Aalto University
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COMPARISON OF LINE MANAGERS' AND HR PROFESSIONALS' PERCEPTION OF HR
AS AN ACTIVITY

A qualitative exploration of a Finnish research and education organisation

Essi Ruuska

International Business Bachelor's Thesis
Instructor: Russell Warhurst
Date of submission: 13.04.2017

Declaration

By completing this cover sheet and declaration, I confirm that this assignment is my own work, is not copied from the work (published or unpublished) of any other person, and has not previously been submitted for assessment either at Aalto University, or another educational establishment. Any direct or indirect uses of material (e.g.: text, visuals, ideas…) from other sources have been fully acknowledged and cited according to the conventions of the Harvard Referencing system.

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Author: Essi Ruuska
Title of thesis: Comparison of Line Managers' and HR Professionals' Perception of HR as an Activity

Date: 13 April 2017

Degree: Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business Administration

Supervisor: Russell Warhurst

Objectives

The main objectives of this study was to investigate the similarities and differences in line managers' and HR professionals' perception of HR as an activity in a Finnish research and education organisation. This was achieved by looking at the perceived activities, roles, added value and improvement of HR of both line managers and HR professionals.

Summary

Overall, perception of line managers and HR professionals on HR as an activity is similar in many aspects such as aim, activity and added value. Differences arose in the roles of HR. In these line managers and HR coordinators saw the role of HR as an administrative expert where as HR managers and specialist saw it as evolving from the administrative side to a strategic partner. A contradiction also came apparent with how the role of the change agent is perceived and how it works in reality. Lastly, differences in perception came apparent in how HR can further increase their contribution to the organisation.

Conclusions

Main differences between line managers and HR professionals' perception were in the shift from an administrative expert to a strategic partner. This revealed differences between different ranked HR professionals as well, HR managers being in more favour of this shift. Perceptions on the aim, activities and ways to add value were quite similar, which reflects the overall positive perception of HR.

Key words: Human Resource Management, Perception, HR Professionals, Line Managers, Role, Added Value, Finland

Language: English

Grade:

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The field of Human Resource Management has gone through many changes in the past few decades in regards to its role in an organisation and how it is perceived in an organisation. Despite the on-going debate on how HRM contributes to organisational performance, HRM is seen nowadays as a vital function of business. HR is sometimes seen as to tell stakeholders how to act and what to do, which creates negative perceptions and critical attitudes of HR (Cappelli, 2015). How stakeholder perceive HR affects how HR activity should be implemented in order for it to be as valuable and beneficial as can be.

As attitudes towards HR have changed, much research has been conducted on the perception of effectiveness and the relationship between perception of HR and various organisational factors. However, only a fraction of studies have focused on examining the perceived activities, role and value added of HR from a qualitative perspective and even smaller fraction compare the differences in perception between line managers and HR professionals. Due to this reason, studying and comparing the perceptions of line managers and HR professionals of HR as an activity can provide better understanding on effective human resource management and in what areas human resources needs to improve in.

1.2. Research Problem

The research problem is to compare and contrast line managers' and HR professionals' perception of the HR activity in a Finnish research and education organisation. Perception in this case refers to what one sees to be the activities and role of HR and what is the added value of it. General consensus of human resource management in the past years has shifted towards recognizing HR as an important function of a successful organisation, but there still are differing perceptions of this. There might also be a difference between how two major stakeholders perceive it:

HR professionals and line managers. Line managers are more often apart of the implementation of HR activity and deal with HR managers on a regular basis, but their main aim is the implementation of strategy and thus they might have differing perceptions of people management than HR professionals.

1.3. Research Questions

The aim of the study is to answer the following questions:

1. How do line managers in large organisations perceive the HR activity?
2. How do HR professionals in large organisations perceive the HR activity?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the perceptions oh HR activity between line managers and HR professionals?

1.4. Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are the following:

1. To understand line managers' perceptions of the HR activity in large organisations.
2. To understand HR professionals' perceptions of the HR activity in large organisations.
3. To determine the similarities and differences between line managers' and HR professionals' perception of HR activity

1.5. Definitions

1.5.1. Human resources

Human resources is the people management and support function in an organisation, it will be discussed later what HR comprises of.

1.5.2. Perception

In the context of this study, perception is defined as the way an action, practise or person is regarded and interpreted. More specifically, how one regards the activities and roles of HR and how they interpret the value added from HR.

1.6. Thesis Structure

The aim of this thesis is to study the differences in perception between line managers and HR professionals of HR as an activity. In the structure of this thesis, after the introduction follows a literature review about the perceptions of line managers and HR professionals and their differences. The third and fourth section will cover methodology, which explains the research method chosen and discusses the collection of primary data and findings. After that, section five presents the main findings in contrast to literature. Lastly, to conclude the thesis, section six discusses the main conclusions, implication for International Business and suggest further areas for research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This literature review introduces the concepts related to line managers' and human resource professionals' perception of human resources as an activity. This literature review aims to define concepts, present available research on the subject, identify gaps in the research and to construct a conceptual framework.

2.2 Human Resource Management as an Activity

2.2.1 Definitions

Human resources is the business function that is concerned with the management of people and how organisational performance can be enhanced through its people while still treating all employees ethically (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014) Common tasks of HR include: recruitment, training, employee relations, reward management, personnel information management, motivation, and personnel well being (De Vos, 2001; McLean, 2006; Ulrich, 1997). Tasks vary among different HR departments as some actions are emphasized accordingly to the organisation's demands for example an organisation in an industry where high turnover is high, recruitment is more emphasized than somewhere with a low high turnover rate. Some HR tasks can be also be outsourced this can may allow for the organisation to get help in an area that they do not have HR experts for or to save in costs.

2.2.2 The Role of Human Resource Management

In order to understand why different stakeholders have specific perceptions of human resource management, it is important to understand what the role of HR is in an organisation. In 1997, Ulrich developed a model, which connects HR goals, objectives, processes and tasks. The model divided HR into 4 roles that it aims to fulfil in organisations: strategic partner, change agent, administrative expert and employee champion (ibid). In short these roles equal to the alignment of HR with firm

strategy, further change, constantly strive for efficient HR structures and boost motivation and commitment among employees (ibid). The model is dated thus does not take into consideration new progressions in the field of HR. However, the model has been cited often and is the basis for much contemporary research, which demonstrates its relevance as a model.

The effect of HR on organisational performance is an on-going debate since it is hard to prove the causation, as there are so many factors to take into consideration. Many contemporary studies have found a positive correlation between HR and firm performance (Besma, 2014; Ngo, 2014; Piening & Baluch, 2013). Piening & Baluch (2013) argued that one explanation for increased organisational performance was that HR affected job satisfaction positively and that in turn lead to better level of customer service and happier customers. Literature provides much evidence for a correlation between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Heinzer et al., 2011; Pantouvakis & Bouranta, 2013). Nevertheless, HR is not the only determinant of job satisfaction and thus the effect of HR on organisational performance cannot be explained merely using employee and customer satisfaction.

As the positive perception of HR increases, it can be viewed as a business partner increasingly. A study by Stritesky & Quigley (2014) found that organisations were transforming their HR structure in order to mobilize resources and that way increase its strategic contribution. Recent literature also has started identifying the strengths of HR acting as a business partner. A study by Bhaskar (2012) found that case organisations going through mergers and acquisitions were more likely to be successful if HR acts as a participant from when the merger or acquisition is already decided upon. It needs to be taken into consideration though that these findings might be industry specific. An industry that is high in human capital will face more HR related issues than one with low human capital and thus HR will not be more involved in the high human capital industry. Nonetheless, these studies were conducted in different countries and reached similar conclusion, thus it shows that there transferability of HR as a business partner.

2.2.3 Strong HRM System

The type of human resource management system in place is a critical part of stakeholders determining their perception and attitude towards it and the organisational environment. In 2004, Bowen and Ostroff presented the construct of "strength of the HRM system". A strong HRM system can result from HR adapting a visible and current presence, by being consistent and have ongoing consensus internally and externally (Almutawa et al., 2015; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). The construct states that one is inclined to perceive HR more positively and possible increase firm performance if a strong HR system is in place (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; De Winne et al., 2013).

However, the components for a strong HR system may differ across cultures and thus it needs to be questioned whether the construct is applicable to different organisational environments. Socio, economic, cultural, political and legal differences influence various HR tasks (Singh, 2014) and HR tasks such as employment relations, reward systems and motivation may differ across cultures due to differences on legal systems and cultural values.

2.2.4 Expectations on Human Resources

The services of human resources are directed at different stakeholders who have differing needs and thus differing expectations to which HR needs adapt. Line managers work towards making business strategy reality (De Winne et al., 2013) while HR managers work to incorporate their strategy into business strategy and practices (Ulrich, 1997). Due to these different aims, demands are not the same.

