MSc Management Research

Research Proposal

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1 Introduction

The Human Resource Management function has over the past couple of decades evolved into becoming an ever more sophisticated and ambitious agent in the establishment of a link between HRM and human performance. The impetus underpinning this quest for the holy grail of performance can be explained by a drive to establish a prominent organizational status, a status believed to be attained by 'value adding' strategic HRM activities in the pursuit of business excellence. Functionalistic HRM research that aims to establish this performance link is hence conducted in remarkable quantities. The research is in turn resulting in an outpouring of prescriptive models for the successful management and development of high performing, highly committed and uniform individuals that successfully, flexibly and in unison are embracing constantly changing working conditions operating under an increasingly competitive environment.

Critical research resting against a moral fiber of ethical considerations for the wellbeing of humans is consequently significantly undersized in comparison. Hence this Research Proposal will not have the intention to suggest yet another functionalistic research project; it is on the contrary highly critical to contemporary HRM practice and have the intention to counteract functionalistic HRM research through the critical inquiry of an important contemporary HRM practice; The Performance Management System and its' control mechanisms of performance appraisals and feedback.

The remaining discussion of this section will have three intentions; firstly it aims to introduce the reader to the meaning of the concepts Personnel Management, Human Resource Management (HRM) and Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) as ways to manage the employment relationship. This will be done through a presentation of HRMs history of development. Secondly it will discuss the HRM function as a representative of the 'audit society'. The consequences of the audit society are directly influencing the philosophy underpinning the SHRM function and so dictating the shape, content and purpose of contemporary SHRM practices and most importantly the working conditions for the employees. Subsequently the discussion will be summarized and considered in the light of

power before moving on to discuss the Performance Management System, performance appraisals and feedback – the focus of the proposed research project.

1.1 The transformation of the HRM function

Prior to the emergence of the current concepts of HRM and SHRM in the 80's, employment management was commonly known as Personnel Management (Watson, 2004). Being mainly an administrative function, personnel management primarily involved activities such as payroll, benefits, recruitment and administration of general needs of the employee. The concept of Personnel Management was brought into a different light during the 80's when a new American concern arose, one of achieving 'business excellence' (ibid. ; Legge, 2005) Labor processes and how those could effectively add value to business was consequently brought to the fore. The management of human input to organizations was to be seen as a strategic managerial concern – the rise of the concept of HRM had begun.

Distinguished from the traditional Personnel Management concept, HRM went on to be described as a series of policies deliberated to maximize organizational integration, employee commitment, flexibility and quality of work (Guest, 1987). In addition the rise of a new type of HRM concept arose; the one of Strategic HRM coined by Tichy, Fombrun, & Devanna (1982). SHRM was to become a response to attacks on American business for its' emphasis of short-run financial perspectives. HRM was hence encouraged to employ a role aligned with overall organizational long-run strategic goals boosting individual performance and consequently productivity and organizational performance.

Since the take-off of the initial ideas arising around a new strategic way to manage human resources the concept has spread across the globe and become established in Europe where it is largely orchestrated and directed by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Located in the UK, CIPD has emerged as Europe's' largest professional body specialized in the development and management of people with a current membership of over 133 000 (CIPD, 2009). This European application of the HRM function and its' history can also shortly be outlined here; The CIPD organization, known as the Welfare Workers Institute in 1919 was founded on a caring, welfarist ideology. The British early version of Personnel management was a function mainly occupied by women, its' organizational status was fairly low and personnel managers would in general lack formal qualifications. By the time Welfare Workers Institute had transformed in various guises and finally emerged under the name of

CIPD, it would have adopted the philosophies underpinning the current SHRM version of the function and through this move head towards what could be seen as a more promising future – the low status of the personnel role could finally become established and legitimate in its' own light vested in a professional suit.

CIPDs' agenda is broad; however some of their key activities is their own costume-built research and production of literature that is guiding thousands and thousands of SHRM students in their future SHRM positions. The principal quest on CIPDs' research agenda is to find a causal link between HRM and business performance so it can (prove and) provide the value-added by HRM. The elements involved in boosting the overall performance of individuals and consequently organizations will encompass various practices that ensure the development of employees' ability and motivational levels for increased performance output whilst attempting to enhance their levels of flexibility and commitment to organizational goals. This quest is however questionable and various authors have discussed its' level of success. Normative and prescriptive accounts on the development of a successful SHRM function have claimed that a link between HRM and performance is already established (Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchison, Rayton, & Swart, 2003; Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich, 1998; Guest & Baron, 2000; Guest & King, 2001; Macduffie, 1995). Concurrently critical voices depict the performance pursuit in a different light; Karen Legge expressed her opinion in following manner;

> " …much of the research on HR 'high commitment/performance' practices and organizational performance is at best confused and, at worst, conceptually and methodologically flawed" (Legge, 2001 p. 31 as cited in Gilmore & Adams, 2007)

The philosophy of contemporary HRM include the belief that people are good for business; that employees' objectives has to be *aligned* with the ones of the organization; a legitimization of the *right to manage* due to organizations need for survival in highly competitive environments; a *unitary* framework for the employment relationship that rests on ideals of commitment, consensus, harmony and shared employer and employee interests; and finally aligning the HRM function with managerial interests. Five key elements will stem out of this HRM philosophy: there has to be a *strategic integration* between corporate strategy and HRM; HR activities are to be devolved to line management; a pursuit for employee *commitment*; extension of worker *flexibility* and finally active management of *corporate*

culture (Pilbeam & Corbridge, 2006) What integration from a SHRM perspective would effectively mean was to horizontally and vertically integrate four generic processes that are comprised by the HRM function; Recruitment& Selection, appraisal, rewards and development. Jacques (1999)

1.2 SHRM as a representative of the 'audit society'

The audit society – visibilization and transparency

The Euro-American world privileges information as a source of knowledge. The knowledge at issue, in any field of knowledge, will be rendered visible through observers' attempts to describe and description will subsequently make for more information (Strathern, 2000). The development of modern social systems has hence closely been coupled with a project to make the 'society visible'. Cooper (1997) presents this trend through the application of a Foucauldian view; the advance of knowledge/power by means of professionalization as

> "professions are those groups in society that are accredited with the task
>
> of creating and maintaining the appropriate 'visibility' of social agents
>
> through such techniques as examination" (ibid. p. 38)

CIPD is an example of an organization engaged intensively in various activities of professionalization; It makes SHRM an aspiring profession interlinking its' project with other activities involved in the rise of an 'audit society' (Power, 1994) where there is a 'broadened scope in the surveillance of performativity' (Gilmore & Williams, 2007). The key contemporary professional SHRM role 'The Strategic Business Partner' (Ulrich, 1998) also suggests that one important activity conducted by the SHRM function is auditing. They main activities pertaining to such a role falls under the following role description (ibid) :

Essentially the *Strategic Business Partner* is partnering with senior and line managers in strategy execution. HR executives are to have close discussions with senior management on how the company should be organized for successful strategy execution. The creation of these conditions involves four steps; *Firstly* HR holds a responsibility to define the organizational architecture. That is to say, HR has to identify the organizational model upon which the company is conducting its business. The architectural work should produce a comprehensive set of blueprints containing all building parts and how they work together. *Secondly*, HR has to be accountable for conducting organizational **audits** that the blueprints can be matched against in order to detect areas needing immediate improvement. Hence Strategic Partners

can aid defining organizations' architecture (for instance its culture, competencies, governance, rewards, work-processes etc) and match it against a blueprint. If there is no 'fit' between architecture and blueprint HR can obtain and develop what is missing. *Thirdly* the Strategic HR partner has to identify organizational parts needed to be renovated and take a lead in creating and debating best practice in cultural change programs, or in reward and appraisal systems. And *finally*, HR needs to prioritize amongst many tasks, however being a 'true' business partner and

> "… to be truly tied to business outcomes, HR needs to join forces with operating managers to systematically assess the impact and importance of each one of these initiatives. Which ones are really aligned with strategy implementation? Which ones should receive attention immediately, and which can wait? Which ones, in short, are truly linked to business results?" (Ulrich, 1998)

What is to be highlighted and problematized from the above description is the fact that there are activities of surveillance or what Cooper (1997) calls 'vizibilization techniques' operating under shifted power relations. These activities are aiming to make parts of the organization and human beings ever more visible and transparent. What then is made visible is to be matched and evaluated against a standard or a blueprint and adjusted accordingly to ensure alignment with corporate values and objectives. If adopting a critical stance, the activities involving visibilization of subjects in the aim of evaluative scrutiny will present themselves as highly problematic, not problematic in the sense of their success-rate to accomplish organizational alignment but problematic in their ethical sense; how far is it feasible and reasonable to uncover and scrutinize living beings in the name of profits? How ethical is it to subject 'the uncovered' and vizibilized to 'renovation' as Ulrich is suggesting overleaf. What is to be 'renovated' and how?

1.3 Reflection – working conditions under changed power dynamics

Lets' re-cap and consider the foundation upon contemporary SHRM practices and policies are to be built and consider what efforts are expected from employees to exert under those conditions. Firstly it is important to recall that the contemporary SHRM function exists primarily to support organizational objectives, CEOs and line management. It is largely built on a unitarist philosophy (Pilbeam & Corbridge, 2006), which essentially means that the workforces and work-environment architectured by the Strategic Business Partners (Ulrich, 1997) should support the employment relationship through ideals of commitment, consensus, harmony and finally shared employer and employee interests (Pilbeam & Corbridge, 2006). These committed and homogenous workforces are supposed to co-operate in a tuneful way under increased levels of responsibility, in a highly changing environment, embrace and feel excited (Ulrich, 1997) about various change initiatives and execute their costumer oriented and adapted work under various forms of flexibility demands (Sennett, 1998). In all of this they are supposed to exert maximum possible effort to produce the value-adding performance levels that the notion of the SHRM concept is promising and CIPD is promoting.

