to Empathy at a Distance when he talked of his concern for employees' material and spiritual wellbeing as part of his responsibility for organisational performance:

The way how a HR director and managers work is very crucial. First of all, I say HR leaders should possess not only comprehensive competences, for example, managerial competences and experiences but also relatively good personal quality and affinity. If you are easy-going and approachable, employees will trust you and like reflecting

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

the truth to you. Otherwise, you are no different from a deaf-mute, which could influence the cooperation degree in work. We have to treat everyone equally and deal with every matter fairly, based on which we could build trustful relationships with the GM, other managers and employees. Otherwise, we could not comprehend the real situation among all of these people in the company, which could influence the smooth coordination. (Mr. Wan)

You shall let staff feel your amicability and then they will be willing to communicate and exchange their true thoughts with you. That is an indispensable attainment, I think. Another particularly important point is that you shall be fair and impartial to anything, especially in such enterprise like us. Integrity is one important item in the values of our enterprise. With integrity, you might be offered another opportunity in case of poor performance; otherwise, you will be passed no matter how good your performance is. So, it is vital to form a habit and carry out the awareness of integrity. (Mrs. Qian)

I respect employees' individuality. I want to make them satisfied with their payment and their development opportunities within this company. I think HR should cultivate employees' motivation by giving them approvals little by little. Encourage employees to set targets for themselves and motivate them both materially and spiritually. I respect my employees and pay attention to their development issues. (Mr. Cheng)

This form of Empathy at a Distance was also apparent in the account of Mrs. Ning who emphasised the importance of treating employees with respect, particularly younger people, but also emphasised how this was important for the company:

I communicate with employees in a humanized and sincere way. Humanized management is what I advocate. Young staffs have their

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

own thoughts although they are very young. It is important for me to let them know the company cares about them. When other companies attempt to employ them with a higher payment, they will still take this aspect into account, and they will have a comparison to find out which company cares about them more and cultivates them truly. (Mrs. Ning)

I usually see all staff once a month, to learn about their work and life, even including their personal demands both at home and at work, most importantly to know their desire for development opportunities. I will try to keep my promise by leading them to fulfil their desires. After a period of time, staffs ask me sincerely for advice in case of their personal difficulties. I need to be humanized. I have achieved a very good corporate atmosphere and cohesion. (Mrs. Qian)

I care for employees and let them feel the warmth of working in this company. I know most of them very well. I can remember most of their names. They can confess their real dissatisfaction in the work to me, which helps me to improve my work all the time. They feel happy to work here. I am proud they like working with me. (Mr. Cheng)

It was clear that these respondents also felt that they had to assume a Mediator/Guardian role although it is interesting to note that this was usually spoken of in the context of relations with more senior managers rather than with employees and that this was particularly strong in relationship with senior managers who were non-Chinese (e.g. Japanese). Mrs. Ning's comments are very revealing and demonstrate how this apparently impartial role can still involve considerable amounts of emotion both of her own and that of other employees. Mr. Cheng showed a more conventional approach where his concern for the feelings of others seemed to overlap with his tendency to show also Empathy at a Distance (above). For example:

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

I always argue for a just ground in front of the Japanese GM. Some of the HR managers hold that buttering up the bosses can make them satisfied. So they always make unfair decisions to Chinese employees to flatter the Japanese GMs. It's hard to realize the role of a bridge between the Japanese top and the Chinese bottom. However, since you are responsible for it, make a good job of it. I support the Japanese GM on just ground and do not yield to any type of *guanxi*. Employees are not happy with this. Most of young employees are radical and impulsive. They scold that I am a traitor and I treat Chinese too harshly to be a Chinese and things like this. But I still insist that I am right. I never compromise any side. I support only the justice. (Mrs. Ning)

The trustful working relationship between me and the GM enables me to bridge better understanding between the Japanese GM and Chinese employees. I suggest the GM to reward employees with moon cake gifts on Mid-Autumn Festival. This action is very rare in Japan. However, this is the Chinese culture and habit, which could influence employees' working motivation. On the other side, I am trying my best to motivate Chinese employees to work overtime without payment as most Japanese employees do. (Mr. Cheng)

To be a qualified HR manager, one needs to have good communication skills; otherwise he/she is not a competent HR manager. What is communication? The aim of communication is to reach consensus at the end. A person who only communicates with no good results of consensus is not suitable for doing HR. It is really an art of canvassing. It depends on a person's inborn talent or capability nurtured during personal growth process. The communication angle to let everyone accept is really kind of art that is very important. (Mr. Wan)

Among this group and, not like any of the other groups, there was also some evidence of the 'Lelia's Couch' position as several respondents, unlike those in the previous groups, spoke of their relatively close relationships with GMs and other senior

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

managers:

As a result of this, the GM packs me in almost every meeting in the company. Almost every minute in everyday I am discussing either marketing or operation issues together with the GM and other relevant managers. The GM is from Japan. He always consult me, if the GM or other managers have some problems, formal or informal, they will come to talk about this with me. (Mrs. Feng)

You know I am giving counsels to the GM and trying to assist him to do the operation and management better. More than eighty percent of my advice could be accepted by him. (Mrs. Wan)

I take initiative in everything in the company. I offer my opinions. I provide a lot of suggestions and advice for the GM on many matters. And about 99 percent of my suggestions will be accepted by the GM and will be listened to. (Mrs. Ning)

It is possible that in these cases, the ability to be seen as being able to be close to the GM may have been related to differences in nationality and the need for non-Chinese GMs to have someone with whom they were comfortable to discuss issues relating to Chinese culture and practices. In this respect, there seemed to be a close relationship between the role of 'having the ear' of the GM and the 'bridging' role as outlined above by Mrs. Ning.

As was the case with the other groups of HR managers, this group placed an emphasis on the notion of *guanxi* and were particular to emphasise its use for external rather than internal relations. The account of Mr. Wan in relation to his connections with government are of interest because they, as in the previous chapter, suggest that

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

external *guanxi* was not seen necessarily in the usual pejorative sense but appeared to refer to a more collaborative form of relationship. In fact, it is interesting to notice that although this still had the elements of a status ritual, in terms of emphasising inclusion and exclusion of the parties, Mr. Wan implied that the balance of power had almost shifted towards the businesses, with the government officials needing to keep up in order not to be left behind in the rapidly developing economy:

I have to coordinate a lot of social networks outside. The majority is dealing with government institutions. The factor of Chinese government is very important and the power of Chinese government administration is very strong, different from those of Japan, U.S. or U.K. where the government administration is relatively weak in both policy quantity and strength. Chinese government's supervision and administration on enterprises are usually involved even though the enterprise can do its job independently. Moreover, the supervision and administration are not performed later but are executed in form of examining and giving approvals in advance. Due to the fast economic and company development in China, the government policies or regulations could easily lag behind. The government officials also realized this problem and they are now trying their best to issue policies or regulations that are up-to-date. Due to the inconsistency and changing nature of the policy and regulation, we really need to communicate with the government over the issue of policy understanding and implementation. (Mr. Wan)

Furthermore, according to Mr. Cheng, building good external *guanxi* with various social relationships makes HRM work less complicated. It was, however, of interest to note that when the respondents spoke of this need for supporting external *guanxi* relationships, they were concerned more with engaging with members of institutions that related to their need to ensure the smooth running of HR work, than with other

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

HR managers (in the interests of exchanging professional practices to develop the discipline of HR). Instead, the concerns tended to be of a more pragmatic nature. For example:

I have many friends in many aspects of the government, such as the Industrial and Commercial Bureau, the Labour Bureau, the Personnel Bureau, the Public Security Bureau and etc. Without friends, survival is difficult. Friends facilitate smooth work and reduce the avoidable troubles, right? (Mr. Cheng)

There are so many benefits of having good *guanxi* with government institutions. For example, if I have good *guanxi* with the Personnel or the Labour Bureau, they can treat my problems in comprehension and implementation of the policy more carefully and seriously. However, I do not mean to bribe them to make a good *guanxi*. I am a person who is very extrovert in making friends. So to use my advantages in building interpersonal relationships, I make friends with them sincerely. Of course they will help me in return if I am confused with some policies or regulations. But I never ask them for some special favour or cheat in my business. (Mrs. Feng)

This is similar in some ways to the results reported by Wright (2008) from HR managers in Australia where among the more senior HR managers, there tended to be an emphasis on networking with other HR managers but only with those who had the same form of specialism and, like the HR managers in this study, the focus was clearly on the practicalities of developing their own careers at the same time ensuring their reputation as competent managers was maintained internally to their organisation. For instance, it is interesting to note the broadly similar patterns in the response of one of Wright's respondents (Sophie) and that of Mrs. Feng above:

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

‘I know when other jobs are around. I know what other people are getting paid so I know my salary in the market. I know who is a good external facilitator. I know who’s had bad experiences with other companies. I know if some of my friends are working in other companies I can get cultural insider information from them and I give them the same so that we can compare what we’re doing and how we’re doing it.’

(Wright, 2008, p.1080)

It is interesting to note in this respect how this group of HR managers with a more strategic focus also showed a greater concern for developing their own careers through external *guanxi* networks. For the purpose of comparison with the other groups discussed earlier, Schein’s (1978) definition of Career Anchors will again be used. It will be recalled that for the first group of HR managers, the dominant response appeared as being a desire for Security/Stability with only some limited evidence of Technical/Functional Competence or General Managerial Competence. Whereas, for the second group of HR managers, two main patterns of career anchors were identified: firstly, those who were assigned to the HR profession appeared to be most strongly anchored in either a functional or managerial competence approach; secondly, those who had been assigned to HR and non-HR professions but who had then adopted a ‘searching’ approach that committed them to developing their functional competencies appeared more strongly anchored to ‘Dedication/Service’.