2.2.5 The Role of Line Managers in Human Resource Management

A shift in recent years in human resource management has been to start devolving HR tasks to line managers, which might have an effect on line manager perception of

human resources. With the devolution of HR, line managers have received a wider array of HR tasks compared to before (Azmi & Mushtag, 2015; Perry & Kulik, 2008). HR related tasks left to line managers have broadened from performance appraisal, courier of employment news and promotion and reward recommendation to recruitment, occupational health and safety, career planning and the advancement of organisational culture (Perry & Kulik, 2008).

Perry et al. (2008) and Sheenan et al. (2014) found that devolution increased the level of effectiveness of people management as perceived by HR professionals. However, Renwick (2003) argues that devolution was the barrier to effective people management since there was concern whether line managers were carrying HR tasks out in a fair manner. De Winne et al. (2013) also found that line managers might let office politics or earlier promises influence HR tasks such as promotion. It needs to be taken into consideration though that the study by Renwick was based on interviews of line managers. Line managers are likely to be less knowledgeable on people management and thus might not be sufficient to judge the effectiveness of it (Perry et al., 2008).

2.2.6 The Relationship of Line Managers and Human Resources

Different tasks and aims between line managers and human resource professionals can cause tension in their relationship. One commonly cited tension creator between the two is in their aims and direction and that views and directions are not aligned (De Winne et al., 2013; Sheenan et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2001). This leads to the lack of consensus (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) and the two parties in some cases not working in mutually benefitting ways, possible influencing the organisational performance negatively (Chen et al., 2011; Kearns, 2004).

Another source of tension is the perception of line managers that HR professionals do not have adequate knowledge on business issues (Caldwell, 2010; Daniels, 2013; De Winne et al., 2013; Sheenan et al., 2014). Sheenan et al. also identified in their study that HR was attracting people who did not regard the business side with

importance. Younger HR employees also had difficulty in balancing strategy and employee advocacy, which created tension with management (ibid). The level of tension may differ across industries and sectors (ibid) and therefore studies on tensions between line managers and HR professionals might not be generalizable to other sectors than the one that the study was conducted in. This may be due to the fact that line managers in different industries are of different educational backgrounds and thus regard the knowledge differently. Nevertheless, these studies give good direction of a possible source of tension.

2.3 Adding Value Through Human Resources

The definition of perception in this research includes how human resources are seen to add value to the organisation and thus it is relevant to examine the models about added value of HR.

2.3.1 Ulrich HR Roles Model

Ulrich (1997) presented the HR roles model, which define the roles for HR professionals as well as identified roles through which HR can add value. Ulrich (1997) argues that HR can bring value to an organisation by fulfilling the four roles equally. The limitation of this model is that it focuses on determining value added through the contribution of HR is to business rather than its activities (Buyens & De Vos, 2001).

In addition to this, there are several debates about the model by Ulrich. The model is seen to be very inflexible. It makes the assumption that similar roles are applicable everywhere, whereas this is not necessarily true as every organisation and industry sets a unique environment for HR to work in. The model encourages standardization of HR practices (Roper, 2016). As technology advances rapidly, it changes the HR as well making it less standardized in nature. However, the model is among the first and many companies have implemented the model (ibid). Since the model is one of

the first on HR roles, it provides useful direction in determining HR roles on a general level.

2.3.2 Buyens & De Vos Added Value Model

Based on research conducted, Buyens & De Vos (2001) presented an updated version of how human resources can add value to an organisation.

Figure 1: Perceived value of the HR function integrated model by Buyens & De Vos (2001).

The model presents a view that all HR activities need to start from the inner circle, people, to be relevant (ibid). All of the roles are important in adding value like Ulrich (1997) argued in his model. The model also identifies a third level, at which value is added: "the four stages of involvement in decision making" (Buyens & De Vos, 2001). This model is more extensive than Ulrich, which is a strength. Nevertheless, it is a very simplified version of the truth.

2.4 Line Managers' Perception of Human Resources

2.4.1 Perception

Line managers are direct recipients of human resource management as well as its implementers (Azmi & Mushtag, 2015; Chen et al., 2011; Perry & Kulik, 2008; Sheenan et al., 2014) and thus their perception of it is important. Most research concludes that line managers perceive the existence of HR important (Caldwell, 2010; Whittaker, 2003) and some line manager research has found it to be perceived essential for a competitive advantage (Wright et al, 2001). However, in all of these studies line managers expressed concern for the overall contribution of HR to business strategy and business. Nevertheless, Buyens & De Vos (2001) found that line managers perceived HR to add value as a strategic partner as well. Wright et al. and Buyens & De Vos are dated back to the beginning of the last decade, but both of them are among the few qualitative studies in the field of line manager perception of HR and thus while caution is needed when analyzing them, they are useful.

2.4.2 Most Important Activities

Human resources include a varied assortment of tasks. McLean (2006) found that line managers in a large Scottish retailer chain rated pay benefits, discipline & dismissal and motivation as the most important activities that HR conducts. These are supported by the findings of Brandl's study of Danish line managers who perceived motivation to be the most important activity of HR. Wright (2001) also found that line managers perceived motivation and retention to be among the most important tasks, however line managers also perceived attraction and selection to be vital roles of HR in order for an organisation to gain a competitive advantage.

In addition to identifying important activities, research has focused on which of roles from the 1997 model by Ulrich are perceived to be important to line managers. The traditional role of HR has been more of the administrative expert than lately emerging strategic partner (Lemmenrgaard, 2008; Teo & Rodwell, 2007) and line managers still perceive HR being the expert as very important (De Winne et al, 2013; Teo &

Rodwell, 2007). Chen et al. (2011) argues that HR is still seen as an administrative expert more than a strategic partner since strategic involvement is relatively new and line managers have not adapted to this concept yet.

2.4.3 Factors Affecting Line Managers' Perception

There are many different factors that may influence perception. For line managers, commonly reported factors influencing their perception of human resources include the competency and credibility of the HR professionals they are in contact with (Björkman et al. 2011; John et al., 2015; Yusoff et al., 2009; Wright et al., 2001). Another factors is how visible the HR department and professionals are about their policies and connections to the rest of the firm (De Winne et al., 2013; John et al., 2015) and lastly how much the senior management supports HR (Caldwell, 2010; John et al., 2015).

In addition to previously mentioned factors, Brandl et al. (2009) identified more specific factors in they study of Danish line managers. The results showed that gender had a slight effect on the perception of HR importance: women perceived HR as more important than men (ibid). A study by Payne (2011) reported the existence of gender bias when rating HR managers, which support that gender, might play a role in perceptions. There was also a slight difference in perceptions between the public and private sector organisations with public organisations rating the importance of HR as higher (Brandl et al., 2009). However, HR is devolved to a much larger extent in Denmark than in many other European countries (ibid) and thus Danish line managers may perceive its activities and importance differently than other countries like Finland.

2.5 Human Resource Professionals' Perception of Human Resources

2.5.1 Perception

HR professionals perceive HR activities and policies to add value to organisations as strategic partner, employee champion, administrative expert and change agent (Buyens & De Vos, 2001). Similarly, Wright et al. (2001) found that professionals identify HR to be critical in attaining a competitive advantage. A study conducted about HR professionals in UK organisations, found that HR executives who sat on executive boards of their organisation perceived HR activities to have more influence and the HR executive to have more of a voice through the symbolic meaning of sitting on the board (Caldwell, 2010). It is not researched though whether the presence of a HR professional on an executive board affects line managers' perception of HR. Although it might have an effect since the opinions and behavior of senior management, who is present on the board, work to shape the perception of HR to line managers and employees below them (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Stanton et al, 2010).

2.5.2 Most Important Activities

More research on the perceived importance of activities exists about line managers than human resource professionals. Common activities that HR professionals perceived to be most important were issues concerned to management of employees such as motivation, training and employee relations (Buyens & De Vos, 2001; McLean, 2006). McLean also found that among Scottish HR professionals, matters of employment legislation and adjusting HR policies across the whole business were important. As these results are based on Scottish professionals, there is a question of transferability.

With human resource professionals, the HR roles model by Ulrich is more to what kind of a professional they perceive themselves to be. In a study of 1188 UK HR professionals, the role of the strategic partner was perceived to be the most desirable role: 33% of the respondents said to fill this role currently and 56% answered that

they are aiming for this role (Caldwell, 2010). With the role of an administrative expert, 24% answered they filled that role and 4% said to be aiming for the role and with employee champion, 12% said to fill the role and 6% aimed for it (ibid). The level of aspiration to a specific role can perhaps be converted to the perceived importance the role is given by HR professionals.