Having CIPD monopolizing HRM knowledge whilst being Europes' largest professional organization directing the way forward under largely unitarist values should from a critical perspective be considered as highly problematic. The SHRM transformation has come to render employees increasingly unprotected whilst deregulation allows for many contemporary organizations (particularly in the UK) to replace unionism with sophisticated HRM functions that essentially are operating in the interest of management. All of those political activities and changes in the power dynamics have hence left human beings more exposed to various increasingly sophisticated activities that should be investigated under ethical scrutiny before ever being considered.

2 In the Research Focus: Performance Appraisals and Feedback

2.1 The Performance Management System

As mentioned the SHRM function is generally working under four generic processes; Recruitment& Selection, Rewards, Training & Development and Performance Appraisal,. As indicated overleaf, these processes are operating under a unitarist managerial framework that ensures that 'right' people are being employed. What 'right' essentially means is that human beings are to greatest extent possible supposed to match and fit into the organizational culture and possess the initial abilities and attitudes necessary to enter the job roles advertised. Once in the organizations, employees are to be rewarded for behavior that complies with the overall objectives of the organization. The employees are to be trained and developed to acquire the abilities necessary to conduct their job and fit into their work context. Finally they are to be appraised to ensure that they are living up to the expected requirements to carry out the job successfully.

A vast amount of SHRM activities has been developed and refined under the directive of CIPD, all of them with the particular purpose to maximize performance output. The practices and activities are supposed to be horizontally (Macduffie, 1995) and vertically integrated where vertical integration is aiming to support the achievement of corporate objectives whilst horizontal integration means that HR practices are internally coherent, complementary and mutually supportive. This essentially means that in order for an entire workforce (particularly those working on higher levels of discretion- i.e knowledge workers) to adopt perfect (vertical) organizational alignment in a changing work environment, they would need to think and act in a standardized manner, following a 'blueprint' to ensure the level of success, preferably feeling excited about imposed structural changes instead of resisting them (Ulrich, 1998). The official standards for thinking, being and acting for the particular organizational context can normally on a face-level be revealed in the mission, vision and value statements. The vast amount of practices that have been developed in the name of performance is unfortunatelly too vast to consider in this thesis. The choice has hence been to focus on a

particular area of SHRM activity that is considered predominantly important for the vertical alignment to the overall corporate objectives, in HRM terms called the Performance Management System (PMS).

Performance Management is defined as:

> "a process which contributes to the effective management of individuals and teams in order to achieve high levels of organizational performance. As such, it establishes shared understanding about what is to be achieved and an approach to leading and developing people which will ensure that it is achieved […] a strategy which relates to every activity of the organization set in the context of its human resource policies, culture, style and communications systems. The nature of the strategy depends on the organizational context and can vary from organization to organization."
> (Armstrong & Baron, 2004 as cited in Cannell, 2009)

Essentially the PMS is a *system of control* securing that individuals and teams are working towards and complying with organizational objectives. When an organization introduces a PMS as an organizational process it aims to develop a *performance culture*. What a performance culture requires are employees that continuously examine their business processes to ensure and maximize quality outputs. Further the employees need to regularly reflect over their development needs. It is a process that aids SHRM to integrate HR with corporate objectives and it is a systematized, continuous process, not an ad hoc event. Effectively the system is encouraging an increased level of self awareness that has to be self reflective and self evaluative against a set of standard measures linked with successful organizational performance.

Four stages are involved in the establishment and operation of a PMS (Pilbeam & Corbridge, 2006); Firstly there has to be a definition of corporate values, beliefs and a vision supporting the achievement of defined objectives on corporate, business unit, team and individual levels. Secondly, training and development plans have to be established to develop the skill necessary to meet the objectives. Thirdly, an appraisal process is put in place to discuss whether objectives are achieved or not and fourth, all is regulated with a feedback mechanism that will ensure that individuals and teams assess to what degree their objectives are achieved.

Finally financial and non-financial rewards are put in place to encourage further performance efforts in line with objectives.

2.2 Performance Appraisal and Feedback

The element of interest in the thesis pertains to the performance appraisal and feed-back elements of the PM process. Being the central pillar of the PMS this activity is generally applied to a larger extent than other activities (training & development and reward) that forms part of the full PMS. CIPDs' 2004 survey on how extensively organizations use such systems showed that 65 per cent use individual annual appraisals, 27 per cent use twice-yearly appraisals and 10 per cent use rolling appraisals (CIPD, 2009). The purpose of such systems have also evolved over the past years; Firstly, increasing attention is given to the behavior of employees and managers and secondly, whilst there previously has been a general view that the information flowing from appraisal meetings should be confidential, there are now increased pressures to store and record the performance data. The recorded and stored data will consequently make the information visible and accessible so the contribution of individuals can be assessed and indicators of human capital value can be felt into (ibid.).

Performance appraisal involves the assessment and measurement of employees' performance against agreed objectives and cultural values. As indicated, formal appraisals can be conducted all from once per year to every six or three month intervals. Involved in the appraisal is managerial assessment/judgment in the review of objectives that are both quantitative and qualitative and appraisal schemes are executed in various forms such as *top-down* appraisals where the manager conducts formal appraisal of the employee; *self-appraisal schemes* that encourages to openness and self reflection of the employee and can be part of the formal top-down appraisal method; *peer-appraisal* - Colleagues and peers can take part in the assessment of individual performance; *upward appraisal* involves an appraisal scheme where employees assessing their manager; *Multi-rater appraisal / 360-degree feed-back*. This type of appraisal involves various feed-back sources such as peers, internal and external customers, subordinates and managers. 360-degree feedback is especially well suited for flat organizational structures where it might be difficult for managers to appraise due to lack of direct control. A particularly important dimension of the 360-degree is its potential to improve

validity and encourage self-awareness. (ibid). Feedback activities are also stretching beyond the formal performance appraisals; Accounts on feedback and appraisal do not rarely encourage for feedback to be produced on an ongoing basis and not only being part of the formal appraisal schemes. In addition many training & development activities such as team-building activities are ending with evaluations and feedback exercises of teams and individual team members.

2.3 Problematization of Performance Appraisal and Feedback practices

This section will attempt to problematize the concepts of performance appraisals and feedback, a discussion developed in three steps: firstly a short summary will outline the general problems involved in these types of practices. Secondly the discussion will proceed to address the issue of the audit society and vizibilization techniques by introducing the reader to Barbara Townleys Foucauldian analysis of HRM practices. This important discussion will highlight how vizibilization techniques are creating a particular *foundation* for contemporary feedback activities. Thirdly the discussion will proceed to consider the feedback by itself, addressing its' constructing potentials operating on vizibilized subjects (Townley, 1993).

Performance Appraisal and feedback schemes are linked with various challenges; subjectivity and biases on behalf of managers are inherent in this type of schemes. Developing objective measures is another such difficulty. The appraisal processes can also be perceived as a managerial tool for control to reinforce behaviors desired by management. Feedback being a crucial element of the Appraisal process is not entirely freed from challenge. Feedback can come in various forms, it can be provided with blame, it can be constructive and it can be positive. Feedback influence individuals' behavior and it is a vehicle for the reinforcement of appropriate behavior and for bringing out individual change.

Lets' now consider how appraisal and feedback practices may operate under the ideals of the 'audit society'. The audit society has brought forth the tendency of extensive usage of vizibilation techniques that consequently increases the knowledge of the internal spheres of organizations and individuals. What once was hidden from view is increasingly becoming open for scrutiny and evaluation. One academic that has provided a thorough analysis around visibility in the field of HRM is Barbara Townley (1994). This thesis will partly build on Townleys' findings however it will attempt to approach the elements pertaining to feedback that her Foucauldian analysis fails to address by switching the analytical prism to Goffman

and Bourdieu. This will be explained in greater detail further below however at this point an extended summary of Townleys' work will be presented.

Townley uses the Foucauldian understanding of power in terms of ' *visibility*'. Hence, "power is exercised by virtue of things being known and people being seen" (Foucault, 1980; 154 cited in Townley, 1993; 520). Consequently, when people are being known and seen they can more easily be governed. Governmentality is the idea of Focault where Government is to be understood as a way to influence, shape, and direct the behavior of individuals whilst rationality underpins the idea that before something can be governed it must be known. In the area of HRM the individual is the basic unit for analysis, the unit to be known and uncovered.

The Foucauldian understanding of making someone visible is firstly that it is a process of making the individual knowable and secondly it will simultaneously construct and produce the individual and his or hers' identity. The processes of knowledge-construction involve acts of classification, codification, categorization, by construction of taxonomies and tables; in short, dissecting the world and humanity into identifiable parts that can be defined. The processes are disciplinary as they will define what behavior is acceptable and non acceptable, they can also in a more subtle form dictate how human beings should think and feel about their jobs (Hochschild, 2003). Townley (1993) provides various examples of how HRM techniques are constituting the subjects and their engagement in various degrees:

> "The role of these individuals is to become managers of emotion. They, themselves, must suppress anger, any sense of effrontery, that is, their own sense of self, no matter how justified. […] However, the status of the individual, that is, the individual's right to be different and everything that makes the individual truly individual tends to get lost in these processes" (Townley, 1993, p. 537)

The author is here indicating how HRM practices are in a sense attempting to standardize human thought and emotion, eliminating the plurality of human life, a line that will be tightly followed in this paper. However, the 'constitution of the human being' will here be addressed differently; i.e. through the introduction of the concept of feedback, a concept not mentioned in Townleys' work. On the other hand the author is addressing these issues though Foucault,

placing her analytical focus on the basic element of the employment relationship - the employment contract. In essence the employment contract is in parts ambiguous and vague and there are 3 dimensions involved in this conceptual space that needs to become visible and 'known' to be rendered governable: geographic (at work), temporal (time at work) and the worker. All these must be known before they can be managed.