The present group of HR managers, however, provided somewhat different accounts of career anchors. In the previous groups, almost all the managers had been assigned to their first positions through the state system; however, almost all the respondents in this group spoke much more directly about how their previous experiences, which

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

were often quite diverse and involved a range of different activities, had influenced them to value challenging situations and to look for opportunities in a variety of ways. For this group, it therefore seemed that their careers were anchored more towards the notions of 'Entrepreneurial Creativity' combined with 'Pure Challenge'. For example, Mr. Wan, Mrs. Ning and Mrs. Feng all emphasised their enthusiasm for doing new and different things. Although they did not refer to being entrepreneurial in the form of starting a new business, it has been noted by Goss et al. (2010) that Schumpeter's (1934) concept of entrepreneurship was not restricted to business formation but involved "conduct that is directed towards something different and signifies doing something different from other conduct" (p.81). The three respondents above could be seen as expressing this desire to do something different in terms of undertaking different forms of occupational development. Although respondents in the other groups had also often moved between different occupations, their accounts of this process did not take the explicit emphasis on the attractiveness of the process of change as something that was welcomed which is found in the present respondents:

I am engineering major. I used to be assigned to do technical work in an SOE after graduation. I chose to leave the SOE and came to do engineering work in Toshiba Dalian in mid-1990s. I came to HR by continuous internal cultivation and promotion. I used to do technical jobs in the plant. Later on, I was promoted to operational management positions and then was promoted to the HR position. I enjoy the new opportunities to develop different skills and to apply these for new developments. (Mr. Wan)

I used to do sales work in an aquatic company, which is an SOE. I was assigned there after graduation. Later, I left the aquatic company and chose to do finance in this company in mid-1990s. At that time, the

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

former HR manager asked for maternity leave and then I took the place of her. I came into HR by chance. But as I entered to all these management areas, I have to develop them to guarantee the company development need. I am always very serious about my work performance and try always to excel at new challenges. (Mrs. Feng)

I came to the company due to the assignment after graduation. At that time, the company was a Sino-Japanese JV. I had worked as the administration staff, translator, secretary and technician. I have managed HR, finance, general affairs and product quality. Gradually I found HR suited me quite well. I was always enlightened by life to do better at whatever I did and I have never been afraid of doing different things. (Mrs. Ning)

Mrs. Qian also expressed a view of welcoming opportunities but in slightly less strong terms than the previous respondents. This seemed to be more in the context of responding to the challenges from opportunities rather than the strong desire to do something different. But even so, the possibility of challenge appeared to be welcomed and this was also reflected in the account of Mr. Cheng who had taken the relatively unusual opportunity to study abroad, and he contrasted himself to many of his contemporaries who were less adventurous:

I had no ideas to work in HR when I was studying in the university. I never thought that I am suitable for the job. I was assigned to be a translator in a Sino-Japanese JV after graduation. I was promoted by my former GM to the HR manager position and then I started my HR career. Actually it was the opportunity that pushed me to this position. Now I am happy for the opportunity and I am happy for the chance it gives me which is very far from my beginning. (Mrs. Qian)

I had worked in HR department since I finished my study in Japan. I

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

chose to work in HR because I think I am fit for HR job and HR is an important department for a company. I think it is helpful to have some culture knowledge to work in a wholly foreign owned company. I studied in Japan for many years. So knowing the culture knowledge enables me to innovate and coordinate more effectively. Many Chinese are conservatives and do not like to move from what they know but for me it is good to have lived outside my own culture. (Mr. Cheng)

In this group therefore, it seemed that the career anchors were more oriented towards challenges and opportunities than towards stability although it is not possible to tell from the present data whether this was as a result of their previous experiences of undertaking a diverse range of activities before arriving at their HR positions or whether this was the result of personality factors which disposed them towards a more entrepreneurial inclination (Baron, 2000; Chell et al., 1991). However, it did seem from their views on where they saw their careers progressing that these respondents maintained a similar openness to challenges and opportunities and several made it clear that they were not against moving out of HR. For example, several respondents appeared uncertain about where their future careers would take them (using words such as, 'I think') and although most expressed a desire to continue in HR, this appeared to be shaped by the level to which this could be matched with their desire for challenges. For instance, Mr. Wan was keen to emphasise that he had a reputation and that this offered him opportunities; Mrs. Feng emphasised her enthusiasm for HR but that she might wish to use these skills as part of activities in business development rather than simply in a narrow functional HR sense:

I think I will still work in HR Director position in this company. Many people know me in Dalian. Some of the private companies want me to work for them. They value greatly my expertise and ability. (Mr. Wan)

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

I will still be the HR Director, if I am not fired by the company [laughing]. I could transfer to business department. I would like to enrich myself with more business knowledge to lead both HR and business employees more effectively. I would like to cultivate more talented employees for the company's further development. (Mrs. Feng)

Mrs. Ning was more explicit about her desire for being anchored to a career that did not completely involve routine work. This was a similar view to that of Mr. Cheng who suggested directly that he was considering looking at different departments as a means of furthering his development beyond a role that he could come to regard as too narrow:

I think I will remain in HR because I think I like the job. I am amused by this job because the work is full of excitement and you can't expect what will happen next in the company. I would not want a job where I do not have to think about what I am going to do in the coming day or where I just follow routines. I am always looking to be inspired. (Mrs. Ning)

According to the current situation, I think I will continue. I have great passion in doing HR. But I think the scope of my duties is sometimes too narrow now, and my personal ability is constrained. If possible, I would like to engage in my own development, perhaps I may engage in the work of other departments. (Mr. Cheng)

Only Mrs. Qian gave a firm indication that she would definitely like to remain in the HR role and to develop this professional activity and this response is consistent with her view expressed above, which was slightly more 'passive' in her career pattern than the other respondents in this group:

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

I would like to do HRM more professionally. I was not a HRM major. I did HRM relying more on experiences instead of professional knowledge. I led HR by using my past experiences. I would like to enrich my theories in HRM. I hope I could do more systematic HRM in the future. (Mrs. Qian)

It seems therefore that for this group of HR managers, there was a pattern of career anchors that was different from that of the previous groups. In particular, it showed a greater tendency to favour a more entrepreneurial view and a search for challenges and opportunities rather than stability and security. However, this also suggests a paradox as this group showed the strongest commitment to a strategic role for HRM in conjunction with business strategy but, at the same time, appeared to have a lower commitment to HRM as a profession than did the previous group of functional managers. The present group was committed to HRM within the context of business improvement rather than as a professional discipline. It was notable that this group, although not alone among the groups considered, viewed their previous and varied experiences as factors that contributed to their current managerial strengths and abilities, allowing them to move beyond HR and develop their careers by bringing different insights to its application, whereas the other groups tended to view their past experiences more in terms of a route into HR which then became their 'settled' position (rather than an addition to it).

It can be noted that this pattern of response is similar to the view of Wright (2008) in his study of Australian HR managers in business partnership roles. Although the findings of Wright (2008) appear to show greater sophistication in relation to the ways in which his respondents saw their positions (regarding them as being closer to private management consultants - a group that is not currently as well established in China as

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

in developed countries), the pattern of the ‘paradox’ he identifies does appear as similar, although somewhat weaker among this group of Chinese HR managers:

‘. . . while the adoption of the discourse of ‘business partner’ and ‘internal consultant’ did allow individuals to appeal to senior managers as valued ‘servants of power’, this process also revealed a contrasting deprofessionalizing dynamic. First, those respondents which accentuated this trend appeared the most dismissive of any broader professional/occupational ethos. While it is entirely possible for individuals to maintain both strong organizational and professional identities, respondents to this study who had successfully attained organizational legitimacy largely rejected identification with a broader HR ‘profession’. Second, where an occupational affiliation was expressed by respondents, this was not so much directed to HRM as a generic occupation as to . . . rival occupations altogether.’

(Wright, 2008, p.1081)

In this respect this final group of Chinese HR managers appeared to have a different orientation to the two previous groups who generally appeared to be more conservative and narrowly functional in their outlook. One possible explanation for this more entrepreneurial approach is that they all worked for companies that were either wholly or partly foreign owned. However, this also applied to respondents in the other groups and, although it may be part of an explanation (in terms of exposure to different ways of working), it does not seem to be the complete answer. Given what has been said regarding the career anchors of these respondents it seems more likely that in this case, individual factors did play a more important part, suggesting a more individualistic orientation towards their own careers (compared to the normal Chinese emphasis on collectivism), which would also explain their reduced commitment to the

HR 'community' and the awareness that opportunities could be realised beyond this. This would therefore, explain why these respondents were working in less conventional companies, having been attracted to these by their opportunities, rather than being content to remain in their original assigned organization or functional area.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the final different pattern of HR managers' responses to their roles and the nature of HR work. This distinguished them from the previous two groups in terms of their strategic orientation and their relatively weaker attachment to HR as a distinct profession, rather than as one aspect of a broader approach to business management. Although the respondents were keen to emphasise their commitment to an involvement with business strategy, this was shown to be close to the notion of developing a HR strategy that would fit with the business orientation of the business, rather than the more developed strategic innovation focus of the so-called Resource Based View (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). Also, in terms of the nature of their roles, they appeared to be closest to a combination of Ulrich's Strategic Partner and Employee Champion roles, shaping HR policies to meet business objectives but also showed a strong unitarist concern for employee behaviour. However, although their strategic approach could not be regarded as being at the 'cutting edge' of strategic HRM, it was suggested as being appropriate for the context of China, where even wholly-owned foreign companies were likely to be strongly influenced by local practices (see Chapter Two above), thereby agreeing with Ulrich et al. (2008), that a rigorous functional approach may be the most appropriate way of delivering HR. In this latter respect there could be seen to be some overlap with the strong functional approach to HR adopted by the previous group of managers, however, with the

Chapter Six: Strategic Partners Group

current group there did appear to be wider differences which justified their separate identification. This was apparent in the area of their emotional responses where there was, as with the second group, evidence of a 'Withholding' pattern (the control of emotions to avoid influencing the emotions of employees). There was also the presence of Mediator/Guardian approach and Empathy at a Distance, but what mainly distinguished this group was the presence of the 'Lelia's Couch' position, involving relatively close relationships with GMs and other senior managers. Such 'closeness' had not been seen in the other groups where there was a more formal and deferential attitude towards hierarchical authority. There were also differences in career anchors, with a greater emphasis on the notions of 'Entrepreneurial Creativity' combined with 'Pure Challenge'. These patterns, in summary were suggested to be linked to stronger individual personality factors in this group which created a more individualistic orientation.

In the final chapter of this thesis, therefore, an attempt will be made to draw together the various themes and differences that have been identified and the grounded concepts that have been developed in the previous chapters. The final chapter will also provide an overall account of the research findings explored through the experiences of Chinese HR managers 'in their own words'.

Chapter Seven:
Conclusions

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

Introduction and Summary

Chapter Two provided an overview of recent developments in the field of HRM and their impact on the situation in China. It was noted that there had been limited investigation of the relationship between HR roles and career choices and only a few references concerning the emotional aspects of the role. Both of these issues were shown to be potentially significant for the work of Chinese HR managers and therefore required a better understanding in order to establish a full picture of Chinese HR practice (a need noted by Zheng and Lamond [2009] in their extensive review of the literature on Chinese HRM, and by Cooke [2009]). To address these issues the need was identified to capture the experience of HRM as seen from the Chinese HR manager's perspective, by letting Chinese HR managers speak for themselves. On this basis it was decided that the research would be guided by three broad research questions:

1. How do Chinese HR managers understand their role in relation to their organization and the wider changes in the Chinese economy?
2. How do Chinese HR managers understand their individual career patterns and how do they see these developing?
3. How do Chinese HR managers experience emotion in their HR activities and how is such emotion dealt with?

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

It was noted that there was a tendency for most studies of Chinese HRM to be dominated by survey-based methods and quantitative techniques. It was concluded that a meaningful understanding of HRM practices in China needed to consider the contextual aspects surrounding HRM and the ways in which these were experienced and understood from the perspective of the Chinese manager. In order to address the research questions and to help to fill this important gap in the existing approach to the study of Chinese HRM, the study placed an emphasis on capturing and interpreting the meaning of HR practices rather than merely measuring the presence of particular forms of practice.