Despite this growing popularity for being the strategic partner, Lemmenrgaard (2008) found that the HR executives perceived to be most like the employee champion. Also, despite only 24% of participants reporting to be an administrative expert, Lemmenrgaard (2008) and Daniels (2013) argued that HR functions are repeatedly engaged in being the administrative expert. The question validity of the results of Lemmenrgaard needs to be taken into consideration, as the sample of HR professionals is very small.

2.6 Differences Between Perceptions

2.6.1 Gaps in Stakeholder Perceptions

There is a limited amount of research that refers to the gaps in perception among different stakeholders (McLean, 2006). Several studies have found differences in perceptions of effectiveness of human resources where HR professionals reported to perceive effectiveness higher than line managers (Chen et al., 2011; Yusoff et al., 2009; Wright et al., 2001). Yusoff et al. argued this to be caused due to HR professionals having the tendency to overestimate their work. Despite this, Ofofri et al. (2012) found that were no significant differences between HR professionals and line managers perceptions of HR as a function and its effectiveness.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework below aims to demonstrate the process for generating perceptions and their outcomes for line managers and human resource professionals. By creating different columns for line managers and HR professionals,
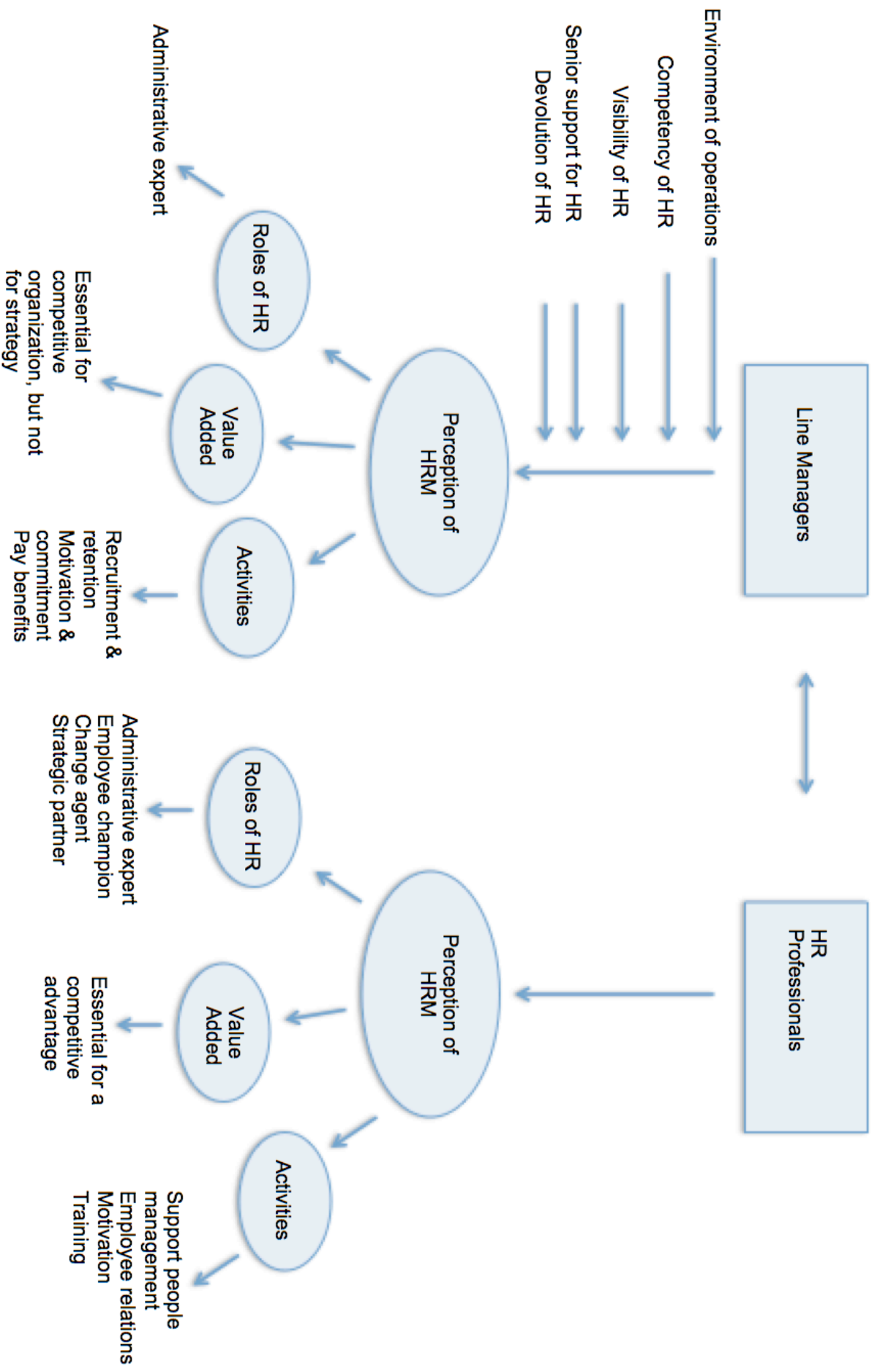
it shows that the research is focused on the two individually as well as how they differ. It also demonstrates that the two have different perceptions of HR (Chen et al., 2011; Yusoff et al., 2009; Wright et al., 2001) and that the perception is affected by different factors.

As the model aims to show, there is a lack of research and literature on the factors affecting HR professional's perception of HR. Nevertheless, much research has been done on the factors affecting line managers. The length of the horizontal arrow illustrates the importance of a factor: with a longer arrow representing higher importance. The first factor is the environment of operation, which means that if a strong HR environment is created or if the environment of operation is very legalistic, HR will have more affect on the organisation, as they are for example needed to provide legislative expertise (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Singh, 2014). The perceived of competency of HR affects how line managers perceive HR as to a large extent their contact with HR is with the professionals and thus they use the people to determine their perceptions (Björkman et al., 2011; John et al., 2015; Yusoff et al., 2009; Wright et al., 2001). In addition, how visible HR is, whether senior management supports HR and the devolution of HR tasks to line managers have an effect on line managers' perceptions (Caldwell, 2010; De Winne et al., 2013; John et al., 2015; Perry & Kulik, 2008). However, not as much research has been done on these factors.

The differences in perception are investigated through the perceived roles of HR, its perceived activities and the interpreted value that brings to an organisation. As the conceptual framework shows, the perceived role is more limited for line managers than HR managers who see the role in more ways (Buyens & De Vos, 2001; Chen et al., 2011). The Literature on the perceived value-added is very similar between line managers and HR professionals, both identifying as an important factor for a competitive factor, although line managers questioned its relevance to organisational strategy (Caldwell, 2010; Whittaker, 2003). Lastly, the perceived activities demonstrates differences between line managers and HR professionals in literature (Brandl et al., 2009; Mclean, 2006).

Current research mostly studies the perceptions of HR through effectiveness and in quantitative manners. This research will aim to fill the gap of examining perceptions

in terms of the what is understood by HRM: the roles and activities and what kind of value stakeholders interpret it to bring and this will be done through qualitative means.

Environment of operations

Competency of HR

Visibility of HR

Senior support for HR
Devolution of HR

Line Managers

Perception of HRM

Roles of HR → Administrative expert

Value Added → Essential for competitive organization, but not for strategy

Activities → Recruitment & retention
Motivation & commitment
Pay benefits

HR Professionals

Perception of HRM

Roles of HR → Administrative expert
Employee champion
Change agent
Strategic partner

Value Added → Essential for a competitive advantage

Activities → Support people management
Employee relations
Motivation
Training

3. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methodology chosen for data collection in order to study differences in perceptions and addresses the limitation of the chosen methods. The method used to collect primary data was qualitative interviews. Primary data collection was useful for this study since there is limited amount of qualitative research conducted on the subject and qualitative research allows for perceptions to be studied in depth unlike quantitative research.

3.1. Research Approach Rationale

In order to identify the most appropriate research approach, it is necessary to examine different approaches. The focus of this rationale will begin on a general level and narrows down on which approaches were used this study.

Two of the broadest approaches to research are quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). These two approaches differ in issues such as research focus, sample size and data analysis (ibid). The quantitative approach aims to describe and predict in order to test and build theories. The qualitative approach, on the other hand, aims to understand and interpret. In terms of data analysis, quantitative approach uses a mathematical and statistical method where as there is a descriptive focus on qualitative data analysis (ibid). This study aims to understand behaviour, the perceptions that line managers and HR professionals have on HR, rather than for example aiming to establish a relationship between perception and some organisational related factor. For this reason the qualitative approach is used in this study. In addition, much of the research in this field of study has been quantitative thus there is a bigger gap to fill in terms of qualitative research.