The particular element of interest in this section is the final unit to be known, i.e. the *industrial subject* According to Townley this is done by firstly making parts of the labor process more visible and this has a direct implication for constituting the individual. It can be done in two ways: Firstly individuals are made subjects of scientific study and secondly through *Technologies of self* where subjects define themselves by definition and through this become tied to an identity by a conscience or self-knowledge both coming to see themselves and being seen in a particular way. In essence there are 2 practices/technologies that generally provide knowledge of individuals and both of them will render the individual more amenable to intervention or management:

1.   Examination - constitutes the individual as an object of knowledge
2.   Confession - ties the individual to self knowledge whilst establishing concepts of subjectivity

What should particularly be highlighted here is that Townleys take on Foucault primarily focuses on how HRM mechanisms are rendering individuals visible. However the process of definition or rather *self-definition is conducted by the subjects themselves.* In essence subjects are exposing themselves and open themselves to self scrutiny; they are defining themselves in a particular manner and consequently become 'fixed' to this definition of the self. It appears to be a self-creating project that later can be used for assessments and various measures. So far this thesis is following Townleys' ideas however from now on those ideas will be taken onto a different path starting with some ideas presented by Hatch & Schultz (2002). These authors are introducing the *feedback loop as an element in the vizibilization process*. They are highlighting and discussing how outsiders are becoming important elements in the constitution process:

Hatch & Schultz (2002) find two contemporary issues putting pressure on organizations influencing their image and culture and consequently their identity; the issues of *access and exposure*. Access and exposure can broadly be seen as a form of 'vizibilization' however
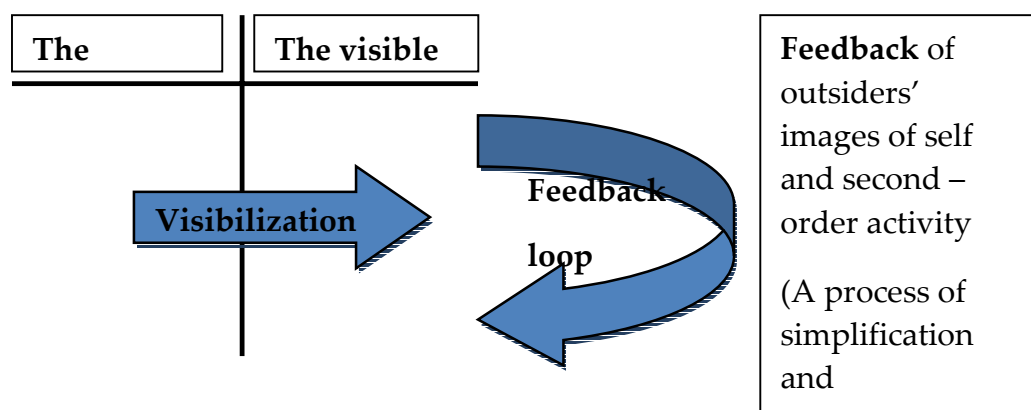
their description of visibility is more defined; as *exposure* is broadly linked to increased media participation and interest in the private lives of organizations and evaluations of internal practices, *access* involves the expanding boundaries of who should be considered an organizational member; Stakeholders and customers are increasingly becoming part of the organization rendering the internal culture once hidden from view accessible for scrutiny for the interested. As a result of these particular pressures, Hatch & Schultz find that organizations may develop two potential dysfunctions in their identity dynamics when there is a disassociation between the organizational self-view and how it is perceived from the 'outside': one of narcissism and one of 'loss of culture' or so called 'hyperadaptation'. Of particular interest for this paper is the dysfunction in their model called hyperadaptation /loss of culture due to some of the characteristics of this dysfunction. These characteristics are highlighting what is argued in this section; the tendency to become hyper responsive to outside pressure, giving stakeholder images of the self much power over organizational self-definition whilst ignoring its' internal its own cultural heritage. Building their ideas on Meads notion of 'I and Me' the authors have brought Mead concepts from a micro to a meso level. Here we will reverse this move and bring Hatchs' & Schultzs' ideas back from a meso to a micro level arguing that hyper-adaptation to outsiders also can occur on an individual level. The authors are hence pointing at an important detail, claiming something that other organizational researchers have overlooked;

"[...] others' images are part of, and to some extent independent of, organizational members who construct their mirrored images from them"

(ibid. p. 120).

What could be understood by this is that there is clearly an intensification of outsider construction coming along with the notions of access and exposure in combination with feed-back mechanisms. Whilst the image very well could be constructed by individuals or organizations themselves, this notion is shifting the idea of image construction from the inside and out towards the outside and in. *In essence Hatch & Schultz are arguing that outsiders' images of the self are imposing themselves increasingly and hence organizations' self-definitions are increasingly defined by outsiders. The consequence will be a dysfunction of hyperadaptation.* This particular view is not acknowledged by Townley who claims that subjects are defining themselves and becoming tied to their own self definition.

One important thing that is argued here is that current SHRM philosophies and practices seem to be encouraging 'hyperadaptive' behavior to a large extent. For example feed-back loops are of importance here since the consequences of increased 'knowability' are now allowing for feedback to be given about previously hidden aspects of organizations and human beings. That is to say that increased visibility of the 'hidden' will make what was previously hidden a part of the feedback mechanism. The consequence of this is that more and more parts of human beings and organizations will be up for evaluation, matched against organizational 'blueprints' that are architectured by Business Partners and finally subjected to 'renovation' activities. In sum, the feed-back will not only regard the external definition of the organization or individuals; the increase of access and exposure will also influence and construct the *internal definition* of individuals and organizational cultures.

A discussion along similar lines is offered by Strathern (2000) who partly draws on Foucauldian ideas of technologies of visibility. The ambitions of making the society visible (in relation to organizational audits) will generate mechanisms of self-description based on second-order activity. That is to say that organizations' description of itself towards the outside world will become integrated parts of the organization and more importantly (in regards to this discussion) the observers will also engage in descriptions and re-descriptions of the organization and this second order-activity will then become "absorbed into the organisations knowledge of itself" (ibid. p. 312). In sum, there is a visibility generating mechanism that is modifying the organizational self-definition through the 'eyes of others' and this will consequently not only generate visibility as an end; the particular visibility is partly constructed from the outside and what will be known as the 'self' is what in fact has been 'given' from *others (or an audience, if following Goffmans terminology).* In addition it will be linked with some sort of 'evaluative' dimension against an ideal standard.

The	The visible

Visibilization

Feedback loop

Feedback of outsiders' images of self and second – order activity

(A process of simplification and

Figure 1 Feedback of the vizibilized self

A research project should be able to investigate these types of tendencies on a micro level; Performance Appraisals of employees generally build on statements produced by management involving ideal values and attitudes that should be embraced and actively drive the employees' individual behavior. In fact, individuals are not solely evaluated and measured on how they behave; soft values and attitudes are increasingly becoming important parts of the appraisal mechanisms, a challenge to pursue as values has to be converted into regulative measures. Nonetheless the ambitions are clearly there as they have turned into standard practices in many contemporary organizations. The inside of the employee is of high interest for the employer and up for measure due to its' believed impact on performance. Various critical texts have discussed this tendency, the interest of managing commitment and engagement through the hearts and minds of humans (Watson, 2004; Hochschild, 2003) particularly in workplaces characterized by high discretion and autonomy (Kunda, 2006).

Hatch & Schultz do consider outsiders' power to influence the view of the self when discussing its' ability to trigger *self-examination* as a result (a requirement in the PMS system). This note is crucial as self-examination may lead to a destabilization of the identity and generate a subsequent need of reconstruction (See also Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000). This notion could potentially be juxtaposed with the Foucauldian idea of Panopticon; seeing this as a self-disciplinary process from actual surveillance (or potential surveillance) to self-surveillance, in this case we can see another type of process *involving self- awareness 'through the eyes of others' and consequent adaptation towards this view*. In a sense the consequences of an audit society that involves a legitimisation of vizibilization - and transparency making seem to result in increased self-modification against an image set by outsiders (as the outsiders' view of the self is stronger and more valid than the internal view of the self).

Hence the **key question** pertains to the dynamics generated by the feedback mechanism and how *a complex self will in the feedback loop become repackaged and returned in evaluative terms in a simplified standardized frame.* The feedback loop will involve some type of image creation of the individual by outsiders. According to Boorstin an image is a highly simplified representation of something else far more complex and messy than the image will reveal. (Boorstin, (1992[1961]). In this feedback loop the meaning of image will also change; Instead

of having organizations and individuals producing public images of the self (as is suggested by the Foucauldian Technology of Self), the public image is constructed by outsiders (or an audience in Goffmans terms). It is worth to provide Boorstins entire definition of image as it fits well into describing the human 'blue print' that seems to be the purpose of the feedback mechanism described here:

There are some characteristics typical for the image: it is synthetic, believable, passive, vivid, simplified and ambiguous (Boorstin, (1992 [1961])). The *synthetic* aspect of image leans on the idea that it is specifically designed to *serve the purpose of creating a particular kind of impression*. The word image is per se indicating that it is distinct from what is really there; it is hence a *"visible public personality as distinguished from an inward private character"* (p. 187). It covers what is really there and concurrently it can successfully be subjected to reparation, refurbishment and other types of 'cosmetic surgery'. It has to be believable and it is *passive.* The image is passive in the sense that ***it already exist*** (being pre-constructed) and the corporation should 'fit into ' the image, rather than attempting to strive for it. The "image will become the more important reality, of which the corporations conduct seems mere evidence; not vice versa. *In the beginning the image is a likeness of the corporation; finally the corporation becomes a likness of the image "(p. 189).* Further the image will generate *a drive for conformity as there is a desire and drive fuelling the need to 'fit into the picture'."* The passivity of conformity is the passivity of fitting into images" (p. 192). Another important characteristic of image is that it is *simplified*, meaning that it is *simpler than the object that it represents.* Finally, the image is *ambiguous*. It has no fixed meaning as it needs to suit 'unpredictable future purposes, and unpredicted changes in taste'.