An exploratory approach was adopted but with an openness to explanation by identifying patterns in the data and, where appropriate, drawing on ideas from relevant theories. A realist understanding was adopted that accepted the existence of material and structural processes but noted that these would be interpreted in different ways by social actors depending on their situation. It was also decided to use an inductive approach to provide patterns of meanings generated from the data that could either be identified as novel contributions or assessed in relation to existing theories and concepts.

A theoretical sample of 26 diverse companies was selected and at least one HR manager interviewed from each enterprise. Interviews were mostly conducted in Chinese, transcribed and then translated and back-translated. Although the sample was initially structured to ensure a range of different types of ownership (this having been identified as a potentially influential factor in previous studies), it was found after the initial analysis, that this did not produce any clear patterns. Examination of

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

the data did reveal consistent sets of accounts in terms of the role that respondents described their HR functions as playing. As this produced a clearer and more distinct pattern than a classification based on ownership, it was decided to use this as the major analytical framework to explore the nature of HR roles (this being grounded in the data). The three groups were named as: Restricted Functional; Professional Functional; and Strategic Partnership.

Chapter Four (Restricted Functional group) showed that these managers described their roles in terms of ‘order-taking’ from senior managers and providing a functional service that had little involvement in strategic decision-making. However, it was also shown that although this role involved compliance with the demands of others, it was not merely passive. The grounded notion of ‘buffering’ was introduced to describe how they balanced the demands of those at the top and the bottom of the organization, particularly through ‘tactful transmission’. It was shown that the role of these managers did not neatly fit into any of the established typologies of HR roles but tended to span across different role characteristics. In addition, a comparison was made with one of the few studies of HR emotions by Hiillos (2007). The results differed from that author’s Finnish study, mainly in terms of a lack of clear gender differences, but this was suspected as reflecting the small size of Hiillos’s sample. In addition, two new categories of emotional reaction, ‘Concern for Correct Attitudes’ and ‘Modesty’, were identified as grounded in the data, providing a further new insight into the nature of Chinese HR work. Finally an examination was made of the nature of the careers of these HR managers drawing on Schein’s Career Anchor types. Here it was found that little choice had been exercised in selecting a HR career and the commitment to HR as a profession appeared to be limited, with the closest match

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

to a career anchor being that of Stability. It was suggested that this could be an effect of the nature of the strong hierarchical power exercised in these organizations both in formal terms and through the more informal processes of *guanxi*. These were tentatively suggested as being possible examples of ‘power rituals’ (Goss & Doern, 2009) that resulted in a loss of emotional energy and enthusiasm to develop an enthusiastic approach to HR as a career.

In Chapter Five (Professional Functional Group) it was shown that this group of HR managers understood their roles differently from the previous group focused more strongly on the role of a professional functional identity. As for the previous group, these managers did not fit completely into the standard typologies of HR roles from the literature. They were located on the ‘interventionary’ dimension of Storey’s typology with an emphasis that varied from tactical to strategic (with those who had adopted a TF/GM career anchor more towards the tactical position and those with a SV career anchor towards the strategic). In Ulrich’s typology they were also in an ambiguous position spanning different cells. All demonstrated some concern for people and there was a mix of operational and strategic positions (although stronger towards the operational), but there was also a concern for process, which defined their sense of professional identity. It seemed that their roles were best seen as combination of the four positions in the typology, with the greatest emphasis in the area spanning the Employee Champion and Administrative Expert cells.

Two possible explanations were tentatively suggested to explain this greater professional commitment. On the one hand, the possibility that a well developed sense of professional identity was a result of a stronger individual commitment to a HR

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

career and also allowed HR issues to be advanced in a more proactive way. On the other hand was the possibility that HR managers were encouraged to develop greater professional competence by relatively weaker hierarchical authority so that they were not restricted only to order-taking. It was suggested that a combination of both explanations was probably involved and this was shown to be reflected in the emotional and career anchor reactions. In relation to the handling of emotion it was found that these managers tended to rely on the Empathy at a Distance and Mediator/Guardian approach, but it was also suggested that another type of handling were present (not identified by Hiillos), in the form of Withholding. This was seen as a deliberate control of individual emotions in order to influence the extreme emotional expressions of others, either by cooling them down, or by preventing their emergence. This form of emotion handling appeared to be well suited to the Professional Functional role as it involved a clear focus on how emotions needed to be managed (in the individual and other employees) in order to ensure the desired organizational outcomes compatible with the relevant HR policies and practices. This form of focus on delivering strong professional service was apparent also in these HR managers' views on their careers where respondents tended towards either the Technical/functional and General Managerial Competence (TF/GM) anchor or towards Service/dedication to a Cause (SV). Although the latter was seen to be associated with managers who were slightly more innovative towards the development of HR, both emphasised a deliberate focus on professional competence (as opposed to the more passive approach of the previous group).

Chapter Six (Strategic Partners) presented the final pattern of HR managers' responses and distinguished them from the previous two groups in terms of their

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

strategic orientation and weaker attachment to HR as a distinct profession. Their commitment to an involvement with business strategy was shown to be close to the external fit approach of developing a HR strategy that would fit with the business orientation of the business. In terms of the nature of their roles, they appeared to be closest to a combination of Ulrich's Strategic Partner and Employee Champion roles, shaping HR policies to meet business objectives but also showed a strong unitarist concern for employee behaviour. This approach was suggested as being appropriate for the context of China, where even wholly-owned foreign companies were likely to be strongly influenced by local practices (and potentially not ready for a more innovative RBV approach). In this latter respect there was seen to be some overlap with the previous group, although the current managers appear to have other wider differences which justified their separate identification. This was particularly in the form of emotion handling where there was an additional dimension, not found in the other groups, of the 'Lelia's Couch' approach, involving closer relationships with GMs and other senior managers. There were also differences in career anchors, with a greater emphasis on the notions of 'Entrepreneurial Creativity' combined with 'Pure Challenge'. These patterns, in summary were suggested to be linked to stronger individual personality factors in this group which created a more individualistic orientation.

Discussion

Having summarised the findings of the analysis of the data from the three groups, an attempt will be made now to relate the findings to an overall pattern and to produce an analysis of the picture that emerges from the total investigation. To do this initially, it was considered what factors appeared to vary in a systematic way across the three

groups and that could be used to distinguish the different roles with greater clarity. Four factors were decided as appropriate for this purpose and they are shown in relation to each group in Table 7.1, following which each will be discussed briefly in turn.

Table 7.1: HR roles and factors

Role dimension	Restricted Functional	Professional Functional	Strategic Partner
Buffering	Defensive	Programmed	Proactive
<i>Guanxi</i>	Internally constraining	Professionally moderated	Actively utilised
Emotion handling	Reactive	Engaged	Expansive
Career anchors	Passive	Focused	Entrepreneurial

Buffering

Buffering was a concept that was found to be grounded in each of the groups of HR managers although it took slightly different forms in each case. But in common to all the accounts was the idea that HR managers were in a ‘middle’ position between employees on the one hand and senior managers on the other. This is not a new finding and has been reported in other accounts of HR managers in western contexts (Hiillos, 2007; Legge, 2005). However, what was revealed in this study was that this buffering role could be conducted in different ways and that therefore, being in the

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

middle, was not a similar experience in all situations. The most basic form was a 'pluralist' approach in which HR managers saw themselves as trying to prevent conflict between workers and managers. This was termed 'defensive buffering' and associated with the Restricted Functional group. These managers were working in organizations that were SOEs, former SOEs or had workforces that came from such organizations and were aware that employees were used to a form of management that was close to Gouldner's 'indulgency pattern' rather than a market-driven system. However, because these organizations were strong in hierarchical authority, the HR managers were aware that any forms of employee resistance or expressed dissatisfaction would be viewed unfavourably by senior managers. They therefore adopted on a form of buffering that focused on establishing a 'negotiated order' in which employees were kept 'happy' by careful forms of communication and relative leniency in order to maintain a stable status quo. This form was termed 'defensive' because HR managers perceived it as an activity that was always ongoing in order to maintain a fragile order and avoid forms of dispute that would anger senior managers. It was not focused specifically on securing HR objectives but was concerned mainly with maintaining the existing status quo and creating the appearance of order.

The second form of buffering was associated with the Professional Functional group and also involved being in between top management and employees. However, in this case the HR managers of this group appeared to adopt a more active role in this process rather than merely reacting to concern about disapproval from senior managers. In particular they emphasised that although it was important to ensure that employees were treated with fairness, they regarded it as more important to ensure that this good will was directed towards ensuring that HR policies were properly

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

followed. Unlike the previous group, they regarded buffering less as a way to keep top managers happy (by reducing the risk of conflict) but rather as an activity that they could use to demonstrate to senior managers their ability to deliver value through the application of HR policies. Thus, although they were still involved in the process of 'tactful transmission' (like the previous group) they did not regard this as a defensive activity but rather the opposite, in the form of a way of promoting a programme of HR initiatives as a successful addition to business effectiveness.

The final form of buffering was present within the Strategic Partner group. This could be seen as an extension of the Programmed approach as it also involved mediating communications to ensure effective HR activities. However, the buffering that was used by this group tended to involve more communication between top managers and middle managers than between top managers and employees. This tended to be a reflection of the fact that these HR managers tended to be more closely associated with senior managers and involved in their strategic discussions. With these managers the emphasis was not only on delivering HR contributions but on buffering between HR and other management functions. In particular, their interest was in shaping performance agendas by attempting to embed HR awareness in other middle managers. Thus, although they were still looking at HR strategy as following from and supporting business strategy, their more active involvement in the decision-making process at senior level could be regarded as an indication of a possible move towards a more sophisticated form of HR utilisation in a way similar to the search for unique and valuable human competencies of the sort associated with the RBV approach to strategic HRM.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

Guanxi

The issue of *guanxi* provided for another theme that was common to all groups but also showed differences between them in how it was experienced. This result was not a surprising one given the differences in the Chinese meaning of the term identified in Chapter Two (which could be crudely distinguished between a pejorative use, usually referring to acts regarded as being close to corruption, and a more favourable form that indicated the existence of relationships involving reciprocal obligations based on trust rather than power). However it was significant that the variations in the ways in which the respondents spoke regarding the nature of *guanxi*, did appear to be consistent with their more general accounts of the nature of their organizations and roles.