Once the qualitative approach is chosen, it needs to be determined which data collection method is the most appropriate. The most common qualitative methods include interviews, ethnography, observations, and focus groups (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). These are all viable choices when conducting qualitative research,

but some of the methods present limitations that make them unsuitable to be used in this particular study. Observations and ethnography allow the researcher to study real life behaviour. However, in order to collect an adequate amount of data these methods would need to be carried out long-term, which is not a possibility in this case. Focus groups allow for faster collection of data since people do not have to be interviewed individually, nevertheless there is a chance of conformity among participants and due to the high number of participants needed; it would be very difficult to set a suitable time for all participants to participate. Individual interviews are time consuming, but they offer in-depth data from participants on the issues the researcher wants and therefore interviews were chosen as the method of collecting data in this study.

Once interviews are chose, the type of interview also has to be decided. The three types of interviews are structured, semi-structured and unstructured and all have the same aim, but do it within different constraints (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). In structured interviews, the researcher has s detailed plan of questions, resembling a questionnaire, that are asked in specific order for all. This allows for answers to be directly compared, as there are no major differences between what was asked from each participant. The limitation is that the researcher cannot go deeper into new subjects that may arise during the interview. Semi-structured interviews have a basic outline of the questions, but the researcher has the ability to ask further about certain issues. The limitation of semi-structured interviews is that the results may be hard to compare as different follow-up questions might be asked from participants. Lastly, unstructured interviews are the least formal style with no predetermined questions or plan for the interview. These are useful in producing elaborate data, but results are hard to compare, as every interview is unique. As the aim of this study is to compare the perception of line managers and HR professionals, structured interviews were chosen. In addition, structured interviews are slightly less time-consuming than the two others as the number of questions is set and does not vary. This is a strength as time for limited for the interviews as the participants had busy schedules and could only give a limited time for the interview.

After choosing the appropriate method, interviews can be conducted in several ways: face-to-face or over the telephone. Face-to-face interviews are very useful as non-

verbal cues can also be studied and provide more data, but these require more planning and for the researcher and interviewee to be in the same city. Therefore telephone interviews are more convenient, but prevent the study of non-verbal cues. In this study, perception is partly an opinion matter and thus non-verbal cues can add to the verbal data. All interviews apart from one line manager interview were conducted face-to-face at the participant's place of work. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed.

Once transcribed, there is a question of coding the transcripts and determining the approach used for this. Two common approaches are the deductive and inductive approach (Saunders et al., 2099). The deductive approach aims to primarily develop existing theories and the research has some sort of conceptual framework. Inductive approach focuses on developing new theories based on the findings. As the interview and research objectives are derived from concepts presented in previous literature, for example Ulrich (1997) model of HR roles, this study utilises the deductive approach. Furthermore, the perceptions of the participants is based on the existing ways of HR, which is equivalent to the existing theory and models in literature, thus the data merely tries to further the understanding of these theories and models.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish, because the working language of all of the participants was Finnish and therefore they were able to express their ideas properly and were not restricted in their answers due to using a second language. This leads to the issue of translation during data analysis. There are two options available: to translate transcript and then code in the translated language or code and complete the analysis in the language of the interviews and translate the complete analysis (Birbili, 2000). In this study, the first was chosen, because concepts were identified in English as the literature review was completed in English. This alternative presents the danger of misinterpretation of transcripts since some terms used in Finnish may not be used in English and using alternative phrases changes the meaning slightly. In order to avoid data distortion, a third party to check translations concerning difficult words and phrases.

3.2. Data Collection

This section discusses the collection of primary data for the study.

3.2.1. Primary Data Collection

The collection of primary data for this study consists of interviews with six line managers and six HR professionals from a Finnish research and education institute. Six line mangers were approached and all agreed to interviewed. Seven HR professionals were approached, out of which six replied. Out of the HR professionals, two were HR managers; one was a HR specialist and three were HR coordinators. Within the line managers and HR professionals, there were four line manager-HR professional pairs meaning that an interviewed line manager's corresponding HR professional was also interviewed. This increases the validity of the comparison as it ensures that the basis of what perception is based upon is similar. The interviews were conducted in February 2017.

Line managers and HR professionals had separate questions that were asked. The questions were adjusted to suit the two roles and their existing knowledge on the subject. All questions were made to be as generic as possible to ensure that all participants would understand what was asked. The subject matter of both sets of questions was similar in order to compare answer. Both sets started with a few questions about the background of the interviewee in order to determine their position in the organisation, level of seniority. All questions were open-ended and aimed to generate reflexive thinking from the participant by asking for reasoning for answers and providing real-life examples. This provides more data, which helps to direct the thesis towards more detailed and accurate interpretations and conclusions. The interview ended with an opportunity for the participant to express something that was not asked to ensure that they were able to say everything that they felt was important or clarify an issue. The questions can be found from Appendix 1 & 2.

Common interview etiquette was followed. All of the participants were informed of the purpose of the research. Permission to record the interviews was asked. Lastly, no

participant received reward or compensation for taking part. Due to the personal nature, in terms of opinions, of the research topic, the identities of participants are protected and results are anonymous. In addition, at the request of the organisation, this study will not refer to the organisation using its name and will merely be described as a Finnish research and education institute.

Line Managers	HR Professionals
Line manager 1	HR manger 1
Line manager 2	HR manager 2
Line manager 3	HR specialist
Line manager 4	HR coordinator 1
Line manager 5	HR coordinator 3
Line manager 6	HR coordinator 4

Table 1: Table illustrating the interview participants

3.2.2. Research and Education Organisation

The case organisation in this thesis is a Finnish research and education organisation. The organisation is composed of different schools with departments, and different units at the organisational level. HR organisation is a matrix organisation where there is a HR director at the organisational level. Each school has a HR manager and a HR coordinator. At the organisational level there is a HR manage and HR coordinators as well as HR specialists. HR managers report to the HR director and HR coordinators report to HR managers. Line managers in this thesis are heads of units or departments. Interviewees are both from the organisation and school level. The main HR partner for line managers is the HR manager and HR coordinators from their unit or school.

4. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the qualitative data collection from line managers and HR professionals by comparing and contrasting the answer to discuss the similarities and differences between the perceptions. At the beginning of the section, there is an overview table of the findings with illustrative quotations from the interviews. Following this, findings are organised and presented in themes with illustrative quotation tables throughout.

Concept	Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals
Aim of HR	Provide support in people management & support employee well-being	"Main aim is to support us in people management and also make sure that our personnel processes work"	Support management in people management & support employees	"Leaders and managers own people management and HR is the enabler that HR provides tools, processes and support"
Most Important Activities	Provide expertise		Provide expertise	
	Support in development, act as a sparring partner, support day-to-day processes		Support development, be a sparring partner, ensure smooth processes	
	Recruitment		Recruitment	
Role of HR	Strategic partner at higher levels of the organisation	"In my team HR hasn't specifically been a strategic partner, but HR is involved in formulating the overall strategy at the highest level"	HR managers saw the role to go towards a strategic partner	"If we are not involved in the strategic partner conversations then it is hard to help change since we don't know what we're changing and don't know what the strategic aim is"
	Most visible role: administrative expert	"We have legislative obligations and practices and handling of personnel information in which I have no expertise in"	Administrative expert	"Administrative expert, because I am in operational HR"
	At times change agent	"Change agent…HR has taken a large role in this, our employees should not get the perception that we are doing change because HR wants it, it needs to come from the line managers wanting change and HR supporting it"	Change agent	"There is challenge in being a change agent in my opinion that we cannot do it for the manager…our role is to enable it and support and facilitate it"
	Employee champion	"Ensuring the fair treatment of the staff"	Employee champion important	"We have strict policies since we want to treat everyone equally and not make exceptions for individuals"
Value Added	Expertise	"Knowledge of the law…What can I and can't I do and then if there is a problem what are the option from where I start to resolve it, what is the palette from where I can consider from and what would be smart"	Expertise	"Finding solutions that suit everyone and are in accordance with the rules"
	Development: identifying strengths and weaknesses		Development: identifying areas of development	
	Supports efficiency & affects external image of the organisation	"If all things are done once in the a unified manner, thinking of the whole organisation it adds efficiency contrary if each line manager would start writing their own job contracts"	Increases employee efficiency & affects the internal image	"Solutions and support for people to work together more efficiently"
Areas of Improvement	Understanding of the organisation's various units	"Rotation of positions in different departments, if a HR coordinator has worked in the department…significantly easier to support and understand what the department does and why"	Understanding the environment of operation	"HR needs to understand the substance of what it is doing, in this organisation it needs to understand the academic environment…because we can't ever be a convincing strategic partner if we can't talk the common language"
	Digitalisation of documents	"One thing that is been improved and where there is space for improvement is digitalisation: there is still much HR paperwork which needs to be signed on paper, which can be hard to schedule"	Digitalisation, HR IT tools	"Our IT tools are really bad that it is going towards that we would get a new system, but there is a lot of shuffling of paper…so if we could get rid of that and double work"
	Being proactive in offering services and special cases & communication	"HR could have been more proactive and earlier…organize discussion opportunities for employees"	Being proactive	"Anticipation of issues could be better and information comes pretty late and then it is challenging to start figuring out when there is a hurry"
	Internationalization	"I have heard much from colleagues and what I have been thinking about is how HR could more actively promote internationalization [in our organisation]"		