In one sense the discussion in this section appears to give a conceptual explanation to how Boorstins' image will come to existence; it highlights a gradual process of simplification and standardization of the internal spheres of humans and organizations through feedback and performance appraisals. The concept of feedback generally appear under a deceptive guise; i.e. one that encourages the impression of feedback being a pure reflection of what is projected out (CIPD, 2009); a feedback that is rationally presented being freed from values, biases, simplifications and distortions. However, *the definition of feedback in this RP is clearly changed and refined;* Feedback in this RP describes an activity that evaluates, labels, standardizes, simplifies and modifies parts of the individual, including those parts that perhaps prior to the rise of our audit society were hidden from view. It creates the standardized image of individuals and organizations, a type of architectured 'blue print' of the

inner and outer self. In addition vizibilization in combination with feedback will eliminate the part of the self where all the personal chaos previously has had an allowed scope to exist. The feedback is hence not one that provides a pure undistorted mirroring of an individual; the feedback is rather one that in an evaluative manner will feedback who someone is in relation to the ideal standard, or image pertaining to a particular performative context.

3 Research Questions

RQ 1 How does feedback and appraisal shape a standardized and simplified human being?

The argument underpinning this paper, and the problematization developed overleaf, has provided a conceptual elaboration around this question. However, no systematic research has addressed this topic before. The question will attempt to address the nature of the various structures and processes involved in these HRM activities, however it do not ask for an answer of its' potential impact. Hence another complementary question should address what is occurring on the receiving end of these activities:

RQ 2 How do individuals respond to the activities involved in feedback and appraisal processes?

4 Previous research

As indicated overleaf, the majority of HRM studies are underpinned by a mainstream, functionalist perspective with an aim to improve efficiency, order and integration through various mechanisms (Purcell *et al*, 2003; Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich, 1998; Guest & Baron, 2000; Guest & King, 2001). The CIPD research machinery is engaged in many research projects to find a causal link between HRM and business performance in order to provide the value-added by HRM. The research generally results in developments of various sophisticated HRM practices that attempts to influence employees' ability and motivational levels for increased performance output and developments of various control mechanisms that ensure that right type of performance is executed. Legge' (1995) voiced her concerns about the prescriptive, normative and non critical approaches that dominate HRM research and analysis. A decade later Watson (2004) observes and questions the unchanged nature of HRM analysis concluding that HRM studies to this day are not contributing to a critical and theoretically sophisticated social scientific study of employment related managerial practices. The critical

discussions provided in the CHRM area have also been limited as they particularly have been focused on the Soft versus Hard HRM or the Rethorics versus Realities discussion (Legge, 1995). Alvesson & Kärreman (2007) have written a critical account on the feedback mechanism in the HRM system of a consulting firm. The function was seen by the authors as a meaning creating device about who the employees are and who the organization is, viewed from a culture-identity perspective. The authors' approach was one suggesting that individuals are rather produced than discovered. This paper also perceives these HRM mechanisms in a similar fashion, i.e. they have a constructive capacity; however this paper will acknowledge a combination of discovery (vizibilization) and feedback (construction), seeing both elements as important in a project of standardization. In addition the analytical tools used for this project would be different as the HRM mechanisms would be considered through the theoretical prisms of Goffman and Bourdieu. Hence this approach will provide yet another angle to these activities; it combines the notion of vizibilization and elimination of plurality (backstage) whilst converting backstage to frontstage that in turn will be subjected to constructive feedback exercises. One final significant contribution important for this paper has been made by Townley (1994). It is mainly upon her work that much of this research project would build, extending critical knowledge around the concepts of visibility and power in the appraisal and feedback activities pertaining to the Performance Management System in the field of SHRM.

5 Contributions of proposed research

This RP has come to the point to discuss its' particular contributions to critical research in the area of HRM and to point out how it differs from previous critical research done in the field. As mentioned overleaf the research proposed in this paper would partly build on Barbara Townleys work. It would address the importance of vizibilization and knowability of subjects and also acknowledge the self disciplinary processes of technologies of self. However, it would diverge from Townleys work in two aspects. Firstly, although acknowledging the possibility that individuals are defining themselves through various vizibilization activities and consequently tie their identities to those self definitions, this approach will move towards the interaction between agents and also the agent and the structure through activities of appraisal and feedback. It has been addressed overleaf that human beings are not solely rendered visible and through this visibility automatically become defined. The visible is here

seen as the hidden becoming visible and consequently becoming part of an evaluation/modification/renovation/simplification and standardization - loop of feedback where outsider views that not necessarily are compatible with the self view are fed back to the individuals. Essentially, subjects do not only define themselves but others may also define the subjects in constructive activities, imposing outsider views and definitions of the self. Secondly, and partly related to the first point, this research project would focus only on the particular practices related to feedback and appraisal mechanisms. Townley on the other hand has broadly addressed the whole area of HR practices. Hence this project would penetrate deeper into a particular area of practice (The Performance Management System, appraisals and various forms of feedback mechanisms) on a micro level of interaction.

Further this research project would provide for the opportunity to use a dramaturgical approach to analyze particular SHRM practices something not previously done. Concurrently it facilitates an opening to review Goffmans' work highlighting how organizational practices and general norms may have developed throughout time for the purpose of comparison and as a point of reference. The key crucial difference that already at this stage can be highlighted is generated and triggered by the concept of the 'audit society'. i.e. all systematic vizibilization and transparency generating practices that has become normal in the contemporary society. Goffman claimed in the 60's when he wrote his book that in the regions of frontstage and backstage we find that homogeneity, unity and consensus are important and required aspects of the frontstage. However, the backstage provides for a structural space where inconsistencies and the pluralistic dimensions of life where conflicts and chaos are allowed to exist whilst being hidden from the audience. This conceptual space of the backstage that allows people to hide, to be chaotic and conflictual is becoming diminished in contemporary delayered organizations that requires from individuals to internalize unitarian corporate values in their hearts and minds concurrently as they are processed through various vizibilization mechanisms.

In addition through the use of Bourdieu this research project would allow other forms of power to be addressed than the ones provided by Foucault. Power could be identified amongst different groups and in structures. As Bourdieu acknowledges that power is a field of struggle for various forms of capital amongst agents operating in different positions, it allows for an analysis of how frontstage and backstage is constructed and used between different hierarchical levels, groups and individuals.

6 Theory

6.1 Goffman

Performances

Performances are various social acts that are occurring infront of some type of audience. It is an activity performed on a particular occasion and in a particular setting aimed to produce a particular impression. If a performance is repeatedly played out on different occasions the performance is called a 'routine'. Individuals performing different acts can relate themselves differently in relation to the roles they are playing. On the one extreme the performer may be absorbed by his or her own act, being fully aligned with the role performed before an audience. We may call him or her the *'sincere'* actor. On the other extreme a performer may feel out of tune with the role to be played in his or her routine, not feeling aligned with it or not believing in it. This type of performer Goffman (1959) has named *'the cynic'*. Lacking the belief in ones role and routine may generate the belief that a person is not a person anymore; the person has instead become a 'mask'. However;

> "In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception *we have*
>
> *formed of ourselves* – the role we are striving to live up to – this mask is our

truer self, the self we would like to be. In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality". (ibid. p. 19, emphasis added).

Hence, Goffman presents the possible perceptions of the mask from two diverging perspectives; on the one hand the mask can be viewed as a false representation of self that is cynically viewed upon by the individual, whilst on the other hand he suggest that the mask can be viewed upon as an ideal that the individual has formed him or herself.[1] Sometimes there is an interaction between cynicism and sincerity; the transition time of growing into a role or an ideal self created by the self.

Performances are normally occurring in the "front" before observers and different spectators. The front involves all the equipment that may aid in the production and maintenance of the act performed before the audience. The front generally involves some standard parts; *'The Setting'* involves various background items, furniture, décor. It may also be a geographical place that is linked with a particular performance or routine. The *'Personal Front'* on the other hand involves the expressive tools closely related to the performer him or herself. This may relate to clothes, age, sex, size, posture, speech, facial expressions and body language. The Personal front may further be subdivided in to *'Appearance'* and *'Manner'*. 'Appearance' is pointing at particularities that may reveal the social status of a person. (social activities, recreations, work) whilst 'Manner' involves the way the role is presented (aggressively, apologetically, firmly etc.). Generally one will find that Manner and Appearance will go hand in hand, however many times a contradiction will occur, one that breaks the expected consistence between them two. When there is coherence between the setting, appearance and manner an ideal type will emerge, one that supports and maintains our expectations.

Mostly routines will involve standardized elements of behavior that can be enacted in various stages and before different observers. The convenience lay in its' eliminated risk for the unexpected and the observer may be able to turn to past experiences and stereo-typical thinking to identify and define the situation that is enacted before them. Hence, the observer only needs a limited amount of fronts to orient him or herself. The performer on the other

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[1] The importance here is to notice the emphasis added in the citation. The mask that is viewed upon as a truer self is also a mask created by the self. The mask that this paper is discussing is aligned with Boorstins' notion of image; they are not created by the self but they are pre-produced. They are pre-constructed masks of a standardized and simplified format that are meant to be fully adopted by the carrier of the mask. In this account there is an even more cynical view of the mask as vizibilization and feedback will create the idea of constructing a *masked soul* not only a masked front.

hand may find that a he or she has to perform a role on a standardized front that already has already been established. The standardization of fronts is created through a compromise where diversity has been "cut at a few crucial points, and all those within a given bracket are allowed or obliged to maintain the same social front in certain situations" (ibid. p.27). Irrespectively if a performer desires the preset front or not he or she will find, if attempting to take on a new task unestablished in the society, that there are several standardized fronts amongst which he has to choose. One dilemma that may occur is when individuals feel that they are falling between the chairs, not fitting into any of the pre-established fronts created in the society[2].