When the Restricted Functional group spoke of *guanxi* they spoke about it as a mainly internal process within their organizations that they saw as closely linked to the power structures of the organization. In particular, they regarded *guanxi* as a process that focused on the most senior managers in the organization and that would be more important than formal policies and practices when it was in operation. Their descriptions of the operation of *guanxi* were consistent with the notion of power rituals (Collins, 2004) in which they were in the role of ‘order-takers’ in relation to the order-giving senior managers. This created the problem for them that, when building these relations of deference towards the senior managers, there was an expectation that they would always put personal loyalty towards the senior manager in favour of conformity to HR formal HR policies or principles of ‘good practice’. The result was that *guanxi* was perceived as a constraint upon their ability to practice effective HR as the latter was always subordinate to the demands of those in control

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

of the organization. Their perception appeared to be that any attempt to resist the demands of a *guanxi* relationship would result in displeasure from above and damage to their position within the organization and therefore hence, their mostly passive reactions. This could be seen as linked to the tendency for their careers to be mostly anchored in notions of stability and their emotion handling techniques strongly influenced by the need for Modesty (see below). As such they had little resources to draw on in order to resist the operation of *guanxi* that had an adverse effect on HR policies (unlike the other groups).

The Professional Functional group also spoke about the ways in which internal *guanxi* could cause problems for the operation of HR policies but unlike the previous group they did not see this as something that they were powerless to resist. In particular, they saw their commitment to a professional HR identity as one way in which they could challenge what they regarded as the inappropriate use of *guanxi* within the organization. Because of their stronger commitment to the ideal of a professional HR function that had an important role to play in maintaining organizational success, they emphasised that matters relating to factors such as recruitment, promotion and reward should be handled through HR practices and not subject to informal influence. They appeared to be able to make such a requirement because of the more prominent role that HR played in these organizations and its official recognition as a source of value. Hence although there remained internal hierarchical power rituals in these organizations they seemed to be given more balance (than was the case with the Restricted Functional group) by the presence of the presence of the professional identity roles and official HR discourses of the HR managers. In fact they did not attach much significance to the use of *guanxi* as an internal organizational issue and

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

rather focused their discussions of it on the relationships with external bodies and, in particular state bodies. In talking about these relationships they appeared to use the *guanxi* term in the more positive sense, and emphasised how these relationships has a professional and reciprocal focus that was intended to ensure the mutual benefit of all parties rather the control of one by another. This was seen to show similarities with the notion of a 'status ritual' where, unlike the emphasis on giving and taking orders in power rituals, the emphasis was rather on inclusion or exclusion from the relationship of relevance. These status rituals were hypothesised (on the basis of the work of Collins [2004] and Goss and Doern [2009]) to be less emotionally draining than having to participate in power rituals (as an order-taker) and could be therefore suggested to have provided these managers with more enthusiasm and emotional support to develop their HR commitment than the Professional Functional managers. Therefore this pattern was named as 'professionally moderated' in order to suggest the way in which the commitment to professional standards provided the basis for resisting what was regarded as inappropriate *guanxi* within the organization, and for underpinning the relationships with external parties.

Finally, the Strategic Partner group showed a pattern of *guanxi* experiences similar in most aspects to the previous group. However, there was a main difference as these respondents made greater use of their positive *guanxi* connections as both a way of promoting their businesses externally (e.g., by offering advice on latest trends to government agencies, rather than merely consulting with them on technical matters as tended to be the case with the previous group), and as a means of exploring future career opportunities, as this group tended to be less committed to a stable career anchor and more open for entrepreneurial opportunities. For this reason, the approach

to *guanxi* was referred to as Active Utilised.

Emotion Handling

On the theme of emotion handling, where very little previous research has been undertaken, three broad patterns were identified which differentiated the different groups of HR managers. This study made use of the framework developed by Hiillos on the basis of a small qualitative study of Finnish HR managers. Because the latter study was exploratory and small the current study looked to determine whether the patterns identified by Hiillos (2007) were present but also to examine the data for patterns that could emerge inductively. The main differences between the three groups are shown in Table 7.2. The responses of the Restricted Functional group were referred to as Reactive because they tended to handle emotions in a way that focused on an anxiety about the potential expression of conflict from employees and about being perceived as too forthright in their expression of ways in which to organize business. Thus they appeared to be reacting to pressures from above and below by using expressions of anxiety about maintaining ‘correct attitudes’ and adopting a position of ‘modesty’ which appeared to give emotional justification for their subordinate position in the managerial hierarchy.

The Professional Functional group were identified as having a pattern referred to as Engaged because they used techniques of emotion handling that were more focused on maintaining professional standards through an emphasis on the mediation of potential conflicts and achieved this through an attempt to deliberately manage their own emotions in order not to create or escalate tensions in others (employees and senior managers) that would create inefficiencies for the organization. This was

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

captured in the technique of Withholding that was distinguished from Hiillos's notion of Withdrawal. Withholding differentiated this group from the Restricted Functional managers as it seemed to be a conscious attempt to manage emotions rather than a reactive response to situations.

The Strategic Partner group's style of emotion handling was labelled as Expansive because it appeared to be a more developed form of the techniques used by the Professional Functional managers. The main difference in this respect was that the Strategic Partner group tended to be involved in the Lelia's Couch technique which involved them in much closer relations of trust and confidence with the senior managers of the organization, whereas the previous group had not expanded into this type of involvement, still being mostly in a more formal hierarchical relationship with their top managers. Although this shows only a small difference from the previous group, the greater emotional involvement that these managers had with their organizations' senior managers can be regarded as having a significant impact in terms of helping to confirm the more strategic nature of their role and, potentially, as contributing to their confidence to develop more entrepreneurial careers. This latter would be likely to be enabled by their closer links to senior and general managers that could be expected to open opportunities into management areas beyond the HR function.

Table 7.2: HR roles and emotion handling

Emotion handling	Restricted Functional	Professional Functional	Strategic Partner
Empathy at a distance (ED)	++	++	++
Mediator/Guardian (MG)	+	++	++
Lelia's Couch (LC)	0	0	++
Outsourcing (OS)	0	0	0
Withdrawal (WD)	+	0	0
Modesty (M)	++	0	0
Concern for Correct Attitudes (CCA)	++	+	+
Withholding (WH)	0	++	++

Career Anchors

The theme of career anchors has also not been explored in any detail in relation to HR managers and here distinct patterns were again identified with each group, using Schein's model as a rough basis for making comparisons. As with the different approaches to the emotion handling theme, the summary differences are shown in Table 7.3. The pattern for the Restricted Functional group was labelled 'Passive' as the dominant anchor was a desire for Stability and Security, followed by a limited concern for Technical and Managerial Competence. This is considered to be consistent with the other themes identified above and could be suggested as reflecting the position of these managers within organizations with strong power rituals and dominant hierarchical authority, meaning that such a passive career anchor would

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

reflect their subordinate position and their concern to ensure modesty of behaviour and expressions.

For the Professional Functional group, the career anchor pattern appeared to be more focused. In particular, they appeared to have anchors which were based on either the desire for Technical/functional and Managerial Competence (TF/GM) or Service/Dedication to a Cause (SV). It was noted that the dominance of these two anchors tended to vary, with some managers in this group being more focused on what could be regarded as 'administrative competence' in HR, whereas others (with dominant SV anchor) showed a greater interest in being more innovative towards HR practice and looking for new ways to develop its application.

This latter theme was continued more strongly in the Strategic Partnership group where the dominant anchors were either the desire for Challenge or the use of Entrepreneurial Creativity. These appeared to have overtaken Technical/functional and General Managerial Competence (TF/GM) which were present but given less of an emphasis. This again would seem to reflect to more outward-facing approach of these managers and their concern for careers that were not necessarily restricted to the HR function (possibly also reflecting the fact that most of this group had come to HR from different management functions and had therefore already experienced less fixed career paths).

Table 7.3: HR roles and career anchors

Career anchor	Restricted Functional	Professional Functional	Strategic Partner
Technical and Functional Competence (TF)	+	++	+
General Managerial Competence (GM)	+	++	++
Autonomy/Independence (AU)	0	0	0
Security/Stability (SE)	++	+	0
Entrepreneurial Creativity (EC)	0	0	++
Pure Challenge (CH)	0	0	++
Service/Dedication to a Cause (SV)	0	++	0
Life Style (LS)	0	0	0

From the discussion above it can be seen that the three groups of HR managers initially identified on the basis of the differences in their accounts of their HR roles, have also shown consistent differences on a number of other themes that emerged from the data. As such it can be tentatively suggested that these three types of Chinese HR manager are worthy of further investigation in order to determine if they can be found using a larger sample that could demonstrate statistical generality, rather than the theoretical sampling technique used for this study which, although it has shown consistent results, is not of sufficient size to allow such wide generalization. However before turning to other issues for future investigation, some comment is needed relating to the possible causes of these differences. It has been suggested in the

previous chapters that the different patterns of HR manager role appear to be due to combinations of structural factors (such as organization structure and especially power rituals) and individual factors or agency (such as experiences of different jobs, desire for challenge). It is therefore possible to use these two dimensions, power rituals and individual agency to show the differences in HR role, see Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: HR roles, power ritual and agency

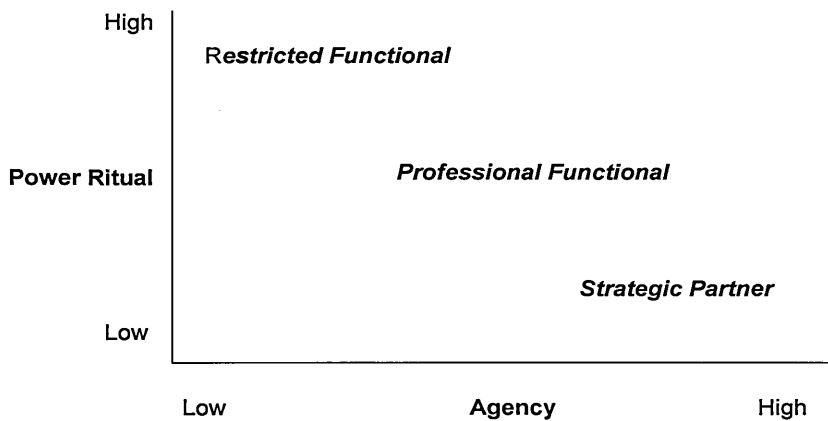


Figure 7.1 shows that where there are strong power rituals and limited individual agency, the resulting form of HR activity will tend to be towards the passive and reactive. However, if the strength of power rituals declines and agency increases, then there is more likelihood of a stronger professional focus (as the role is not completely dominated by the power ritual and increased agency allows for some innovation within the limits of the weaker power ritual. Finally, where power rituals involving HR managers are relatively weak (i.e., they are not defined only as order-takers) and there is greater individual agency, then the role may become more dynamic and strategic. The diagram in Figure 7.1 is intended to give an approximate indication of the relationships involved. The power ritual axis can be seen to represent the level of hierarchical authority to which the HR managers were subjected (in terms of being

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

defined as order-takers) and this can be regarded as the more dominant of the axes as (as was shown in Chapter Four) some HR managers with some personal ambition may find that this is restricted by the strict hierarchical control that is exercised in their organizations. The axis of Agency can be seen as a reflection of individual differences that could be shaped by a variety of factors such as personality, social background, experience and education. Thus where individuals have gained a strong level of confidence in relation to HR and have a personal ambition to succeed, they may be able to overcome the constraints imposed by organizational power rituals or, as was shown in Chapter Six, they may actively seek out forms of employment in organizations where power rituals are weaker and where their ambitions have more opportunity for development. It is of interest to note that this possibility may be a relatively recent phenomenon that has become available really only since the economic reforms allowed greater labour market mobility and this was a relaxation of state placement of employees. Thus these dimensions provide a useful way of summarising the patterns found in the data and relating them to constructs (power and hierarchy and individual difference) found in the wider literature and therefore providing a way in which comparisons could be made with other studies. It can also be noted that Figure 7.1 shows two 'empty' positions (bottom left and top right – low-low and high-high). It would be in theory possible for these positions to be filled but there was no evidence for this in the present study. On the low-low position, this might represent organizations that were relatively democratic but where the HR manager lacked ambition or enthusiasm. This might be possibly the case in small co-operative enterprises where the control of the organization remained in the hands of a committee of employees and where the HR saw their role as only to administer what the managing committee desired. Although once relatively common in China, such

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

forms of organization have tended to become more market-focused and those that remain have remained small and isolated, this being one reason for not including them in the present study. The high-high position would involve strong power rituals and strong agency. This might be the situation that was more common under strict state control, where ambitious employees had no alternative but to remain within strongly hierarchical organizations. It might be likely that under these conditions such individuals would either attempt to leave the HR role in order to seek ambitions by becoming general managers or, as was seen to have happened in some cases in Chapter Six, to find different employment in less hierarchical organizations. As with the low-low position, the nature of the organizations studied did not reveal any clear instances of this position.