Table 2: Overview Table of Findings

4.1. Differences in Line Managers' and HR Professionals' Perceptions

4.1.1. Aim of HR

The perception of the aim of HR is very similar for line managers and HR professionals. Both state that the main aim is to provide support for management in people management issues. This is done through making sure that personnel processes are functioning, managers have appropriate tools and support as well as by being a sparring partner to managers. Another issue that was identified to be an aim of HR by both stakeholders was to provide support with employee well-being issues and line managers and HR professionals mentioned HR's task of coordination occupational health services as a part of promoting well being. HR has been around for some time and thus a certain general universal reason for its existence prevails and thus aims may be perceived largely the same. The way in which the aim is brought into reality differs in organisations according to its needs and people have different ideas of how to do this and thus perceptions of its activity, role and added value differ more drastically than aim.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR professionals
Aim: Support in people management	*"Main aim is to support us in people management and also make sure that our personnel processes work"* – Line Manager 1	Aim: Support people management and employee well being	*"Leaders and managers own people management and HR is the enabler that HR provides tools, processes and support"* –HR specialist

Table 3: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

4.1.2. Most Important Activities of HR

The perception of what is entailed in activities and their importance is relatively similar between line managers and HR professionals. One activity that was perceived important by all was employment relations, which includes job contracts, wage issues, and hiring policies. Many of these activities would have legal consequences if not followed and thus they may be perceived important to avoid consequences. Line manager 2 said that by HR handling all employment issues, it increases fair treatment of all employees since there are unified polices and contracts through out the organisation. The only difference between the two was that although HR saw employment relations as important, HR managers believed that some parts of it just had to be done without using excessive resources or time for it: for example paying salaries. This may be due to belief of HR managers that HR is moving away from being an administrative expert and since payroll is an administrative duty, it does not support for example becoming more strategic. In addition, HR manager 1 saw that payroll was a very routine process that the amount of added value that it can deliver was limited and thus the focus should be on actions that have larger opportunities of bringing added value to the organisation. Line managers and HR coordinators, on the other hand, still perceive the administrative side more important and thus regard importance of such administrative activities differently.

Another important activity perceived by both was support. This was seen as supporting in different ways, but the most commonly mentioned by both were: support development, act a sparring partner and ensure that day to day works. Line managers reported to see HR as the facilitator of development, by for example facilitating workshops. In addition, several line managers identified that when things change, employees need to adjust their mind set and HR helps in this. HR also saw the activity of supporting development as helping employees to develop themselves and advance in their careers by creating tools for them. This is because the task of HR is not only to support people management, but also ensure employee well being in different ways such as helping in career advancement.

In regards to supporting day to day operations, both saw it as an important task to make sure processes were running in accordance to the yearly clock. Line manager

4 gave an example of when recruitment processes were not running efficiently and HR regulations prolonged the selection process by not letting the line managers hire when was promised. This affected the whole department, as the manager was not able to recruit the best possible people since they had gotten offers from other organisations. This shows that how processes function have an impact on line managers and their work, which explains the importance that is placed in smooth running of processes. The task of supporting management in difficult personnel issues was also mentioned by almost all. The reason for why support is perceived so important is that line managers may not have adequate knowledge or experience to deal with such issues alone and therefore requires the help of HR. In addition, in special cases may require solutions that have not been done before and thus line manager may require someone who is familiar with the rules and regulations in order to come up with a solution within the constraints of the law.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professional
Support	*"If I am having trouble with my subordinate and I can't tell anyone about it so I can tell my partners in HR in confidence these issues"* –Line manager 6	Support	*"Difficult personnel situations: I encounter weekly that there is such a situation for which one of my HR coordinators or me is wanted to support the manager"* –HR Manager 2

Table 4: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

Recruitment was an occurring important activity among the line managers who worked in the head of schools and their HR counterparts. As the organisation is a research and education institute, a large portion of its staff includes visiting faculty and temporary researchers. This leads to a high turnover rate, which requires a lot of recruitment in order to ensure the filling of all essential positions. Both line managers

and HR professionals mentioned that the goal of recruitment was to attract and select good, internationally high level personnel. Without putting importance on recruitment, the organisation might not be able to attract quality staff, which has an influence on the quality on the education and research that is produced.

Although line managers and HR professionals identified important activities, line manager 4 and HR coordinator 2 saw the importance of activities to shift as the need for them changes. Line manager 4 believed that it was important for HR to have different tools such as recruitment and development discussions and when the tools are needed the importance of them increases. HR coordinator 2 also believed that the importance of different activities was determined by what was needed at times, which to an extent is dictated by the annual clock of what needs to be done. The key is to do what the client, users of HR, needs as important. This way may also be the best insurance that line managers and HR professionals are putting emphasis on similar issues, which can help HR to be more relevant as their activities as needed at the time.

4.1.3. Role of HR

There are several differences as well as similarities between the perceptions of what the role of HR is. The perception of HR as an administrative function differs largely. Line managers see this function as very visible and important. This is due to the fact that every organisation has legislative obligations related to their personnel and personnel information needs to be processed and these are not the areas of expertise of line managers. Therefore, HR filling the role of an administrative expert, line managers do not have to use their time to complete basic HR processes and study issues related personnel matters such as employment legislation, but rather focus on their tasks. HR coordinators also perceive the role to be an administrative expert to a large extent. HR coordinators are more responsible for operational tasks, which are very administrative concentrated. However, HR managers and specialists perceive HR's role to be moving from an administrative expert to strategic partner. HR managers' and specialist deal with less operational issues and thus may not see the role prominent. According to HR manager 1, if all other three roles (strategic

partner, employee champion, change agent) are done well, the administrative expert will happen without having to pay too much attention to it. Meaning that if the roles are done well, there will be less conflict and people are able to agree on things informally instead of needing to research legislation related to resolving conflict.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals	
Administrative expert very visible	*"We have legislative obligations and practices and handling of personnel information in which I have no expertise in"* – Line Manager 5	Coordinators see role as administrative mostly, managers do not	*"Administrative expert, because I am in operational HR"* –HR Coordinator 2	*"Originally it has been administrative expert, but now a days it is more of a strategic partner"* –HR manager 2

Table 5: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

Another function in which the perception differs is strategic partner. Line managers reported that they do not perceive HR to be a strategic partner in their unit, but feel that HR is involved in strategy at the higher levels of the organisation. With HR professionals, the coordinators reported not to perceive their role to be a strategic partner. Higher ranked HR professionals saw their role as more strategic. One described this role to be apparent through sparring about many issues such as strategy with managers. According to HR manager 1, without being apart of the strategic partner discussions HR cannot fill its role as employee champion and change agent properly since they do not understand where the organisation is headed. This difference is partly due to the fact that HR coordinators are more involved with administrative issues and may be on the operational side and. Line managers are in most contact with HR coordinators and thus mostly see the administrative side than strategic.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals	
Strategic partner present on higher levels of the organisation	*"In my team HR hasn't specifically been a strategic partner, but HR is involved in formulating the overall strategy at the highest level"* –Line Manager 5	Strategic partner role is apparent for some	*"If we are not involved in the strategic partner conversations then it is hard to help change since we don't know what we're changing and don't know what the strategic aim is"* –HR Manager 1	*"Strategic partnership has been distant for me"* –HR Coordinator 1

Table 6: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

The perception of HR's role as an employee champion was very similar between line managers and HR professionals. HR's task of ensuring fair treatment of all employees was perceived essential and relevant. HR was also seen to have done this through promoting the strategy of 'People First' in the whole organisation. Also both stakeholders perceived that creating tools and practices to make personnel more efficient was a part of HR's task. However, a few line managers said that they mostly deal with motivating their employees rather than HR, but in these cases HR provides ideas on how to do it. This difference may be due to personal differences between HR professionals and line managers and how they prefer to handle specific issues such as motivation.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals
Ensuring employees' rights	*"Insuring fair treatment of employees and communication of employees' rights"* – Line Manager 6	Ensuring fair and rightful treatment of employees	*"We have strict policies since we want to treat everyone equally and not make exceptions for individual"* – HR Coordinator 1