A performance is further presenting an idealized view of the situation. Hence, in a performance a person will incorporate and enhance officially accredited values of the society. Hence the performance will in a sense be reaffirming and reproducing the values of the society or community. Social (upward) mobility is a given example of creation of an idealized view. In such situations much effort and sacrifice is put into maintaining a front aligned with a favorable social style.[3] Concurrently as idealized performances are occurring there are activities of concealment that are hiding something 'inappropriate' for observers to see or know and hiding the discrepancies between the actual activity and the appearance. Concealment involves corrective actions of mistakes and errors. The work in progress is many times concealed and the end product is what is to be shown. The semi-illegal, cruel, degrading and unclean is to be hidden.

However, as a response Goffman expresses; " we must be prepared to see that the impression of reality fostered by a performance is a delicate, fragile thing that can be shattered by very minor mishaps as humans are creatures of variable impulses, moods and energies that change

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[2] This note is partly linked to the previous one as a standardized front could also potentially be addressed as the pre-constructed image that Boorstin is talking about. The image one would have to step into and adjust to. Contemporary organizations and individual roles are however highly specialized, something that also should be taken into consideration; Job-descriptions advertised in recruitment processes are often prescribed in meticulous detail. The descriptions do not only prescribe in detail what individuals would have to do and how they have to behave (manner) in their newly acquired role, they are also highly prescribed in terms of personality, values and attitudes that a potential candidate should have, especially for autonomous roles with high levels of discretion. Goffman do however not discuss values and personalities to any larger extent apart from general social values, he mainly talks of behavior. In addition it may be worth considering that a highly specialized front can also be standardized, i.e. that specialized roles can very well come in a standardized format in contemporary organizations and multinational corporations (the role of a CEO in country X in corp. Y may very well be the same in another country in the same organization).
[3] This is a good example of the reproduction of how the pre -constructed front is acting as a structure for reproduction of hierarchies and power -relations. This should be considered in combination with Bourdieus concept of habitus.

from one moment to the next" (ibid. p. 56). Those ups and downs are not to be revealed before and audience hence " a certain bureaucratization of the spirit is expected so that we can be relied upon to give a perfectly homogenous performance at every appointed time" (ibid. p. 56). Goffmans' account is here pointing at particular social values of perfection, stability and symmetry. He points out a highly representative value for our western world in our time (2009); one where the representation

> "…is more truly ourself than is the flux of our involuntary dreams […]
>
> The severe bust of an archaic sculpture, scarcely humanizing the block,
>
> will express a spirit far more justly than the man's' dull morning looks or
>
> casual grimaces" (Goffman citing Santayana p. 57)

The representation is hence more real and representative of ourselves than 'reality' and *this mask of manner can be held in place from within through social discipline*.

Concurrently he presents the questioning of whether an impression that is fostered before observers is true or false. This question will be brought to the light particularly when fostered appearances are misrepresented in one way or another as there will be brought to the light discrepant facts from the intended impression. He finally claims that for many sociological reasons (not mentioning which ones) it is unnecessary to decide which one is more real than the other; "the fostered impression or the one the performer attempts to prevent the audience from receiving" (ibid. p. 66). For Goffman himself the philosophical question of what reality is, do not matter for his report, what is important for him is the question of what impression of reality can shatter the fostered impression of reality; in which ways can an impression be discredited and what will represent a false impression?[4]

One way that individuals can control what is to be emphasized in a performance and what types of matters that are to be concealed is through control over what is to be shown. The performer can regulate information flows of the self and hence limit the level of contact between observers and the performer. If the performer on the other hand fails to regulate the information flow the performance may be ritually contaminated as Goffman expresses it.   To

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[4] This discussion of reality is however of importance but not in the sense of establishing what is true or false; As Goffman presents two diverging and concurrently typical values influencing the ways organizations are run; As indicated previously, on the one hand the notion that the image is more real than the real and on the other hand the need for making the society and humans more visible, as if there is something else hidden underneath the surface, something that is valuable to know and something that should be uncovered and brought out into the spotlight.

maintain a social distance and put restrictions on contact/information can generate fears in the audience and put them in a state of "mystification". Equally social control can be exercised in this manner as a means of self-concealment and this technique can for instance be used by "men of the world [...] to preserve a sort of ascendancy over the unsophisticated" [5](ibid. p. 68).

This discussion primarily pertains to the idea of the notion of personal integrity that should not be violated or breached. Concurrently, states of mystification may induce fear amongst spectators in the audience and this will create a tension between the idea of personal integrity and notions of fear and mystification. It is to be highlighted that fear can be generated irrespectively if the performer is of inferior or equal status and (in some occasions but not as much) if the performer is of superordinate status[6]. Irrespectively, Goffmans account shows that both inferiors and people of superordinate status have the possibility to put their audiences in states of mystification. And the state of mystification allows for some elbow room to create the impression preferred by the performer[7].

Teams

Performances are often enacted for the purpose of expressing a task rather than expressing characteristics of a performer. For instance, in work-situations individuals are to establish an adequate definition of the service or product that they are selling. In such situations it is commonly found that one impression that is forwarded is done so by more than one individual; meaning that there is more than one individual that have to cooperate intimately to maintain a shared front. Goffman names all individuals that are cooperating and staging a

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[5] This is a good example of how some, i.e. 'men of the world' are in a position to cut information and contact from their audience. They appear better equipped to cut off information flows and to keep their audiences in states of mystification. This is to be considered in relation of employees as actors and employers/managers/HRM personnel as audience and reversely. Goffman notes the interesting tendency that when performers have claimed some celestial qualities or powers they may prohibit the audience to look at the performer at all.

[6] This note is of importance as it implies something implicit; the mystification around the superordinate is legitimate and unquestionable in a different sense as when mystification is created around inferiors. Fear legitimately be mystifying their performances in the same way as superordinates concurrently as they appear to induce more fear amongst their audience.

[6] Considering the previous discussion around the audit society it would appear as if it would decrease for possibilities of mystification at least in regards to employees subjected to various auditing and appraisal activities.is less induced by a mystified superordinate than by a mystified inferior. The latter do hence not appear to legitimately be mystifying their performances in the same way as superordinates concurrently as they appear to induce more fear amongst their audience.

[7] Considering the previous discussion around the audit society it would appear as if it would decrease for possibilities of mystification at least in regards to employees subjected to various auditing and appraisal activities.

single routine *a team*. Hence a team can be staged by one or more performers. Cooperation will involve various demands on trust and faith that the team-members will not give away the show to the audience. Same team-members will on the other hand not be in the position to keep the impression fostered before one another. They will, as Goffman expresses it "be in the know".

Teams are not to be confused with friendships or unofficial private social groupings that have no ambitions to maintain a particular impression before an audience. Social groupings can be named teams only if they are working together for the purpose of maintaining a particular definition of a situation. The team is as far as possible not to produce public disagreements in front of the audiences as this creates false notes and incapacitates the situation. To ensure that the team line is maintained, teams are generally selecting teammates that are trustworthy to perform properly and to maintain the united front. Normally in team-performances it is often found that someone has been given the right to control or direct the drama, someone that will be the director of the scene. Normally it will differ who is allowed to direct the performance or not.

Sometimes performers may act as if they have an audience even though they are 'in the private'. They are then acting in accordance to incorporated moral standards associated with some type of reference group whilst acting before a 'non-existent audience'. "The individual may privately maintain standards of behavior which he does not personally believe in, maintaining these standards because of a lively belief that an unseen audience is present who will punish deviations from these standards. In other words, an individual may be his own audience or may imagine an audience to be present" (ibid. p. 82)

Regions and Region behavior

The theoretical summary of Goffmans work has come to the key area of analysis; the region. Goffman defines the region as a place that is "bounded to some degree by barriers to perception". The regions of perception are divided into the *frontstage* and the *backstage*. The frontstage refers to the region where the performance is enacted. The performance on the frontstage is involving the effort to maintain a certain standard. Standards can firstly refer to manner that the performer is talking and treating his or hers audience and secondly how the performer comports himself whilst in visible range from the audience but not necessarily involved with them, these standards are called *decorum*. There are some requirements involved in the decorum, those are *moral* and *instrumental* requirements. The fist one refers to rules of non-interference and non-molestation of others, respect for sacred spaces and sexual

property. The latter refers to duties that an employer may demand from the employees. Those can for instance be related to the maintenance of the work level or care of property. Both of these demands will influence the individual and generally the moral and instrumental rationalizations are used as justifications for most standards that ought to be maintained.

The backstage is another region where other suppressed facts are making their appearances and individuals are behaving 'out of character'. This region is relative to a particular performance here one will find behaviors that are contradicting the ones performed on the frontstage. In this region opportunities are given to express aspects not allowed to be seen on the frontstage; a place where equipment and materials of different sorts are stored, amassed in formats that are not representative in the way that they would be once entering the spotlight on the frontstage. Here is the space where various adjustments and flaws have the chance to be corrected and prepared for the front-act. Teams are here preparing for their performances, joking, arguing, and having an informal tone. The backstage is also a place that is cut off from the frontstage that performers can withdraw to for short moments of relaxation before entering the stage again. Observers are generally not allowed to this area and the performer can feel confident that there will be no in-expected intrusions by the audience. Vital secrets that can give the show away are out in the open in the backstage hence it is important to keep the two regions separated, having the backstage hidden from observers.

Essentially backstage is an important area to facilitate the art of impression management. In addition *backstage control* is important for workers to shield themselves from the demands they are exposed to whilst at work. It is a safe place that helps the worker to make a full days' work with less than a full days' effort[8]. Not managing to keep a backstage control will involve various problems for the workers; the audience may enter the backstage witnessing those from the frontstage suppressed facts that they are meant to be seen.[9]

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[8] Vizibilization of humans, work-processes and production-systems are obviously narrowing this area significantly. Much of what Goffman describes as backstage regions has in fact become frontstage regions in many contemporary organizations. Hence the possibilities to seek ones hideout to relax are significantly narrowed.