At this point, now it is possible to return to the original research questions.

1. How do Chinese HR managers understand their role in relation to their organisation and the wider changes in the Chinese economy?

In the discussion above, it was shown that the roles were understood in three different patterns that appeared to reflect differences in structural power rituals and individual agency. Although there was not a complete match, it seemed that the strength of power rituals in organizations was a reflection of the sort of sectors in which they operated (rather than simply ownership, although many of those with the strongest power rituals were SOEs or former SOEs), with traditional heavy manufacturing sectors with little competitive pressure, appearing to adopt a form of bureaucratic structure that maintained power concentration and was a legacy of state control. In sectors that were more competitive pressure and more involvement on foreign

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

organizations, there appeared to be a reduction in the strength of power rituals or their moderation by forms of meritocratic competition. It therefore remains to be seen whether the Restricted Functional HR role will decline as the Chinese economy becomes increasingly open and competitive.

2. How do Chinese HR managers understand their individual career patterns and how do they see these developments?

Here it was shown that responses varied from very conservative to entrepreneurial. It was noted that those with the most entrepreneurial approach tended to have had more diverse careers in the past. As above, as free career choice becomes increasingly common in the Chinese economy (rather than state placement), it may be expected that career aspirations become more varied and passive. However, this may mean (as was shown by the Strategic Partner group, that there will be less devotion to a technically specialist career (such as HR). Therefore, for HR professionalism to be strengthened in China it may be necessary for an association of Chinese HR professionals to be strengthened in order to maintain professional standing and attractiveness and not to lose good managers to other specialisms.

3. How do Chinese HR managers experience emotion in their HR activities and how is such emotion being dealt with?

This question showed that patterns of handling emotions also varied from in a way that reflected the power structures and agency levels involved, ranging from passive acceptance and anxiety about pleasing senior managers to close bonds with such

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

managers and a greater enthusiasm change and excitement. As emotions have been little studied in relation to HR work, it is not possible to draw comparisons, but it seems that in a society that is more complex and experiencing rapid change, such as China, the range of emotions involved may be more variable than in more stable and developed countries (such as Finland, subject of the study by Hiillos [2007]). Recognising how such changes may affect the emotions of HR managers and how they handle them (whether they tend towards emotional security or emotional excitement) may be important in shaping how the practice of the profession develops.

At this point it is possible to summarise the contribution to knowledge made by this thesis.

1. It has supported the ideas of studies such as those of Wei and Lau (2005) that ownership may not be the main determining factor in shaping Chinese HRM practices. Whereas the latter's approach was broad, the qualitative approach of this study has shown what other factors could exert an influence (such as hierarchical structure and individual differences) which also supports Gamble's (2003) idea that the local structures of control may be important in shaping HR practices.
2. It has shown a tension in the debates about the role of HR managers and offers a need for caution when looking at the changes in HR roles advocated by major gurus such as Ulrich (2008). Whereas Ulrich's most recent work suggests that HR professions should abandon the role of 'employee advocate' in favour of the outsourcing of routine HR work to 'shared services' and the HR manager becoming an 'organizational consultant' for specific HR projects based on technical expertise, the current study has shown that the notion of 'caring' for employees and looking after their interests remains strong in the Chinese context. It was also shown that this

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

provided a considerable source of emotional reward for HR managers and gave them a pride in their achievements. In this respect the contribution of this study can be seen as a warning to HR professionals in the West that this aspect of their work is not something that should be lightly abandoned as it may have significant consequences for both professionals themselves and for employees more generally. On this respect it supports the warning of Critical HRM thinkers such as Legge (2005) and Marchington and Grugalis (2000).

3. The study has made a valuable contribution to the role of emotion in HR work. This has been very much under-researched and the results of these studies have built on the work of Hiillos (2007) to demonstrate that there do appear to be common forms of emotions between the Chinese HR managers and those she interviewed in Finland but that importantly: a) although similar emotional patterns were present these appeared in different configurations in the Chinese sample (which may again reflect the different organizational conditions involved); b) that the influence of gender was not as significant as that found by Hiillos which may be a feature of the more general collective orientation of Chinese culture.

4. The study through this analysis of emotion also contributed to showing the significance of *guanxi* practices within Chinese organizations. Many studies in HRM have treated *guanxi* as a simple phenomenon that is viewed in negative terms (Chen et al., 2004; Zhu, 2005; Parnell, 2005). In this study it was revealed that HR managers used *guanxi* in different ways for external and internal relationships and, in some cases, attempted to avoid being involved in this practice. As such these results, give support, but in a more detailed form, to those writers who claim that *guanxi* is complex and with different dimensions (e.g., Fan, 2002; Alston, 1989; Gamble, 2006).

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

5. The study has also contributed to the area of HR career development which has been seen to be largely unresearched in any form. As such it used a version of the notion of career anchors to show that there is an emerging picture of diverse career patterns in the Chinese HR profession that appear to be shaped by individual ambitions and organizational opportunities created by the changes in market conditions. This can be seen as extending the work of Wong (2007; Wong & Slater, 2002) which had looked at the notion of career anchors in an Asian context but had not covered mainland China.

6. Finally, the study makes a contribution to knowledge of HRM in China by filling an important gap that has been identified in many of the recent reviews of Chinese HRM, in the form of the lack of qualitative studies of Chinese managers (e.g., Zhu et al., 2008) and of HR managers in particular. By presenting a view of the nature and roles of Chinese HR work through the words of Chinese HR managers themselves, this study has presented a body of rich data that provides a very unusual insight into the experiences of a group that has been widely explored from the 'outside' but has been given little opportunity to 'speak for itself'.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations of the present study have already been mentioned and include the use of a relatively small and not statistically representative sample. Although within the sample the differences between the three groups appear to be robust, this will need to be tested by the application to a larger and more representative sample. It is felt that the three categories of managers could be turned into measurable variables, based on the differences in key themes identified above, and their existence in more general terms determined.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

A second limitation could be seen as an over-reliance on qualitative data and lengthy quotations from interviewees. Although as was discussed in the Methodology Chapter, this raises issues of potential subjective bias, it was considered that this was overcome by the depth and texture that this material added. Firstly, it is believed that this is probably one of the most detailed accounts of Chinese HR work seen from the perspective of the HR managers themselves and, as was suggested earlier, offers a valuable insight into their word by allowing them 'to speak for themselves'. Secondly, it can be argued that many of the distinctions in the themes would not have been apparent if a less detailed and 'authentic' method had been used. Finally, it can be suggested that because of the large quotations used, the reader can make a more informed judgement for themselves about the validity of the interpretations than if the data had been more highly processed by the researcher. In addition, the factors identified could be tested through subsequent more quantitative approaches both for greater generality and to develop more consistent constructs based on the original ideas.

Another issue that did not potentially receive adequate attention in the current study is the issue of gender. With the benefit of hindsight, more questioning on this issue would have taken place, particularly to explore the emotional dimensions. This is also an interesting issue for further research as, even though this study did not examine the issue in detail, it did not seem to suggest the patterns found in Hiillos's (2007) study. It would be interesting to examine this in relation to Chinese culture relating to gender differences and how these are changing and to examine whether this lack of difference was influenced by the practice of state assignment to careers rather than free market choice.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

Finally there is a theoretical issue which concerns the relationship between power structures and individual agency which was discussed above. Here there are two main concerns that would deserve further investigation. The first could be the possibility that the two dimensions of power structures and agency are not independent and therefore should not be used as separate dimensions for causal rather than for descriptive purposes. Research by Goss (2010; 2008) has suggested that agency can be seen as a function of power ritual status (i.e., that strong power rituals reduce the agency of those who are order-takers). However, this is still a mainly theoretical model, but as this study has shown variations in the two dimensions it would be interesting to develop a study that could test the relationship between the two in terms of causal relationships, which was not possible with the present data. As Goss (2010) has suggested this would require longitudinal data that was beyond the scope of the present research. However, the presence of the two dimensions does mean that such a study could be possible for a future time. The second concern is that the notion of agency has not been well defined and has mainly emerged from apparent differences in aspirations and enthusiasm. This is not uncommon in the study of agency as a sociological notion (as Goss [2010] has shown) but it is a potential limitation and a future study might include more structured measures of individual differences such as personality profiles, measure of cognitive and emotional intelligence and other cognitive processes.

However, taken together it is considered that this study has addressed its research questions and aims and has contributed to knowledge of the HR professional role in China by identifying some novel patterns and types of activity, some of which could apply to HR roles more generally, and has identified potentially interesting and

relevant areas for future investigation.

References

References

Ackers, P., & Wilkinson, A. (2003). *Understanding work and employment: Industrial relations in transition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ahlstrom, D., Bruton, G., & Chan, E. S. (2001). HRM of foreign firms in China: The challenge of managing host country personnel. *Business Horizons*, 44(3), 59-68.

Alston, J. (1989). Wa, *guanxi*, and inhwa: Managerial principles in Japan, China, and Korea. *Business Horizon*, 32(2), 26-31.

Anderson, V. (2004). *Research methods in human resource management*. London: CIPD.

Armstrong, M. (1992). *Human resource management: Strategy and action*. London: Kogan Page Limited.

Armstrong, M. (2000). *A handbook of human resource management practice*. London: Kogan Page Limited.

Armstrong, M. (2000). *Strategic human resource management: A guide to action* (2nd ed.). London: Kogan Page Limited.