Table 7: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

In regards to the perception of HR being a change agent, this generated some contradictory perceptions. Both stakeholders perceive being a change agent as part of HR's role and it was acknowledged by both that the change needs to come from managers and HR is merely its facilitator. One line manager though reported that HR has been overemphasizing the role by also deciding on the areas of change. Several HR professionals, however, emphasized the importance of HR merely being the facilitator. This means that managers need to be the ones initiating the change and HR works to take this change forth and help make it possible. One example of this is: HR can develop teaching methods extensively, but if professors do not change their teaching methods, HR's developments are useless. Thus there seems to be a misconnect between what is perceived and what happens in reality in the organisation. This may be due to miscommunication between the two of what is expected from the role.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals
Making sure to merely be a facilitator of change	*"Change agent…HR has taken a large role in this, our employees should not get the perception that we are doing change because HR wants it, it needs to come from the line managers wanting change and HR supporting it"* –Line Manager 2	Acting as the facilitator of change	*"There is challenge in being a change agent in my opinion that we cannot do it for the manager…our role is to enable it and support and facilitate it"* –HR Manager 1

Table 8: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

4.1.4. Value Added by HR

Line managers and HR professionals perceived HR to bring added value to the organisation and the ways in which it does so are perceived to be quite similar. The first way of adding value in line managers' and HR professionals' opinion was through providing expertise. When HR is bale to provide the expertise in personnel management and legislative issues, managers are able to focus their job instead of studying issues such as employment legislation. Line managers especially emphasized the importance of legislative expertise since if laws are not followed; there are consequences for the organisation. Line manager 6 also said that difficult personnel situations need the expertise of someone experienced and this comes from HR. This is because otherwise the situation may not be handled appropriately and it may not confer with all regulations in place.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals
Providing expertise line managers lack	*"Knowledge of the law…What can I and can't I do and then if there is a problem what are the option from where I start to resolve it, what is the palette from where I can consider from and what would be smart"* – Line Manager 4	Providing expertise to different cases	*"Finding solutions that suit everyone and are in accordance with the rules"* –HR coordinator 3

Table 9: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

One area in which all line managers and most HR professionals reported HR to bring added value in was the cases of difficult personnel situations. This was also an area that almost all reported that cooperation between line management and HR is very good. Line manager 5 said the support of HR in these situations is very valuable since the issue cannot be discussed with anyone else. As previously mentioned, it was also acknowledged that these situations required experience in handling similar things as well as knowledge about how they can be resolved within the confines of legislation. HR manager 1 also said HR can make a real difference by opening the communication channels between managers and employees and talking about the difficult issues when the manager is not able to do so.

Another way that both line managers and HR professionals perceived HR to add value was through identifying strengths and weaknesses in an organisation and based on results helping to choose areas of development. This is done through the means of different workplace questionnaires. Several line managers said that in

these situations HR works as change agents by helping to develop by for example facilitating workshops. Line managers may not necessarily have the expertise or time to setup workshops and thus believe HR to be able to bring added value in this and help the process.

An area in which HR can add value that showed slight differences in perception was helping to create the image of the organisation. Line manager 6 reported that the image of an organisation is composed of the quality of its work, but also how well its recruitment processes work. Therefore by making sure that recruitment processes are good for the person chosen as well as for those not chosen, the image of the organisation in the eyes of both remains favourable. A similar point came apparent from a HR professional, but it concentrates on the image of the organisation in regards to its employees. HR needs to ensure that all things during the lifespan of ones time at the organisation run smoothly to ensure that employees have a positive image of processes and this brings added value to an organisation and its employees. This difference can be partly explained by the fact that line managers and HR professionals have different aims within the organisation. Line managers are responsible for the employees, but also the larger picture and thus they consider the bigger implications. HR is solely focused on people management and employee well being and thus places importance on the employees within the organisation.

Last area in which perceptions differed slightly was the way HR can make the organisation more efficient. Both line managers and HR professionals identified it to increase efficiency in some way. One line manager identified HR to add value by making sure that the whole organisation does certain things in a unified manner such as job contracts that every manager does not need to do it themselves thus increasing efficiency. HR professionals saw HR to increase efficiency by creating different tools, platforms and solutions to for example enable more efficient ways for employees to work together thus increasing efficiency among line managers as well as employees. As with the creating image, the difference in aim between line managers and HR professionals may explain the difference in perception of how HR enhances efficiency. Line managers are concerned with the overall efficiency whereas HR professionals specifically focus on efficiency though people.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals
Efficiency in processes	*"If all things are done once in the a unified manner, thinking of the whole organisation it adds efficiency contrary if each line manager would start writing their own job contracts"* –Line Manager 2	Efficiency in employees	*"Solutions and support for people to work together more efficiently"* –HR Specialist

Table 10: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

4.1.5. Areas of Improvement

Several areas of improvement were identified in order for HR to be more efficient and add more value. The perceptions on what the areas of improvement are were largely the same, with some differences. Both line managers and HR professionals identified that HR should have more understanding of the environment in which operates. Line manager 2 said that HR could be able to support more if they understood what the services are about by for example doing job rotations in different units. HR manager 1 related the understanding of the environment to being able to be a strategic partner. Without being knowledgeable, HR also cannot meet the demands of the line managers as well since they do not understand what is expected and cannot contribute on a more meaningful level. Being more knowledgeable may help HR to be more proactive, which was another area of improvement identified by line management.

Line Managers Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals
More knowledge on the environment of operation	*"Rotation of positions in different departments, if a HR coordinator has worked in the department…significantly easier to support and understand what the department does and why"* –Line Manager 2	More knowledge on the substance of the whole organisation	*"HR needs to understand the substance of what it is doing, in this organisation it needs to understand the academic environment…because we can't ever be a convincing strategic partner if we can't talk the common language"* – HR Manager 1

Table 11: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

Becoming more digitalised was another area of improvement that was identified by both. Much paper work is related to HR and for example signing papers and at the moment it is done physically instead of electronically. Line manager 6, HR coordinator 3 and HR specialist felt upgrading to electronic copies to be more efficient and would save time. The reason for such a need for HR professionals was because inadequate IT tools affected the quality of their work, as with advanced tools handling of personnel information is easier. For line managers, the need for digitalisation since the old way was time consuming and. When an activity is inefficient, line managers may perceive it negatively and thus reflect these feelings onto whose processes they are and thus perception of HR may decrease.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals
Digitalisation	*"One thing that is been improved and where there is space for improvement is digitalisation: there is still much HR paperwork which needs to be signed on paper, which can be hard to schedule"* –Line Manager 6	Digitalisation	*"Our IT tools are really bad that it is going towards that we would get a new system, but there is a lot of shuffling of paper…so if we could get rid of that and double work"* - HR Specialist

Table 12: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

One area of development that was identified by both was to be more proactive with problem solving; however the perspective of this differed. Line managers felt that the issue was with HR: they should be more proactive. Line manager 3 for example said that in one difficult instance, HR could have come in earlier to discuss about the issue when in reality it took several years. However, line manager 5 felt that their HR counterpart was able to anticipate needs, but in general HR could offer their services more proactively. HR professionals on the other hand acknowledged that solving problems should be more proactive, but in the sense that managers would come to HR earlier with the problem. One explanation for why line managers may not be going to HR early enough is because HR can be seen as a police and thus they are not trusted to be told of problems. On the other hand, HR may have limited resources to deal with such issues and have not identified that employees want chances to discuss difficult issues.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals
HR to be more proactive	*"HR could have been more proactive and earlier…organize discussion opportunities for employees"* –Line Manager 3	More reactiveness from line management	*"Anticipation of issues could be better and information comes pretty late and then it is challenging to start figuring out when there is a hurry"* - HR Coordinator 3

Table 13: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

One area in which perceptions differed slightly was communication. Line manager 3 told how in some difficult personnel cases communication was not completely successful. After a difficult situation was reported, it took awhile for HR to communicate about their thoughts on it, causing in some cases the situation to become insignificant. Line manager 5 said that HR was not involved in writing guidelines for a common recruitment process on how it works for employees and managers. Despite this, only one HR coordinator said that communication was an area that could be constantly improved and that it needed to be taken into consideration that communication did not only include face-to-face communication with managers and employees, but written texts and process guidelines. This suggests that there may be a misunderstanding between the two on what is expected from the communication between line management and HR and thus it can create problems.