[9] Goffman exemplifies this by mentioning how service personnel normally takes for granted the right to keep their audience away from the backstage. In some instances however, such as in sportscar garages and refilling-stations workers may have to put up with an audience in the backstage as the owners do not want to leave their cars overnight. Goffman recognizes this as a problem and has through his research managed to identify the perceived invasion of privacy and right to ones' own backstage (see good example in note 12. at p. 115) This should be considered in the light of the 'audit society' that is aiming to vizibilize many role-functions. One example is the service organization that is aiming to show the entire process chain to a public to prove the quality of the product and service. Some restaurants for instance will invite the audience to see the entire process of logistics and grocery supply from

When the performance is staged in cooperation between more than one member the tone between them is likely to be different in the backstage. There is a different language operating in this region, a language that generally is opposite to the language of the frontstage. This behavior can be seen as offensive if enacted on the frontstage.[10] The informality that normally may be linked with backstage behavior can however be limited in some ways. One limitation is that although an audience is not present team-members may want to maintain the impression of trustworthiness, i.e. that he or she will act properly once on the frontstage. Another limitation is that when a team is composed by members of different social divisions the backstage freedom, relaxation and other such activities will be limited.

6.2 Bourdieu

This paper will to some extent use Bourdieus concepts of field/game, habitus and capital as an analytical prism to understand particular actions occurring in this field. In terms of similarities or overlaps between Bourdieu and Goffman it becomes difficult to point at particularities. Bourdieu and Goffman did however meet and Goffman turned out to be a great inspirational source for Bourdieu even though he rarely cited him. Particularly of importance is that Bourdieu found in Goffmans work a strong sense of agency that was opposed to the French structuralism (Swartz, 1997)[11].

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providers to cooking in-front of the audience, turning everything into a performance. Hence the quality (and efficiency) is not only to be proven and vizibilised to the audience as an end product; the quality/efficiency has also to be vizibilised before an audience in the production /delivery system and in the process (Normann, 2000)

[10] Goffman suggests that any region can turn into a backstage if backstage behavior is enacted. However, what is suggested in this thesis is that any region due to vizibilization can turn into a frontstage as frontstage behavior is required in what in Goffmans examples is presented as typical backstages – performance will be enacted everywhere.

[11] This section solely draws on one secondary source of Bourdieu; David Schwartz who gives a detailed and well informed account of Bourdieus work.

The main purpose of using Bourdieu is to bring in the concept of power to the thesis. This is a concept not addressed by Goffman is being seen as important to analyze and explain the broader struggles of power that are underpinning the transformed SHRM function. Bourdieu is hence mainly used to analyze the overarching political games and power-struggles that are creating the conditions for contemporary SHRM practice. In addition Bourdieus concept of power differs from the Foucauldian idea of power that has been used analytical prism by Townley. Bourdieu brings into the critical analysis the structure, or rather the interaction between structure and agency and how power and influences shaping individuals stem from this interaction.

One key aim of Bourdieus work is to uncover power relationships that are produced and reproduced through various institutions, processes and cultural resources. He develops a relational method to overcome various antinomies in social sciences, the ones of objectivism/subjectivism, mirco/macro, empirical/theoretical and finally the symbolic versus the material forms of social life. He builds his work of the relational method on some core assumptions about social life; the relations are competitive rather than cooperative, unconscious sooner than conscious, hierarchical rather than egalitarian. Bourdieus image of social life is found in his work; it is one pertaining to domination, misperception (a form of false consciousness) and competitive distinction. He chose to focus on a symbolic dimension of social relations and distances himself from Marxist ideas of the superstructure.

The Political Economy of Symbolic Power

Symbolic Interests

Bourdieu argues that Marxists ideas ignores that symbolic and political dimensions have their own interests in the same manner as the material ones. Marxist ideas are according to Bourdieu indicating that symbolic and cultural dimensions are disinterested. Hence he moves to reject the Marxist ideas and claims that all material and symbolic goods are objects of interest if they are considered rare and desirable in a particular social context. In essence he claims that all practice is *interested* and have an orientation of maximizing material and symbolic profit. However, strategies involved in the maximization of profits are not believed to be calculated and purposive as is claimed by rational actor theorists; instead action is according to Bourdieu tacitly, and pre-reflectively interest orientated through time.

Power as Capital

Bourdieu extends the idea of capital to all forms of power; material, cultural, social and symbolic. These are seen as resources that may enhance or maintain individuals' positions in the social order. These resources are conceptualized as capital when they become objects of struggle being seen as valued resources in a particular context.[12] Capital is seen as accumulated labor over time and labor in turn is encompassing the four generic types of capital mentioned overleaf. Hence capital is power relations when they create quantitative differences in embodied labor.

Symbolic Violence and Capital

Bourdieu engages himself in the role played by symbolic processes and forms as means to reproduce social inequality. This is a form of domination that has removed itself from coercion and threats to forms of symbolic manipulation. Hence power is not only economic, it is also symbolic and the latter involves various forms of symbolic systems such as art, language, science and religion that perform three interconnected functions: cognition, communication and social differentiation.

Symbolic systems are to be understood as 'structuring structures' as mechanisms to order and understand the social world. Hence, language, myths, science and art would perform a *cognitive* function by creating ways to understand the world. Symbolic systems perform the function of logical and moral integration when exercised as *instruments of communication and knowledge*. Finally and most importantly the symbolic systems function as *instruments of domination* that provide the opportunities for dominant groups to distinguish themselves in hierarchies of social ranking by encouraging dominated groups to accept existing socially differentiating hierarchies[13]. Working these three functions of symbolic systems, Bourdieu developed a sociology of symbolic forms and a theory of symbolic violence.

The sociology of symbolic forms is based on language as a creator of binary oppositions in the mechanism of establishing differences and distinctions in symbolic systems and processes. The key logic pertains to differential deviation by building up classification systems through

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[12] In regards to the SHRM function and CIPD one could say that CIPD has been performing a struggle as an organizational function to gain the same influence and say as other CEOs and managers. The resources from an HR point of view are human. They are valuable because of their potentials of adjustable performance levels. Once 'adjusted' and proven of the value added, this function may gain the symbolic capital it seems to be striving for.

[13] Appraisals and feedback mechanisms could potentially be treated as symbolic systems that are shaping worldviews of employees and particularly views of themselves in relation to the ideal standards. The particular form of symbolic system in the appraisal and feedback mechanisms would pertain to language and communication.

inclusion and exclusion. Hence, all symbolic systems are based on this logic of primitive classification where all elements pertaining to the social life are to be divided and grouped in opposing classes of good/bad, male/female, distinguished/vulgar etc. These oppositions are building blocks of the social life upon which the fundamental bipolarity is created; the dominant /dominated opposition. The social consequences of symbolic distinction in these systems are hence differentiating and legitimizing hierarchical and inegalitarian arrangements between groups and individuals[14].

This part of Bourdieus theory is concerned with legitimation as a form to justify the power of domination. Legitimation is forming part of the political function of symbolic systems. It operates under taken for granted assumptions and practices in the construction and reproduction of power relations. Symbolic violence is hence a way to impose means to comprehend and adapt to the social world through taken for granted forms. The violence pertains to the idea that dominated accept as legitimate their condition of domination and the legitimating power is based on the consent of dominant and dominated. Hence this type of power is producing the legitimate way of seeing the world and the way it is divided. This power that is using legitimation consequently creates 'misrecognition' that all actions are interested. Hence, the practices operating under the protection of *legitimation will be misrecognized as disinterested*. Hence those that will gain symbolic capital will gain capital that is generally seen as 'disinterested', i.e. " it disguises the underlying interested relations as disinterested pursuits." (ibid. p. 90 citing Bourdieu) Symbolic capital is a type of power that is not perceived as such, it is perceived as legitimate demands of obedience, services etc.

Habitus

One central concept in Bourdieus theory of practice is the Habitus. It answers the question of how action is regulated and how it can follow statistical patterns. It answers the question of how patterns occur throughout time not being an outcome of subjective intentions or of external structures. This concept involves some central dimensions addressing the relationship between action and structure. Bourdieu attempts to transcend the classical dilemma pertained to the individual/society dualism, arguing that "social reality exists both inside and outside of individuals, both in our minds and in things." (ibid.p. 96). Hence his key argument of Habitus is that "the socialized body (individual or person) does not stand in opposition to society; it is

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[14] Feedback systems are mainly built on classification and evaluation schemes against a standard set by what could be seen as dominating groups in a particular context. The dominating groups have the legitimate right to classify and evaluate humans under different binary oppositions.

one of its forms of existence" (ibid. p. 96 Swartz citing Bourdieu). Hence the individual and the social is not separated but related and Bourdieus' understanding of how actors and structures are related pertains to the idea that objective structures have subjective consequences. In addition, this idea is not incompatible with the other idea that the social world is constructed by individual actors. Bourdieu further uses the term 'strategy' to acknowledge the agency within structuralist frameworks however, strategy does not mean rational calculations or conscious choices.