Ashkanasy, N. M., Hartel, C. E. J., & Zerbe, W. J. (2000). *Emotions in the workplace: research, theory, and practice*. Westport: Quorum Books.

References

Barney, J. B. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99-120.

Barney, J. B., & Wright, P. M. (1998). On becoming a strategic partner: The role of human resources in gaining competitive advantage. *Human Resource Management*, 37(1), 31-46.

Baron, R. (2000). Psychological Perspectives on Entrepreneurship: Cognitive and social factors in entrepreneurs' success. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(1), 15-18.

Baruch, Y., & Peiperl, M. (2000). Career management practices: An empirical survey and implications. *Human Resource Management*, 39(4), 347-366.

Becker, B. E., & Huselid, M. A. (1998). High performance work systems and firm performance: a synthesis of research and managerial implications. In K. M. Rowland & G. R. Ferris (Eds.), *Research in personnel and human resource management* (pp.53-101). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Benson J., & Zhu, Y. (1999). Markets, firms and workers in Chinese state-owned enterprises. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 9(4), 58-74.

Björkman, I. (2002). The diffusion of human resource management practices among Chinese firms: The role of Western multinational corporations. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 9(2), 43-60.

References

- Bjorkman, I., & Fan, X. (2002). Human resource management and the performance of Western firms in China. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13(6), 853-864.
- Bjorkman, I., & Lu, Y. (2001). Institutionalization and bargaining power explanations of HRM practices in international joint ventures - The case of Chinese-Western joint ventures. *Organization Studies*, 22(3), 491-512.
- Bowen, D. E., & Ostroff, C. (2004). Understanding HRM-firm performance linkages: The role of the "strength" of the HRM system. *The Academy of Management Review*, 29(2), 203-221.
- Bowling, A. (2003). *Research methods in health: Investigating health and health services*. London: Open University Press.
- Boxall, P. (1996). The strategic HRM debate and the resource-based view of the firm. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 6(3), 59-75.
- Boxall, P. F. (1993). The significance of human resource management: A reconsideration of the evidence. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 4(3), 645-664.
- Boxall, P., & Purcell, J. (2003). *Strategy and human resource management*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

References

Branine, M. (1997). Change and continuity in Chinese employment relationships. *New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations*, 22, 77–94.

Brown, A., Forde, C., Spencer, D., & Charlwood, A. (2004). Changes in HRM and job satisfaction, 1998-2004: Evidence from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 18(3), 237-256.

Bryant, A. (2003). A constructive/ist response to Glaser. *Forum: Qualitative social research sozialforschung*, 4(1).

Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (Eds.) (2007). *The Sage handbook of grounded theory*. London: Sage.

Bryman, A. (2001). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bu, N., & Roy, J.-P. (2008). Chinese managers' career success networks: The impact of key tie characteristics on structure and interaction practices. *The International Human Resource Management Journal*, 19(6), 1088-1107.

Burke, R. J., & Ng, E. (2006). The changing nature of work and organizations: Implications for human resource management. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16(2), 86-94.

Caldwell, R. (2003). The changing roles of personnel managers: Old ambiguities, new uncertainties. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(4), 983-1004.

References

Caldwell, R. (2008). HR business partner competency models: re-contextualising effectiveness. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 18(3), 275-294.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.

Chell, E., Haworth, J. M., & Brearley, S. A. (1991). *The Entrepreneurial Personality*. London: Routledge.

Chen, C. C., Chen, Y.-R., & Xin, K. (2004). Guanxi practices and trust in management: A procedural justice perspective. *Organization science*, 15(2), 200-209.

Chen, S., & Wilson, M. (2003). Standardization and localization of human resource management in Sino-foreign joint ventures. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 20(3), 397-408.

Cheng, J. Y. S. (1989). Introduction. In J. Y. S., Cheng (Ed.), *China in the post-Deng era* (pp.1-20). Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Child, J. (1991). A foreign perspective on the management of people in China. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2(1), 93-107.

Child, J. (1994). *Management in China during the age of reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

References

Child, J. (1995). Changes in the structure and prediction of earnings in Chinese state enterprises during the economic reform. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 6(1), 1–30.

Chiu, W. C. K. (2002). Do types of economic ownership matter in getting employees to commit? An exploratory study in the People's Republic of China. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13(6), 865-882.

Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Colbert, B. A. (2004). The complex resource-based view: Implications for theory and practice in strategic human resource management. *The Academy of Management Review*, 29(3), 341-358.

Collings, D. G., & Scullion, H. (2008). Resourcing international assignees. In M. Dickmann, C. Brewster, & P. Sparrow (Eds.), *International human resource management: A European perspective* (2nd ed.) (pp.87-106). Oxon: Routledge.

Collins, C. J., & Clark, K. D. (2003). Strategic human resource practices, top management team social networks, and firm performance: The role of human resource practices in creating organizational competitive advantage. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 46(6), 740-751.

Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction ritual chains*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.

References

Conner, K. R. (1991). A historical comparison of resource-based theory and five schools of thought within industrial organization economics: Do we have a new theory of the firm? *Journal of Management*, 17 (1), 121–154.

Cooke, F. L. (2000). Manpower restructuring in the state-owned railway industry of China: The role of the state in human resource strategy. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 11(5), 904–924.

Cooke, F. L. (2000). Ownership change and reshaping of employment relations in China: A study of two manufacturing companies. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 44(1), 19-39.

Cooke, F. L. (2004). Foreign firms in China: Modelling HRM in a toy manufacturing corporation. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 14(3), 31-52.

Cooke, F. L. (2009). A decade of transformation of HRM in China: A review of literature and suggestions for future studies. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 47(1), 6-40.

Creswell, J. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative Approach*. London: Sage Publication.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publication.

References

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. London: Sage.

Cushing, L., & Tompkins, A. (2007). *Chinese posters: Art from the great proletarian cultural revolution*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Cutcliffe, J. R. (2005). Adapt or adopt: developing and transgressing the methodological boundaries of grounded theory. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 51(4), 421-428.

De Cieri, H., Cox, J. W., & Fenwick, M. (2007). A review of international human resource management: Integration, interrogation, imitation. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 9(4), 281-302.

Deng, J., Menguc, B., & Benson, J. (2003). The impact of human resource management on export performance of Chinese manufacturing enterprises. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 45(4), 409-429.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage Publication.

Ding, D. Z., & Akhtar, S. (2001). The organizational choice of human resource management practices: A study of Chinese enterprises in three cities in the PRC. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 12(6), 946-964.

References

Ding, D. Z., Goodall, K., & Warner, M. (2000). The end of the 'iron rice-bowl': whither Chinese human resource management? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 11(2), 217-236.

Ding, D. Z., Goodall, K., & Warner, M. (2002). The impact of economic reform on the role of trade unions in Chinese enterprises. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13(3), 431-449.

Ding, D., Fields, D. & Akhtar, S. (1997). An empirical study of human resource management policies and practices in foreign-invested enterprises in China: The case of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 8(5), 595-613.

Doorewaard, H., & Benschop, Y. (2003). HRM and organizational change: An emotional endeavour. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 16(3), 272-286.

Dorn, J. A., & Wang, X. (1990). *Economic reform in China: Problems and prospects*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Douglas, D. (2003). Grounded theories of management: A methodological review. *Management Research News*, 26(5), 44-52.

Douglas, D. (2004). Grounded theory and the 'And' in entrepreneurship research. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 2(2).

References

Dyer, L., & Reeves, T. (1995). Human resource strategies and firm performance: What do we know and where do we need to go? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 6(3), 656-670.

Easterby-Smith, M., Malina, D. & Yuan, L. (1995). How culture-sensitive is HRM? A comparative analysis of practice in Chinese and UK companies. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 6(1), 31-59.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Lowe, A. (2002). *Management research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

England, G. W. (1983). Japanese and American management: Theory Z and beyond. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 14(2), 131-142.

Fan, Y. (2002). Questioning *guanxi*: definition, classification and implications. *International Business Review*, 11(5), 543-561.

Farh J.-L., Tsui, A. S., Xin, K., Cheng, B.-S. (1998). The Influence of relational demography and *guanxi*: The Chinese case. *Organization Science*, 9(4), 471-488.

Farhang, M. (1999). The human resource dimension of international technology transfer: Identification and analysis of training needs. *Journal of Euromarketing*, 7(3), 79-93.

References

Farley, J. U., Hoenig, S., & Yang, J. Z. (2004). Key factors influencing HRM practices of overseas subsidiaries in China's transition economy. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(4&5), 688-704.

Feldman, D. C. (1995). The impact of downsizing on organizational career development activities and employee career development opportunities. *Human Resource Management Review*, 5(3), 189-221.

Feldman, D. C., & Bolino, M. C. (1997). Careers within careers: Reconceptualizing the nature of career anchors and their consequences. *Human Resource Management Review*, 6(2), 89-112.

Fine, G. A. (1984). Negotiated orders and organizational cultures. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10, 239-262.

Fineman, S. (2004). Getting the measure of emotion—and the cautionary tale of emotional intelligence. *Human Relations*, 57(6), 719–740.

Francis, H., & Keegan, A. (2006). The changing face of HRM: In search of balance. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 16(3), 231-249.

Franzway, S. (2000). Women working in a greedy institution. *Gender Work and Organization*, 7(4), 258-268.

References

Fulop, L., & Linstead, S. (2004). Motivation and meaning. In S. Linstead, L. Fulop, & S. Lilley (Eds.), *Management and Organization* (pp.280-323). Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Fung, K. C., Iizaka, H., & Tong, S. (2002). 'Foreign Direct Investment in China: Policy, Trend and Impact'. Paper presented at 'International Conference on China's Economy in the 21st Century', June 24-25, Hong Kong.

Gamble, J. (2003). Transferring human resource practices from the United Kingdom to China: The limits and potential for convergence. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(3), 369–387.

Gamble, J. (2006). *Guanxi* and business ethical issues in China. In S. Clegg, K. Wang, and M. Berrell (Eds.), *Business networks and strategic alliances in China* (pp.252-272). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Gill, J., & Johnson, P. (1997). *Research methods for managers* (2nd ed.). London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory: Emergence vs forcing*. Mill Valley, ca: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

References

Goodall, K., & Warner, M. (1997). Human resources in Sino-foreign joint ventures: Selected case studies in Shanghai, compared with Beijing. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 8(5), 569–594.

Goss, D. (1991). *Small business and society*. London: Routledge.

Goss, D. (1997). *Human resource management: The basics*. London: International Thomson Business Press.

Goss, D. (2004). Unpublished lecture notes; Philosophy of research PhD training module, University of Portsmouth.

Goss, D. (2008). Enterprise ritual: A theory of entrepreneurial emotion and exchange. *British Journal of Management*, 19(2), 120-137.

Goss, D., & Doern, R. (2009). 'Power and Emotion'. Paper presented at the 'BAM Conference', September, Brighton.