Last major area of improvement that came apparent was HR supporting the internationalization of the organisation. Two line managers mentioned it and no HR professionals talked about it even though it concerns the whole organisation and not only the units from which the line managers were. The line managers saw that HR should be more active in promoting the international environment especially for

visiting faculty in non-international oriented schools and units. This difference in perception may be due to issues such as communication. Some line managers may be involved with international employees on a regular basis whereas HR not as often and thus have not identified it as an area of focus.

Line Manager Perception	Evidence from Line Managers	HR Professional Perception	Evidence from HR Professionals
Internationalisation	*"I have heard much from colleagues and what I have been thinking about is how HR could more actively promote internationalisation"* – Line Manager 3	Nothing mentioned	

Table 14: Table showing a concept and illustrative quotations

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section provides a discussion and analysis of the findings of the qualitative research. In addition, it compares the finding to relevant literature. The structure of the section follows the conceptual framework, which was presented earlier, to a large extent, discussing first the factors affecting perception and then discussing overall perception as well as the three specific areas identified: activities, roles and valued added by HR. This structure aims to place this study into the existing research.

5.1. Factors Affecting Perception

One major factor affecting HR professionals' perception was identified. However, as the aim was to study perceptions, not factors affecting, the contribution of this study to factors affecting is limited. According to the results, it seems that the seniority and job description of a HR Professional may influence their perception. HR managers identified more to be shifting towards strategic partners whereas HR coordinators did not believe the same as they role are often more operational and thus administrative. As identified in the conceptual framework, previous literature does not discuss factors affecting HR professionals' perception and thus there is no support for this factor.

5.2. Overall Perception of Human Resource Management

Overall, the perception of line managers and HR professionals towards HR as an activity is positive. HR helps line managers to reach a certain standard and helps the organisation to operate more efficiently to reach its goals. These findings are supported by literature. Several studies have found that both line managers and HR professionals perceived HR to be essential for a functioning organisation (Caldwell, 2010; Whittaker, 2003; Wright et al., 2001). However, there was concern of how HR contributes to the overall strategy of the organisation among line managers, which is also present in the fore mentioned studies. However, Buyens & De Vos (2001) found that some line managers perceived HR to be strategic. This contradictory result may

be due to the position of the line manager in the organisation, as some line managers identified that although a strategic HR is not visible to them, it is at higher levels.

Generally perceptions were quite similar between the two with some differences and contradictions. This notion is also supported by a study conducted by Ofori et al. (2012). This is a positive finding for the HR profession in the case organisation as it indicates that line managers do not have any big misconceptions of HR.

5.3. Important Activities

According to the findings of this study, the perceptions of what are important activities of HR are quite similar between line managers and HR professionals. The most reoccurring activities were employee relations and support. In addition to these, several line managers and HR professionals identified recruitment as a key task of HR. These line managers and HR professionals worked in a unit or school that had a high turnover due to majority of the workforce being postgraduate researchers. Literature on the most important tasks and activities shows no strong patterns as the perception of what is most important is closely related to the type of industry or organisation and its needs. Studies on line management perceptions identify tasks such as reward management, motivation and discipline (McLean, 2006; Brandl et al., 2009). Studies on HR professionals identify tasks such as motivation, training and employee relations (Buyens & De Vos, 2001; McLean, 2006), which partly supports findings of this study. The similarities in perception indicate that HR is aiming to focus on what is relevant to its users.

5.4. Roles

Literature on perceptions of HR widely discusses roles identified by Ulrich (1997) and the research findings of this study found several similarities to the literature. Nonetheless, there were a few differences.

Overall, all four roles proposed by Ulrich (1997) were identified to be included in the role of HR. Line managers and HR coordinators saw the role of the administrative expert as the most visible one and a very important one. This is very similar to literature related to line managers (De Winne et al., 2013; Teo & Rodwell, 2007), because the concept of a strategic HR is relatively new and thus stakeholders have not adapted to this yet (Chen et al., 2011) or then in the case of this study, HR was said to be involved strategically at higher level of the organisation, and thus not present to lower levels. At lower levels the tasks of HR tend to be more operational. HR professionals at the highest levels are involved executive boards and other management committees where strategy formulation is more likely to take place. Line managers reported to have most contact with HR coordinators, who are not involved in higher level decision making and therefore they do not focus on strategy and this may be the reason that line managers did not regard the strategic partner present.

In regards to HR professionals, all identified administrative expert to be an essential role, but HR managers said to be moving away from this to become more of a strategic partner. This is also the general trend in HR professional literature (Caldwell, 2010; Lemmenrgaard, 2008; Teo & Rodwell, 2007). However, due to legal and other aspects of the HR professions, professionals are repeatedly engaged in administrative issues (Daniels, 2013; Lemmenrgaard, 2008). HR coordinators reported to primarily be administrative experts, which is an interesting contrast to a study conducted in the UK, which found that only 24% of HR professional participants said to be an administrative expert (Caldwell, 2010). This difference may be due to different ranked HR professionals as based on this study it appears lower ranked HR professionals or operational HR professionals are more involved in the administrative side.

According to the findings, both line managers and HR professionals perceived employee champion to be an important role of HR. This is supported by relevant literature in which line managers identified among most important activities to be employee motivation and commitment (Brandl et al., 2009; McLean, 2006; Wright, 2001). Another supporting study is by Lemmerngaard (2008), which found that HR executives perceived to be like employee champions. However, study on UK private

sector HR professionals found that only 12% of participants said to be filling the role. These differences may be due to the differences in the industries studied.

A finding in this study was also that the role of change agent is important, however HR is merely a supporting actor in this. The findings found some differences in HR's role during change. Such conflicts are not identified directly in literature. However, literature identifies that one source of tension between line managers and HR professionals the misalignment of aims and directions (De Winne et al., 2013; Sheenan et al., 2014, Wright et al., 2001). Thus there is a misalignment in the perception of what the aim of the role agent is and this is a possible source of tension.

5.5. Creation of Added Value

The findings include many ways for HR to bring added value to an organisation. The first way to bring value, perceived by both line managers and HR professionals, was the involvement of HR in difficult personnel cases. This is because line managers do not have the experience or expertise to deal with them alone. However, an area of improvement was to be more proactive including involving the HR professionals earlier. The Added Value Model by Buyens and De Vos (2001) supports the notion of adding value through being involved in decision-making, which in this case is the decisions related to personnel cases. However, the model identifies to add value by timely involvement of HRM, which supports that putting more consideration into when it is appropriate to involve HR, can increase the added value.

Another finding is that both line managers and HR professionals perceive HR to bring added value through the different Ulrich HR roles. Especially line managers and HR coordinators saw the added value to come from expertise of for example legislative issues, because line managers do not have knowledge on this, but it needs to be done. One HR manager though perceived the value to come from the other three roles since if everything is done well, the role of administrative expert will have less demand. These findings are slightly different than literature as several studies argue that value comes from the four roles equally (Buyens & De Vos, 2001; Wright et al.,

2001). Again the question of the effect of rank on perception comes into force as perceived added value may be related to what is relevant to one's own role.

Efficiency was another way that both line managers and HR professionals perceive HR to add value. Although the specific ways in which it increases efficiency differs slightly, both ways help to increase overall efficiency in an organisation. The difference may be due to the fact that the line managers and HR professionals focus on different things and thus experience the increase in efficiency differently. Literature does not offer supporting evidence for the differences as the issue of efficiency has been mainly researched through quantitative means to measure efficiency and effectiveness. Although these studies found HR professionals to rate their activity more effective, line managers also perceived HR to be effective (Chen et al., 2011; Yusoff et al., 2009; Wright et al., 2001).

In addition to these, other ways to bring added value perceived by line managers and HR professionals according to the findings are evaluation of the work environment, through personnel questionnaires, and contributing to the image of the organisation, internally and externally. These two are not specifically identified in literature.

The findings also identified several areas in which HR could improve in order to bring added value in new ways. One HR manager and HR specialist as well as one line manager said that HR should have more knowledge on the environment in which they operate. This would enable for HR to be more of a strategic partner and bring more meaningful insight into conversations and be able to ensure that aims are aligned with management. Literature also identifies this issue and connects it to a possible source of tension (Caldwell, 2010; Daniels, 2013; De Winne et al., 2013; Sheenan et al., 2014). Therefore HR should invest in this to contribute more.

Another area of improvement and possibility to increase efficiency and thus add value, identified by both line managers and HR professionals, is digitalisation. In addition, it came apparent that line managers wished for clearer communication and for HR to support internationalisation within the organisation. Better communication can support existing ways of bringing value such as handling of special cases. Promoting internationalisation was seen as a completely new area in which HR can

add value. Literature on areas of improvement for HR is limited as the issues are generally very organisation specific as all HR departments work different and emphasize different issues.