Actors are linked to structures through the concept of Habitus and one definition of this concept is

> " a system of durable transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express master of the operations necessary in order to attain them"

(ibid. p. 101 Swarts citing Bourdieu)

This essentially means sets of deeply internalized dispositions that cause action. The concept has also been described as habit-forming force, mental habits, sets of basic, deeply interiorized master-patterns etc. Habitus introduces the notion of agency in structuralist analysis without surrendering completely to the idea of voluntarism. The term disposition is crucial to the habitus concept and involves two components of importance; *structure* and *propensity*. Habitus is the outcome of experiences gained during early socialization. During this period external structures are internalized. Consequently individuals will internalize the dispositions of parameters that set boundaries of what is possible or impossible for someone pertaining to a particular social group to do. Hence there is a structurally limiting element for action pertaining to the concept. On the other hand habitus will generate practices, perceptions and aspirations that are corresponding to the parameters set during early socialization. Hence there are internalized chances of failure or success and these parameters will direct individuals' aspirations and expectations. This will be externalized through action, and the action will "reproduce the objective structures of life chances". The

internalization of social conditions makes dispositions that will determine what is "probable, possible or impossible for a given social group" (ibid. p. 104). Being resistant to change, habitus indicates that early socialization is more in a position to shape the internal dispositions than experiences acquired later in life[15]. Habitus has also an embodied aspect as internalized objective structures are not only influencing mental process but also corporeal ones. The cognitive and bodily aspects of the concepts are related, they are expressed in language, through body language, tastes, perceptions, values and ways of reasoning.[16] In essence, Bourdieus ambition with his research is to identify master-patterns that are representative of deep structural patters.

The Field and the Game

The final concept of importance in Bourdieus theory of practice is the 'Field'. The field is defined as the structure of the social setting where habitus operates. Fields are spatial metaphors for arenas of goods, services, knowledge, status, production, circulation and involve the positions held by actors in their struggles to monopolize the different types of capital. A field is structured around specific kinds of capital or combinations of the same. In fields individuals, groups and organizations compete out from their hierarchical positions. The fields both oppose itself to consensual views of the social worlds and to views that claims total dominations. Fields are 'fields of struggle', sites of resistance and domination. Fields also suggests that the struggle occurring within is shaped by the logic of reproduction.

The structural properties of a field can be presented in four points. Firstly fields are arenas where the struggle for control over valued resources is occurring. The resources are various forms of capital such as economic, cultural, scientific and religious. The struggle can also be arenas of struggle for legitimation, for the right to monopolize the exercise of 'symbolic violence'[17]. Secondly, "fields are structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions

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[15] This raises the question of habitus and its' influence on individuals operating under a sophisticated SHRM function, that promotes various sets of dispositions. Bourdieu refers to habitus as a mechanism that operates particularly under the early stages of socialization and forms individuals chances of failure and success in particular contexts. Another question is if corporate systems such as the PMS, the feedback and appraisals could be forming and shaping the dispositions of habitus in later stages of life i.e. shaping habits of seeking self-awareness "through the eyes of others".

[16] Various questions could be asked in relation to habitus and how it shapes and dictates the chances and failures of individuals in the work life; does habitus influence the chances of successful performance? One thought is linked to the idea of Goffman that groups of people pertaining to a higher social status may incorporate backstage behaviors that can be similar to the ones in the frontstage .

[17] The analysis of a field pertaining to this RP would probably describe the field as an arena of legitimation. Rather the various practices that are stemming from SHRM /CIPD research are

based on types and amounts of capital" (ibid. p. 123). In fields the ones in dominant positions are set in opposition against the ones in dominated positions. This may also occur in areas of knowledge transmission or production where there may on the one hand be opposition between those who transmit legitimate bodies of knowledge and those that are inventing new types of knowledge. There are three types of field strategies: conservation, succession and subversion. Conservation is pursued by those holding dominant positions. Succession strategies are efforts to gain a dominant position and normally pursued by new entrants[18]. Subversion strategies are normally performed by those that expect small gains from the dominant groups. They are radically rupturing the dominant groups through the challenge of their legitimacy to define the field standards. Thirdly, "fields impose on actors specific forms of struggle" (ibid. p.1125). Irrespective of the actors positions in the field the incumbents and challengers share the interest to preserve the field in itself. The issue is however, how the field is to be controlled. When new entrants are entering the field there is a tacit acceptance of the rules of the game. Hence the struggle is limited to particular terms and forms considered legitimate professional procedure of a field.[19] New entrants are hence obliged to pay an initial entry investment. This involves the practical knowledge of how to play the game and recognizing the value of it. Fourth, "fields are structured to a significant extent by their own internal mechanisms of development and hence hold an extent of autonomy from the external environment."(ibid. p. 126)

7 Method

7.1 Adopting a critical approach to research and its' methodological implications

As has been indicated overleaf, a potential research project would approach the field of SHRM from a critical perspective. It would follow the echo of the few critical but powerful voices expressing their concerns regarding the transforming HRM function (Gilmore &

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based on this particular type of struggle; the struggle of the SHRM function to become a professional function and for CIPD to monopolize the knowledge in the area.

[18] This type of strategy would be typical for the SHRM function and CIPD as a try to enter the strategic field of management.

[19] This suggests of the change in power dynamics described overleaf. The SHRM function and the way it operates have had to change its game (turning unitary, adopting managerial principles etc) in order to establish a legitimate professional status of its own.

Adams, 2007; Francis & Keegan, 2007; Legge, 1995; Watson, 2004, Townley, 1994; Jaques, 1999) and take into consideration the changing nature of the function that has shifted HRMs overall purpose towards being one of serving the interests of management whilst de-emphasizing the needs of the employees, a move that will have generated a different form of power relations (Jacques, 1999; Townley, 1994). A critical approach recognizes the importance of that the pluralist values underpinning employment relationships have been replaced by newer models built on a unitarist philosophy that downplays the responsibility that the HR has in protecting the interests of the employees (Fransis & Keegan, 2007).

In this case a critically underpinned research project would adopt a pluralist view to how the employment relationship should be managed. It would oppose itself against unitarist ideals that are rejecting the idea that life and living beings are complex in themselves and social life is complex. A unitarist framework takes for granted that management and employees share the same interests whilst ignoring the inequality of power between employees and employers. In addition, a unitarist framework will find that anything disrupting a harmonious work environment built around consensual ideas is unnatural, unwanted, problematic and should hence effectively be removed. Concurrently this critical approach would adopt a Social Constructionist (Burr, 2003) view on social life. From this perspective it is easy to see that the SHRM function is operating various practices dense with socially constructive elements, such as for instance audits, appraisals and feedback.

In addition something should be mentioned around some key concepts pertaining to a critical perspective or tradition (Prasad, 2005). Firstly the concept of hegemony is of importance. As much of contemporary sophisticated SHRM practices are operating under a highly people friendly surface the notions of coercion and exploitation is not representative descriptions of contemporary SHRM activities. On the contrary, hegemony suggests that individuals are active collaborators in their own subjugation and many times unaware of the hegemonic practices that are operating on and around them. This will hence have methodological implications as Alvesson rightly comments;

> "We can hardly go around asking people about their 'psychic prisons' or 'false consciousness', or about 'communicative distortions' and so on; nor do such things allow themselves to be readily observed" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2007)

A critical researcher would hence have to adopt a sensitivity towards activities that systematically legitimates and masks injustices and asymmetries (Prasad, 2005). It follows the line of thought that nature and social life is very much approached in an instrumental fashion, meaning that humans and knowledge are used as means to an end.[20] A critical approach further suggests that technology is gaining supremacy in relation to the world of emotions, it not only gains supremacy , it takes the legitimate role of defining reality whilst erasing and denying all oppositional and subjective forms of thoughts and actions. Hence this approach critiques all aims to create standardized formats of social life that are eliminating plurality and that are believed to induce false senses of security and freedom. Finally a critical approach views many areas and structures as potential mechanisms for the production and reproduction of unequal power relations between agents. Communication is an example of a potentially effective mechanism to eliminate opposing views and even eliminate the opportunities for opposing views to arise.

This research proposal hence suggests a research method informed by Critical Theory. However, it will not engage itself in systematic fieldwork pertaining to the different critical traditions but rather use it as a philosophical backbone to the work (ibid.). The critical approach proposed here blended with the necessities of capturing processes through time would make a research project that this RP suggests particularly suitable for critical ethnographic research that concerns itself critically with commodification of hearts and minds, colonization of the inner lives of human beings and corporate takeovers of the human consciousness in the public and in the private lives. A critical ethnographic research project would take into account the multifaceted and rich content involved in different communication systems i.e. not only the words spoken or written but also how they are spoken and presented in all their forms, the symbolic systems surrounding the communication, the clothes that are worn, the physical layout of the different settings etc. It would attempt to highlight distortions and power-relations; it would view all the areas pertaining to appraisals and feedback in all its' forms as potential locations where hegemony may be exercised; it would particularly question those aspects of social life that present themselves as self-evident and it would attempt to interpret and explain. Alvesson & Sköldberg, (2007) suggests two types of interpretation. The first involves the interpretation of *processes and structures* leading to 'communicative noise and distorts self-knowledge and

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[20] For example the political aim of CIPD to produce increased performativity of individuals as a means to create a value-added in SHRM, a value added that is believed to raise the status of the SHRM function.

understanding. The second type of interpretation involves the *content* of ideas and conceptions. These authors further suggest the use of negations as a way to think dialectically about the research topic. The aim is to find counter-images and produce contrasts to facilitate the interpretation in a state of tention, make the familiar foreign/exotic/arbitrary and problematize the self-evident, an important element in critical ethnography.

A critical ethnographic study will involve the collection and interpretation of a dense body of empirical information. Hence there will have to be a selection process of what information should be used in the final thesis. At the outset some practices are rather obvious to be used in the analysis, however, it is likely that feedback and appraisals can emerge in different types of contexts under less obvious but nonetheless important forms ('boot camps' involving various forms of teambuilding excercises has already been suggested as a potential arena of various forms of feedback). Further, it is worth questioning if feedback should be broadened in its' definition, stretch beyond the spoken/written word and involve more subtle forms of feedback taking the shape in body language, tone of voice etc.

Hence, this project would follow the advice of Alvesson and Sköldberg, spend a reasonable amount of time becoming familiar with the particular context and the organizational culture whilst attempting to locate within the broad collection of empirical material gathered the important themes linked with the research questions.