Goss, D., Jones, R., Latham, J., & Bette, M. (2010). Entrepreneurship and subordination. *Organization Studies*, forthcoming.

Gouldner, A. (1954). *Patterns of industrial bureaucracy*. Glencoe, ILL: Free Press.

Gowing, M. K. (2001). Measurement of individual emotional competence. In C. Cherniss, & D. Goleman (Eds.), *The emotionally intelligent workplace: how to select*

References

for, measure, and improve emotional intelligence in individuals, groups, and organizations (pp.83-131). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Granrose, C. S. (2007). Gender differences in career perceptions in the People's Republic of China. *Career Development International*, 12(1), 9-27.

Gray, D. E. (2004). *Doing research in the real world*. London: Sage.

Greenbaum, J. (1998). The times they are a'changing: dividing and recombining labour through computer systems. In P. Thompson, & C. Warhurst (Eds.), *Workplaces of the future* (pp.124-141). Basingstoke: Macmillan Business.

Gregory, M., & Wales, T. (1996). A glimpse of shopfloor life. *People Management*, 13(6), 26-29.

Grey, C., & Garsten, C. (2001). Trust, control and post-bureaucracy. *Organization Studies*, 22(2), 229-250.

Guest, D. E. (1987). Human resource management and industrial relations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 24(5), 503-521.

Guest, D. E. (1997). Human resource management and performance: A review and research agenda. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 8(3), 236-276.

References

- Hall, D. T. (1976). *Careers in Organisations*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.
- Hallett, T., & Ventresca, M. J. (2004). 'Bringing Gouldner Back In: Towards and Institutional and Interactionist Embrace'. Paper presented at the 'Sociology of Culture Roundtables at the American Sociological Association Meetings', August, San Francisco CA.
- Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hausknecht, J. P., Rodda, J., & Howard, M. J. (2009). Targeted employee retention: Performance-based and job-related differences in reported reasons for staying. *Human Resource Management*, 48(2), 269-288.
- Heckscher, C. C., & Donnellon, A. (Ed.). (1994). *The post-bureaucratic organization: New perspectives on organization change*. London: Sage.
- Helburn, I. B., & Shearer, J. C. (1984). Human resources and industrial relations in China: A time of ferment. *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, 38(1), 3-15.
- Higgs, M. (2004). Future trends in HR. In D. Rees, & R. McBain (Eds.), *People management: challenges and opportunities* (pp.15-31). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

References

Higgs, M., & Dulewicz, V. (2004). The emotionally intelligence leader. In D. Rees, & R. McBain (Eds.), *People management: challenges and opportunities* (pp.173-191). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hiillos, M. (2007). HRM and emotions: a gender perspective. In P. Lewis, & R. Simpson (Eds.), *Gendering emotions in organizations* (pp.109-125). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hofstede, G. (1983). The cultural relativity of organizational practices and theories. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 14(2), 75-89.

Hofstede, G. (1994). Management Scientists are Human. *Management Science*, 40(1), 4-13.

Holland, J. L. (1973). *Making vocational choices: A theory of careers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Homans, G. C. (1958). *Social behaviour as exchange*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

References

Hoskisson, R. E., Hitt, M. A., Wan, W. P., & Yiu, D. (1999). Theory and research in strategic management: Swings of a pendulum. *Strategic Management Journal*, 25 (3), 417–456.

Huselid, M. A. (1995). The impact of human resource management practices on turnover, productivity, and corporate financial performance. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 38(3), 635-672.

Keat, R., & Urry, J. (1975). *Social theory as science*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Krone, K. J., & Morgan, J. M. (2000). Emotion metaphors in management: The Chinese experiment. In S. Fineman (Ed.), *Emotion in Organizations* (pp.83-100), London: Sage.

Lado, A. A., & Wilson, M. C. (1994). Human resource systems and sustained competitive advantage: A competency-based perspective. *The Academy of Management Review*, 19(4), 699-727.

Law, K. S., Tse, D. K., & Zhou, N. (2003). Does human resource management matter in a transitional economy? China as an example. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 34(3), 255-265.

Legge, K. (1978). *Power, innovation and problem solving in personnel management*. London: McGraw Hill.

References

Legge, K. (2005). *Human resource management: Rhetorics and realities* (Anniversary ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Leung, T. K. P., Lai, K., Chan, R. Y. K., & Wong, Y. H. (2005). The roles of xinyong and *guanxi* in Chinese relationship marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 39(5/6), 528-559.

Lewis, P. (2003). New China—old ways? A case study of the prospects for implementing human resource management practices in a Chinese state-owned enterprise. *Employee Relations*, 25(1), 42–60.

Li, L. X. (2000). An analysis of sources of competitiveness and performance of Chinese manufacturers. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 20(3), 299-315.

Lin, J. Y., Cai, F., & Li, Z. (2003). *The China miracle: Development strategy and economic reform* (revised ed.). Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Locke, K. D. (2001). *Grounded theory in management research*. London: Sage.

Marchington, M., & Grugalis, I. (2000). 'Best practice' human resource management: Perfect opportunity or dangerous illusion? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 11(6), 1104–1124.

References

Marchington, M., & Wilkinson, A. (2005). *Human resource management at work: People management and development* (3rd ed.). London: CIPD.

Martin-Alcazar, F., Romero-Fernandez, P. M., & Sanchez-Gardey, G. (2008). Human resource management as a field of research. *British Journal of Management*, 19(2), 103-119.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching*. London: Sage.

May, M. (1982). The historical problem of the family wage: The Ford Motor Company and the five dollar day. *Feminist studies*, 8(2), 399-424.

May, T. (2001). *Social research: Issues, methods and process* (3rd ed.). London: Open University Press.

McConville, T., & Holden, L. (1999). The filling in the sandwich: HRM and middle managers in the health sector. *Personnel Review*, 28(5/6), 406-424.

McMahan, G. C., Virick, M., & Wright, P. M. (1999). Alternative theoretical perspective for strategic human resource management revisited: progress, problems, and prospects. In P. M. Wright, L. D. Dyer, J. W. Boudreau, & G. T. Milkovich (Eds.), *Research in personnel and human resources management* (pp.99-122). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

References

Naughton, B. (1995). China's evolving managerial labour market. *Journal of Political Economy*, 103(4), 873-892.

Neuman, W. L. (2003). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Ng, Y. C., & Siu, N. Y. M. (2004). Training and enterprise performance in transition: Evidence from China. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(4&5), 878-894.

Paauwe, J. (2009). HRM and performance: Achievements, methodological issues and prospects. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46(1), 129-142.

Palmer, B., Walls, M., Burgess, Z., & Stough, C. (2001). Emotional intelligence and effective leadership. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 22(1), 5-10.

Parnell, M. F. (2005). Chinese business *guanxi*: An organization or non-organization? *Journal of Organisational Transformation and Social Change*, 2(1), 29-47.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.

Pei, L., Stanton, P., & Legge, D. (2004). Improving human resource management in Chinese health-care: Identifying the obstacles to change. *Australian Health Review*, 27, 124-130.

References

Pettigrew, A. M., & Whipp, R. (1991). *Managing change for competitive success*. Oxford: Black-well.

Pfeffer, J. (1994). *Competitive advantage through people*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Pieper, R. (1990). *Human resource management: An international comparison*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.

Purcell, J. (1999). Best practice and best fit: chimera or cul-de-sac? *Human Resource Management Journal*, 9(3), 26-41.

Remenyi, D., Williams, B., Money, A., & Swartz, E., (1998). *Doing research in Business and Management: An introduction to process and method*. London: Sage.

Richard, O. C. (2000). Racial diversity, business strategy, and firm performance: A resource-based view. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(2), 164-177.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Rosenzweig, P. M., & Singh, J. V. (1991). Organizational environments and the multinational enterprise. *The Academy of Management Review*, 16(2), 340-361.

References

Rumelt, R. (1984). Toward a strategic theory of the firm. In R. Lamb (Ed.), *Competitive strategic management* (pp.556–570). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2003). *Research methods for business students*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Scheff, T. (1990). *Micro-sociology*. Chicago: UCP.

Scheff, T. (1997). *Emotions, the social bond and human reality*. Cambridge: CUP.

Schein E. H. (1985). *Career anchors: Discovering your real values*. San Diego, CA: University Associates, Inc.

Schein, E. H. (1978). *Career dynamics: Matching individual and organizational needs*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.

Schein, E. H. (1996). Career anchors revisited: Implications for career development in the 21st century. *Academy of Management Executive*, 10(4), 80-88.

Schuler, R. S., & Jackson, S. E. (1987). Linking competitive strategies with human resource management practices. *Academy of Management Executive*, 1(3), 207-219.

Schuler, R. S., & Jackson, S. E. (2007) *Strategic human resource management* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

References

Schuler, R. S., & MacMillan, I. C. (1984). Gaining competitive advantage through human resource management practices. *Human Resource Management*, 23(3), 241-255.

Schuler, R., & Walker, J. (1990). Human resources strategy: Focusing on issues and actions. *Organisational Dynamics*, 19(1), 4-19.

Schumpeter, J. (1934). *Capitalism, socialism, and democracy*. New York: Harper and Row.

Seale, C. (1999). *The quality of qualitative research*. London: Sage.

Sekaran, U. (2003). *Research methods for business: a skill-building approach* (4th ed.). New York: Wiley.

Selmer, J. (1999). Culture shock in China? Adjustment pattern of western expatriate business managers. *International Business Review*, 8(5-6), 515-534.

Selmer, J. (2004). Expatriates' hesitation and the localization of Western business operations in China. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(6), 1094-1107.

Selmer, J. (Ed.). (1998). *International management in China: cross-cultural issues*. London: Routledge.

References

Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Simon, H. A. (1987). Making management decisions: The role of intuition and emotion. *Academy of Management Executive*, 1(1), 57-64.

Storey, J. (1992). *Developments in the management of human resources*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Storey, J. (2001). Human resource management today: An assessment. In J. Storey (Ed.), *Human resource management: A critical text* (pp.3-20). London: Thomson Learning.

Storey, J. (Ed.). (1991). *New perspectives on human resource management*. London: Routledge.

Storey, J. (Ed.). (1995). *Human resource management: A critical text*. London: Routledge.

Strauss, A. L. (1978). *Negotiations: Varieties, contexts, processes, and social order*. London : Jossey-Bass.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques*. London: Sage.

References

Summers-Effler, E. (2002). The micro potential for social change: Emotion, consciousness, and social movement formation. *Sociological Theory*, 20(1), 41-60.

Sun, L. K. (1991). Contemporary Chinese culture: Structure and emotionality. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 26, 1-41.

Takeuchi, N., Wakabayashi, M., & Chen, Z. (2003). The Strategic HRM configuration for competitive advantage: Evidence from Japanese firms in China and Taiwan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 20(4), 447-480.

Tansakun, T. (2010). 'Performance management and measurement in the Thai public sector', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Surrey.