5.6. Limitations of the Research

This research has several limitations that need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, there is an issue of transferability of results due to the type of the case organisation. It is a research and education organisation and therefore it is different from traditional corporations. Secondly, the sample did not include HR professionals from the highest level of the organisation. Due to this, the findings and analysis in based on HR managers and coordinators and may not be reflect the perception of higher ranked HR professionals.

6. CONCLUSION

This section presents the main findings of the study, implications of the study for the field of International Business and lastly offers suggestion for further research.

6.1. Main Findings

The purpose of this study to was compare and contrast line managers' and HR professionals' perception of HR as an activity. Overall, the findings from line managers and HR professionals were similar to relevant literature. Nonetheless, there were some differences and new issues arose, as research from a similar perspective is limited.

Line managers and HR professionals perceived the aim of HR as support for management in people management and ensure employee well being. Most important activities perceived are closely related to the aim and are very similar between line managers and HR professionals. These tasks include providing expertise in various issues such as employment legislation and leadership, provide support in development, sparring and processes, and lastly recruitment. This suggests that line managers and HR professionals are emphasizing similar tasks and thus provide a better platform to have aligned activities.

Within the role of HR, perceptions differ slightly. Most visible role among line managers is reported to be an administrative expert. This is the same among HR coordinators, however HR managers and specialist see themselves as moving away from this role. Similar type of divide exists with the role of strategic partner that line managers and HR coordinators do not perceive it to be visible. HR managers and specialist aim for this and see HR moving towards this. The perception of employee champion is fairly similar and both perceive to be an important part to fill. Lastly, both acknowledge the importance of change agent and being a facilitator of change. However, a contradiction occurs in how involved HR really is in change. This suggests that there are differences of what is expected from HR, which can cause tension.

The perception of how HR is able to bring added value is very similar between line managers and HR professionals with a minor difference. Both perceive the main ways to add value to be through offering expertise that other stakeholder in an organisation do not have and by evaluating the organisation and helping to identify areas for development. Both also perceive HR to have the possibility to affect the organisational image positively. Line managers perceive HR's effect on the image to outsiders where as HR professionals perceive the effect to be on the internal image. Similarities in how value is added ensure that HR works in ways that is also beneficial for line managers.

Lastly, although some areas of improvement were perceived to be the same, there were several differences. Both perceived it to be important for HR to be more knowledgeable on the environment of operation, which in this case is the academic environment. This would allow for HR to have a bigger contribution in the overall strategy formulation and operations at all levels. Secondly, both also perceived digitalisation as something to be improved and a way to become more efficient. The first difference came in how issues are approached. Both perceived the benefits if HR were more proactive. However, line managers perceive that this change needs to happen in HR, while HR perceive that line managers need to come to HR earlier. Lastly, HR promoting internationalisation and improving communication were issues that were not identified properly by HR professionals, but solely by line managers. The identification of differences in perception in areas of improvements allows for HR to further develop their function to better serve different stakeholders and increase the added value to the organisation.

6.2. Implications for International Business

Human resource management is a field that is evolving constantly as the understanding of its positive effect on an organisation develops and as technology advancements bring new opportunities to different areas such as recruitment. This study offers further understanding of how it is perceived by two important stakeholders, which gives direction to how to develop the HR function further to contribute more to an organisation. In addition, as there is a limited amount of

qualitative research on these perceptions of HR, this study aims to add to the qualitative understanding of the subject.

6.3. Suggestions for Future Research

Based on this study, several suggestions for future research come apparent. The study demonstrated that more research should be done on HR professionals, as there is much more research available on line managers than HR professionals currently.

There are several ways to approach this. The first is to conduct more academic research, which results in empirical data about what factors affect HR professionals' perception. This study suggested that there might be a difference in the perception of different ranked HR professionals for example in regards to the shift from an administrative expert to strategic partner. As this shift is a major change in the field, more research on how line managers perceive this change might also be beneficial to get a better understanding of how to successfully change the role.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1- List Of Interview Questions for Line Manager

1. Kerro tehtävästäsi lyhyesti.
2. Kauan olet ollut nykyisessä tehtävässä?
3. Ketkä ovat HR:ssä tärkeimpiä yhteistyökumppaneitasi?
4. Mitkä sinusta ovat HR:n päätavoitteita?
5. Mitkä sinusta ovat HR:n tärkeimmät tehtävät?
6. Miksi nämä ovat mielestäsi tärkeimmät?
7. Mitä HR tehtäviä sinä et koe niin merkityksellisinä?
8. Minkä takia sinä et usko näiden olevan niin merkityksellisiä?
9. Millä tavoin koet HR toiminnan auttavan saavuttamaan organisaation tavoitteita?
10. Onko HR:llä ollut tiettyjä rooleja jonka kautta on auttanut näissä tilanteissa?
11. Voitko antaa esimerkin jossa olet kokenut HR ammattilaisen organisaatiossasi vaikuttaneen positiivisesti ja negatiivisesti yksikköösi
12. Miten koet HR:n voivan tuoda lisäarvoa organisaatiolle?
13. Millä tavoin koet HR:n voivan kehittyä vastaaman paremmin tarpeita yksikössäsi?
14. Minkälaisissa tehtävissä yhteistyö on ollut erityisen onnistunutta auttamaan yksikköäsi?
15. Onko jotain jossa yhteistyötä voisi kehittää?
16. Onko sinulla vielä jotain snottavaa mistä en kysynyt?

Translation:

1. Tell about your position shortly.
2. How long have you been in the current position?
3. Who are your most important cooperation partners?
4. What do you think the main aim of HR is?
5. Which HR activities do you believe are the most important?
6. Why do you believe these are the most important?
7. Which HR activities do you believe are less significant?
8. Why do you believe these are less significant?

9. In what ways do you see HR to help the organisation help achieve its aims?

10. Through what kind of roles has HR helped in these situations?

11. Give an example of how HR has made an impact positively and negatively.

12. In what ways do you believe HR can bring added-value to the organisation?

13. In what ways do you believe that HR could improve its activity to further meet demands?

14. In what activities has the cooperation with HR been successful?

15. In what ways could the cooperation be improved?

16. Do you have something to add that I did not ask about?

Appendix 2 – List of Interview Questions for HR Professionals

1. Kerrotko lyhyesti tehtävästi Aallossa

2. Kauan olet ollut kyseisessä tehtävässäni?

3. Ketkä ovat tärkeimpiä asiakkaitasi ja yhteistyökumppaneitasi?

4. Mitkä sinusta ovat HR:n päätavoitteita?

5. Mitkä mielestäsi ovat HR:n tärkeimmät tehtävät?

6. Miksi nämä ovat mielestäsi tärkeimmät?

7. Mitä HR tehtäviä sinä et koe niin merkityksellisinä?

8. Minkä takia sinä et usko näiden olevan niin merkityksellisiä?

9. Millä tavoin koette HR:n tuovan lisäarvoa organisaatiolle ja sen työntekijöille?

10. Kerrotko esimerkki tilanteita jolloin HR toiminta on tehnyt todellisen eron Aallossa

11. Miten kuvailisit rooliasi suhteessa organisaatioon ja sen työntekijöihin? Jos olet perehtynyt HR:n teorioihin ja malleihin sen roolista, voit käyttää näitä termejä.

12. Millä tavoin koet HR:n voivan kehittyä vastaaman paremmin sen sidosryhmien tarpeisiin?

13. Minkälaisissa tehtävissä yhteistyö (HR & linjajohto) on ollut erityisen onnistunutta?

14. Onko jotain jossa yhteistyötä voisi kehittää?

15. Siinä oli minun kysymykseni, onko sinulla vielä jotain snottavaa mistä en kysynyt?

Translation:

1. Tell about your position shortly.
2. How long have you been in the current position?
3. Who are your most important client and cooperation partners?
4. What do you believe the main aim of HR is?
5. Which HR activities do you believe are the most important?
6. Why do you believe these are the most important?
7. Which HR activities do you believe are less significant?
8. Why do you believe these are less significant?
9. In what ways do you believe HR to bring added-value to the organisation and its employees?
10. Tell examples of situations in which HR has made an impact in the organisation.
11. How would you describe your role in regards to the organisation and its employees? If you know theories or models about the role of HR, you can use these terms.
12. In what ways do you believe that HR could improve its activity to further meet demands?
13. In what activities has the cooperation with HR been successful?
14. In what ways could the cooperation be improved?
15. Do you have something to add that I did not ask about?