7.2 Research Design; capturing the empirical

Methods of data collection

The methods of data collection suggested for this type of research and to address the posed research questions are of three different kinds; The first pertains to the key research activity of

ethnographic research – the participant observation (Prasad, 2005). However, this research project would not solely rely on observation as a source of data but attempt to enrich the understanding around the topic of the project through qualitative interviewing and through collection and analysis of documents (Bryman, 2008).

Observations

This method would firstly be used to get a thorough understanding of the context and its' 'organizational inhabitants', secondly it would involve attempts to gain access to more specific types of locations and activities such as formal appraisal and feedback activities of employees and managers in addition it would facilitate the understanding of the less obvious type of feedback mechanisms that may be used in the organization. Thirdly it would aim to generate an understanding for the hidden versus the vizibilized and investigate what types of social values that are disseminated in the organization in regards to these concepts and work processes operating under these concepts. One potential problem arising in regards to this method of data collection pertains to access. Both access of the situations that are aiming to facilitate an understanding of what vizibilized and what is hidden and further the formal feedback situations of employees and managers could potentially be problematic. There has to be considerations of establishing contacts with gatekeepers but considerations would also have to be given to the ethical dimensions of the research project, such as the informed concent of the members. Inspiration could be collected from presented research on sensitive topics and how researchers have managed to circumvent particular issues of access (Lee, 1999). Alternative ways to get around this problem could potentially be inspired by academics such Rosen & Astley(1988), Rosen (1985), Benford & Hunt (1992) and Van Maanen & Kunda (1989) that have used creative approaches to get around the issue of access, approaches that could be well suited to the theoretical framework of Goffman as all of these academics works are well compatible with the dramaturgical tradition.

The level of engagement of the researcher in the daily worklife of the members of the social setting will probably shift from *Participant – as – observer* where there will be complete participation and *observer - as- participant* where the researcher is hanging around, asking questions and interviewing the members to *complete observation* (Bryman, 2008) which would be the natural approach during appraisal and feed-back situations. Hence there are various degrees of involvement depending on situation and stage in the research process.

Interviews

The second research question posed in this paper is not of the kind to be answered straightforwardly, particularly in a research project that is run as a critical research project where practices may be looked upon as hegemonic. Irrespectively, it is interesting to find out how individuals are making sense of these practices and what they are saying about them. An orientation around the sense-making of these practices can reasonably be investigated through interviews with employees and managers in the organization(s) researched. Hence in addition to the more freely conducted interviews during observer – as – participant periods of the research process, additional semi-structured interviews (ibid.) could be conducted with employees and managers to provide a richness to the understanding of the researched topic. The interviews would, if possible, be recorded and transcribed. The sampling would be *purposive* (ibid.) in the sense to create an overall idea of what is being said amongst different occupational groups and hierarchical levels in regards to the concepts of feedback and vizibility.

Qualitative analysis of texts and documents

Limiting oneself to observations and interviews may restrict the researcher from getting a grasp of the important information that could be collected through document analysis. Hence, this type of analysis should be considered to highlight the documented impact of performance enhancing activities resulting from different feedback and appraisal practices (and even self-reflective activities). Vizibilization and feedback activities are aimed to produce particular performance outcomes over time and an analysis of appraisal sheets would hence provide indications on how employees are developing over time in accordance to set performance standards. Analyzing the corporate website, vision, mission and value-statements, HRM policies; internal marketing materials and Human Capital Management systems may also shed a valuable light on the established and official values pertaining to the research topic. The documents could potentially be analyzed through qualitative content analysis, where the main attempt would be to identify underlying themes of interest for the research questions (ibid.).

Time frame

The research project would constitute a part of a PhD programme stretching over a four year period. The period would be divided between the attendance and course-work pertaining to compulsory PhD modules, fieldwork/transcription and writing-up, the coding of the data and

the writing the doctoral thesis. Hence, an ethnographic research that in addition would involve data collection methods such as interviews and textual analysis would within these time constraints reasonably stretch across a time span of six to nine months. Potentially, shorter visits could be done over several years to capture the development/progress/impact of HRM practices on particular individuals. For instance it may be worth to attend to as many formal appraisals as possible within existing time limitations to capture the process and the 'progress'. The coding of the data would reasonably consume a larger chunk of time and should be given at least the same amount of time as the research itself. Hence following 'action plan' is suggested

Proposition for Research Agenda

Following table is a suggestion for how the time could be spent during a four year PhD period:

Time Frame	Activity
1 – 1.5 years	Compulsory PhD coursework
9 months	Fieldwork, writing up and transcribing
9 months	Coding and analyzing
6 months	Extra time to apply where needed. (Potential mishaps should wisely be left some elbow space in the time schedule)

Table 1 Proposition of research agenda

Proposition for how the fieldwork /writing up should be spread across a 9 month time frame:

The schedule is calculated on fulltime work and one hour of interviewing equals 5 hours of transcribing/ writing up. In terms of taking field-notes and the writing up of these it is more difficult to give an exact figure. However it should be reasonable to assume that 1 week of fieldwork will require at about half a week of writing up. It should be kept in mind that this is one suggestion of how the time could be divided between the different research activities. Most likely the way that these hours and times would be spread across the time-span for the project would be subjected to amendments and changes due to particular circumstances that might influence the research situation:

	Fieldwork	Writing up/transcribing
Observations 1 Formal appraisals	20 ppl * 2times* 2 years = 80 hours /2 weeks fulltime	80 hours of appraisal observations = 2 weeks of writing up
Observations 2 General observations	Approx 4 months	6 weeks of writing up
Interviews	30 ppl = approx 30 hours = 2 weeks with approx 2 interviews / day	30 * 5 = 150 hours = approx 4 weeks of transcription
Document analysis	1 week	1 week
Total time:	Approx. 6 months of fieldwork	Approx. 3 months of writing up and transcribing

Table 2 Suggestion for time spend on fieldwork and writing up/transcribing

Qualitative Sampling

The sampling for this qualitative research project would be purposive (Bryman, 2008) in its selection of organization(s), people, and documents, and to some extent arenas/occasions for observations. In regards to sampling of people, the purposive element is primarily guided by the underpinning pluralistic belief directing the research questions, i.e. the conflicting interests upon which an employment contract is built and the differing positions of power upon which organizational members are performing their work. Therefore, participants will be selected both from the management teams on the one hand and from the employees on the other in regards to interviews and formal appraisal/ feedback observations. In the calculations in Table 2 there is a suggestion of performing interviews with 30 participants and also 20 observations of formal appraisals conducted on the same participants during 4 occasions spanning across two years. Preferably it would be the same people during the observations as during the interviews.

The sampling will also be influenced to a large extent by the possibilities of access and interest of the subjects to participate. Further the sampling would be guided by the course of events and the general observations conducted through time. Hence a flexible approach will

be necessary in order to give the scope for research activities to be contingent upon research findings arising during the fieldwork. This flexibility will be falling under what has been called 'general observations' in table 2 and particular observations of interest for the research topic would consequently be addressed in due course.

Location

Various criteria would influence selection of organization to be researched. Apart from time and other resource limitations there are other important criteria that will determine the choice of location. Firstly, it should be an organization that actively attempt to disseminate its' organizational values and systematically attempts to develop a unitary and harmonious culture. This is normally found in organizations where members are working under higher levels of discretion and autonomy. Secondly, the organization(s) should be operating a sophisticated SHRM system and a Performance Management System that preferably involves systematic and frequent feedback activities with linked training & development and reward schemes. That is to say that the organization(s) should conduct at least two formal appraisals per year and put considerable resources on training & development and linked reward as this will raise the opportunities and chances to observe various activities that normally involve a range of feedback elements. Thirdly, the organization should further be one that attempts to vizibilize the information gathered during the appraisals to keep track on the *human capital value* added by individual members.

Resources

The financial and time resources necessary to conduct the fieldwork would involve technical equipment for recording interviews. Possibly even video-recording could be used in some occasions during public events such as training activities and other social gatherings. Travel costs would be contingent upon the location of the organization(s) and if participation/fieldwork would be conducted on other locations than in the organization. Finally, there would be costs pertaining to the writing up and transcription of the fieldwork, i.e. material such as toners for the printer and paper.

8 Conclusion/weaknesses of the proposed approach

This Research Proposal has presented a critical account on contemporary HRM practice and how it operates as a representative of the 'audit society' (Power, 1994). It has suggested a

critically informed approach to research the Performance Management System – performance appraisals and feedback, how these activities operate under a 'vizibilized' organization and how employees are influenced by it. The research proposed is hence to rest against a backbone of Critical Theory whilst being viewed through the prisms of Goffman and Bourdieu which one the one hand would provide a rich dramaturgical understanding of appraisal and feedback activities (Goffman, 1959), and on the other how these activities are operating in fields of struggle for power and capital (Bourdieu, 1977). The research project would be conducted as a critical ethnographic study primarily applying the method of observation but also interviews and textual analyses to gain a richer understanding of the research topic.

Some acknowledgement should be given to potential limitations and drawbacks for the choice of approach to the topic and also how the research would be conducted. In terms of adopting a critical perspective there are various acknowledged weaknesses and critiques: Positivist critics claim it to be too anecdotal, unscientific, filled with biases and invalid for generalizations. Prasad (2005) responds to this critique by pointing at the critique as ill informed by the epistemological basis of critical theory. This RP is also shaped by the acknowledgement of an absence of neutrality in the knowledge production. Hence, it has from the outset (including the image on the cover page) been clearly positioned (rather cynically) against its' contents, giving the reader an opportunity to obtain an idea of where the author of this thesis is standing in relation to the topic. The argument driving this thesis forward is however not grasped from thin air; on the contrary it is informed by sophisticated theoretical and empirical accounts of the field. The positioning against ones topic is in addition to be accompanied with reflexivity, an awareness of the way ones research (manner, and political, cultural and theoretical context) influence what is researched (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2007).

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