Taylor, R. (2005). China's human resource management strategies: The role of enterprise and government. *Asian Business and Management*, 4(1), 5-21.

Torres, O., & Delmar, F. (2006). Smallness of firm and HRM: The key role played by proximity. *Rent XX-Brussels 2006*.

Torrington, D., Hall, L., & Taylor, S. (2002). *Human resource management* (5th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Torrington, D., Hall, L., & Taylor, S. (2008). *Human resource management* (7th ed.). Harlow: FT/Prentice Hall.

References

- Tsang, E. W. K. (1998). Can *guanxi* be a source of sustained competitive advantage for doing business in China? *Academy of Management Executive*, 12(2), 64–73.
- Tsang, E. W. K. (1999). The knowledge transfer and learning aspects of international HRM: An empirical study of Singapore MNCs. *International Business Review*, 8(5-6), 591–609.
- Tsang, E. W. K. (1995). The implementation of technology transfer in Sino-foreign joint ventures. *International Journal of Technology Management*, 10(7/8), 757-766.
- Ulrich, D. (1997). *Human resource champions: The next agenda for adding value and delivering results*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Ulrich, D., & Brockbank, W. (2005). Role call. *People management*, 16 June, 24-28.
- Ulrich, D., & Lake, D. (1990). *Organizational capability*. New York: Wiley.
- Ulrich, D., Younger, J., & Brockbank, W. (2008). The twenty-first-century HR organization. *Human Resource Management*, 47(4), 829-850.
- Van Riel, C. B. M., Berens, G., & Dijkstra, M. (2009). Stimulating strategically aligned behaviour among employees. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46(7), 1197-1226.

References

Von Glinow, M. A., & Teagarden, M. B. (1988). The transfer of human resource management technology in Sino-U.S. cooperative ventures: Problems and solutions. *Human Resource Management*, 27(2), 201-229.

Wang, C. G., & Fang, W. (2001). Cultural adaptation and co-operation: an important aspect that MNC's face in China. *Xinhua Wenzhai*, 12, 19-24.

Warner, M. (1986). Managing human resources in China: an empirical study. *Organization Studies*, 7(4), 353–366.

Warner, M. (1991). Labour-management relations in the People's Republic of China: The role of the trade unions. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2(2), 205-20.

Warner, M. (1992). *How Chinese managers learn: Management and industrial training in China*. London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's Press.

Warner, M. (1995). *The management of human resources in Chinese industry*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Warner, M. (1996). Chinese enterprise reform, human resource and the 1994 Labour Law. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 7(7), 779–96.

Warner, M. (1996). Human resources in the People's Republic of China: The 'Three Systems' reforms. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 6(2), 32-43.

References

Warner, M. (1997). China's HRM in transition: Towards relative convergence? *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 3(4), 19-33.

Warner, M. (2001). Human resource management in the People's Republic of China. In P. S. Budhwar, & Y. A. Debrah (Eds.), *Human resource management in developing countries* (pp.19-33), London: Routledge.

Warner, M. (2005). *Human resource management in China revisited*. New York: Routledge.

Warner, M. (2009). 'Making sense' of HRM in China: Setting the scene. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20(11), 2169-2193.

Wei, L., & Lau, C. (2005). Market orientation, HRM importance and competency: Determinants of strategic HRM in Chinese firms. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(10), 1901-1918.

Wei, L-Q., Liu, J., Chen, Y.-Y., & Wu, L.-Z. (2010). Political skill, supervisor-subordinate *guanxi* and career prospects in Chinese firms. *Journal of Management Studies*, 47(3), 437-454.

Wernerfelt, B. (1984). A resource-based view of the firm. *Strategic Management Journal*, 5(2), 171-180.

References

- Williams, M. (2002). Generalization in interpretive research. In T. May (Ed.), *Qualitative Research in Action* (pp.125-143). London: Sage.
- Wong, A. L. Y. (2007). Making career choice: A study of Chinese managers. *Human Relations*, 60(8), 1211-1233.
- Wong, A. L. Y., & Slater, J. R. (2002). Executive development in China: Is there any in a Western sense? *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13(2), 338-360.
- Wright, C. (2008). Reinventing human resource management: Business partners, internal consultants and the limits to professionalization. *Human relations*, 61(8), 1063-1086.
- Wright, P. M., Dunford, B. B., & Snell, S. A. (2001). Human resources and the resource-based view of the firm. *Journal of Management*, 27(6), 701–721.
- Xiao, J. (1996). The relationship between organizational factors and the transfer of training in the electronics industry in Shenzhen, China. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 7(1), 55-73.
- Xin K. R., & Pearce J. L. (1996). *Guanxi*: connections as substitutes for structural support. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 39(6), 1641–1658.

References

Yarnall, J. (1998). Career anchors: Results of an organisational study in the UK. *Career Development International*, 3(2), 56-61.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: design and methods*. London: Sage.

Youndt, M. A., Snell, S. A., Dean, J. W., Jr. & Lepak, D. P. (1996). Human resource management, manufacturing strategy, and firm performance. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 39(4), 836-866.

Zamet, J. M., & Bovarnick, M. E. (1986). Employee relations for multinational companies in China. *Columbia Journal of World Business*, 21(1), 13–19.

Zhao, S. (1994). Human resource management in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 32(2), 3-12.

Zheng, C., & Lamond, D. (2009). A Critical Review of human resource management studies (1978-2007) in the People's Republic of China. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20(11), 2194-2227.

Zhu, C. J. (2005). *Human resource management in China: Past, current and future HR practices in the industrial sector*. New York: Routledge.

Zhu, C. J., Cooper, B., De Cieri, H., & Dowling, P. J. (2005). A problematic transition to a strategic role: Human resource management in industrial enterprises in China. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(4), 513-531.

References

Zhu, C. J., Thomson, S. B., & De Cieri, H. (2008). A retrospective and prospective analysis of HRM research in Chinese firms: implications and directions for future study. *Human Resource Management*, 47(1), 133-156.

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Introduction Letter-English version and Chinese translation

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am a PhD student researching HRM at the University of Surrey, UK. The aim of my research is to explore the understanding of HR roles from the perspective of Chinese HR managers during economic transition. I would be very grateful if you would be able to help me in this work. You have been chosen because of your experience and knowledge in this field. All results of the research will be anonymous and neither you nor your organization will be identified in any way when the results are presented in the final thesis or any following published forms such as conferences or articles for academical journals. As a student I am most anxious to learn from experienced managers about the real practical issues involved in this field and your help will be invaluable to me in this respect. I enclose a brief outline of what the research involves for your information. I sincerely hope you will be able to find the time to help me with a project that will hopefully benefit the future of HRM in China.

This research is about exploring how Chinese HR managers perceive their roles during the economic transitional period in China. The research will explore the perception of the HR roles from the individual HR managers' experiences and try to identify the factors that contribute to different roles among individual business organizations in China. The study will involve an informal interview in order to identify personal experiences and opinions about the nature of HRM in China. It is expected that the interview will last for approximately 45 minutes to an hour. If you

Appendices

are willing I would like to record the interviews for later analysis. All the tapes will be made anonymous and will be listened to only by myself and will be stored in a locked cabinet. They will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and will not be passed to any other person. The aim of the research is to provide results that will help to better understand the changing roles of HR under complex business environment from the perspectives of Chinese HR managers. If any further queries, please contact me (my mobile: 13514246525).

Thank you very much for your support and help!

Researcher: Weiwei Guan

尊敬的先生（女士）：

我是英国萨里大学研究人力资源管理的一名博士生。我的研究目的是探寻在中国经济变革时期，中国人力资源经理们对中国人力资源管理的角色的理解。如果您能对我的这项工作给予帮助，我将十分感激。我选择您是因为您在这个领域拥有丰富的经验和知识。本次研究的所有结果都将是匿名的，无论这次研究的结果是出现在论文里还是发表在其他后续的会议或者期刊上，您还是您的企业都不会被其他人识别出来。作为一个学生，我最渴望向富有经验的经理们学习这一领域中真正的实践方面的问题，因此，您的帮助对于我丰富对实践的理解无疑是无价的。这篇文章中包含了一个简要的研究内容概括，包含着您所希望了解的信息。我真诚的希望您能在繁忙的公务中给予我一点时间来帮助我完成一项将会对未来中国人力资源管理发展有益的研究。

这项研究是关于在中国经济变革的时期，中国人力资源经理们是如何看待人力资源管理的角色的。这项研究将会从人力资源经理们的个体经验中探索他们对人力资源管理的理解，并且努力在众多单个的商务企业中确定影响人力资源角色的诸多因素。这个研究将会采访一些经理，从他们的切身经验和观点来确定中国人力资源管理的性质。这个研究会采用非正式采访的方式来

Appendices

确认人力资源经理们对中国人力资源管理性质的个人体会和看法。一个采访预计大约会在 45 分钟到一个小时左右，如果您愿意的话，我会录下本次参访，以便日后进行分析。所有的录音都将是匿名的，只有我可以听到，而且会被保存到一个上锁的柜子里。当录音内容被文字记录后，录音就会被完全删除，不会传给其他人。这项研究的目的是为了提供良好的科研结果以便更好的来理解在复杂的商务环境下，中国人力资源经理们认为人力资源管理的角色有哪些改变。如果您对这项研究还有疑问的话，请与我联系（我的手机：13514246525）。

衷心感谢您的支持与帮助！

研究者：官玮玮

MATERIAL REDACTED AT REQUEST OF UNIVERSITY

Appendices

Appendix 3: The summary of frequency of quotations used by each respondent

No.	Chapter 4		Chapter 5		Chapter 6	
	Respondents	Quotations	Respondents	Quotations	Respondents	Quotations
1	Mr. Zheng	9	Mr. Yuan	4	Mr. Wan	12
2	Mr. Gao	9	Mr. Hong	5	Mrs. Feng	9
3	Mr. Wei	9	Mr. Long	3	Mrs. Ning	7
4	Mr. Lei	8	Mr. Su	4	Mrs. Qian	8
5	Mrs. Zhan	7	Mr. Lai	3	Mr. Cheng	13
6	Mrs. Shi	4	Mrs. Sheng	4		
7	Mr. Zhao	6	Mr. Zhong	2		
8	Mr. Lang	5	Mr. Kang	7		
9	Mr. Peng	3	Mr. Yan	4		
10	Mrs. Yu	8	Mrs. Xiao	6		
11	Mrs. Lian	3	Mrs. Gu	4		
12			Mrs. Meng	3		
13			Mrs. Yun	4		
14			Mr. Shen	2		
15			Mrs. Tang	8		
16			Mrs. Deng	2		
17			Mrs. Mu	3		
18			Mr. Yue	3		
19			Miss. Zhu	2		
20			Mr. Ma	8		
21			Mr. Fei	4		
22			Mrs. Tian	4		
	Mean quotes per respondents	6.45	Mean quotes per respondents	4.05	Mean quotes per respondents	9.8