

How to make a living in No Man's Land

A Case Study of the HR function at Region Skåne



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

Master's Thesis

Spring 2015

Managing People, Knowledge & Change

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Acknowledgement

First of all, we would like to thank our supervisor, Mats Benner. He has guided us and given us insightful feedback with a constant positive approach throughout the whole process. He has even installed high-speed Internet at his country house so that we could reach him at any hour. Mats have during the thesis period shown a great commitment and a genuine interest in our study, which have helped us to complete our research with quality.

We would also like to give a big thank you to our respondents at the HR departments at Region Skåne for letting us take part of their stories. Without their contribution and openness during the interviews, this project would not have been possible.

Thank you!

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Lund 2015-05-21

ABSTRACT

Title: How to make a living in No Man's Land - a Case Study of the HR function in Region Skåne

Submission date: 22nd of May 2015

Course: BUSN49 Degree Project in Managing People, Knowledge and Change – Master Level

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Keywords: HRM, Professional Bureaucracy, Organizational Change, Lack of competencies, Ambiguity

Thesis purpose: To provide knowledge about how the HR professionals within a healthcare organization perceive and make sense of an organizational change

Methodology: A qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews that have been conducted from an interpretive stance

Research Question: How do HR professionals perceive organizational change within a healthcare organization, and how is this articulated in terms of their views of work tasks and organizational development?

Basic Findings: We found five central aspects in our research. Firstly, that HR is an *undervalued function*, due to the professional bureaucracy structure. Further, the HR work has been *separated from the operational core*, which have caused *ambiguous work tasks*. Also, the HR function has a responsibility to act as a *supplier of competencies* when operating in a “*panic organization*”.

Conclusion: The HR professionals are having distinct difficulties with making sense of their own situation in a constantly changing organization like Region Skåne. The fact that Region Skåne is undergoing continuous changes makes it problematic for the HR function to find their role and quickly adapt, before it is time for another change. The professional bureaucracy is also causing problems for the HR professionals to make sense of their role in Region Skåne. The professionalism of the managers and the physicians is pushing away the HR function and makes it hard for them to develop into anything else but what Mintzberg (1993) identifies as the support staff. The shortage of nurses and physicians within Region Skåne puts the HR professionals in a problematic position, since they are required to solve this situation without the resources they need to succeed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a seminal paper, Vosburgh (2007) argued that work in Human Resources (henceforth mentioned as HR) has undergone a profound recent change, moving from a service and staffing function to the very core of corporate strategy. The thesis has triggered the rise of an entire set of literature on the strategic dimensions of human resource work, Strategic Human Resources (Ulrich, 1997; Guest & King, 2004; Legge, 1978; Boxall & Purcell, 2000). Our starting point is to unpack Vosburgh's grand vision of a transformation of HR work, by looking at an instance of a proclaimed organizational change, how change was instigated, how the plans were made and ruled of HR therein, and if HR work was altered or transformed in that process.

The first elements of an HR function evolved during the industrialization in the 19th century. During this period, a need for a new function in the labour market was growing. The main purpose of this function was to recruit personnel, coordinate wages and providing motivational factors for productive work (Boxall, Purcell & Wright, 2007, Lazonick 1990). After World War II, *personnel administration* became a dominant concept, focusing more on organizing labours and employees with a foundation in mutual trust (ibid., Granberg 2011). Today, the concept of *Strategic Human Resources Management* (henceforth mentioned as SHRM) has been widely adopted, emphasizing a strategic view of HR work and the competitive advantage of engaging with employees's involvement and enhancing individual and business performance in parallel (ibid.).

Returning to Vosburgh, he argued that HR was at a watershed: "*HR is active in a continuous changing market environment and the biggest question is if it will define the future or simply react upon continuous changes that occurs in the economy*" (Vosburgh 2007:11). A key question is how the constitution of HR is linked to organizational change more broadly, a linkage that Vosburgh pointed out as particularly critical. Organizational change projects may open a window of opportunity for a transformation of HR, but it may also reproduce a marginal and peripheral role of it.

A key issue is the form and structure of organizational change projects, as it is to them the expectations of a rejuvenation of HR are linked. Many such projects fail however, for a variety of reasons (Wim, 2005). Anders and Casidy (2014) take the example of the transformation of a healthcare institution, claim that a successful change process requires sufficient resources, time and staff, and adequate managerial and personal capabilities.

The history of Human Resources Management (henceforth mentioned as HRM) is a long road of trying to find an understanding of the relevance of the HR function, in what is often portrayed as a fast changing environment (Rosa, 2013). That is also the starting point of this paper, to study how the HR function is affected by organizational change projects in general, and in the specific context of an organizational change project within the health care system. This specific context is shaped by the political framework of the healthcare system, with recurrent changes in the leadership function, intermittent financial crises and a constant search for novel ways of addressing and dealing with multiple expectations (cf. Scott, Ruef, Mendel & Caronna, 2000). The health care system is a critical case also in the sense that it is shaped by a professional structure where core functions are roles are carried out by professionals with highly specialized skills and training (Mintzberg, 1993). This can be assumed to further complicate organizational change projects, as these have to engage with strong and well-organized professionals on which the organizations are critically dependent; furthermore it means that we can expect tensions between healthcare professionals (doctors and nurses), who wish to remain in control of critical issues such as recruitment and work organizations, and HR professionals, who – in the light of the proclaimed rise of SHRM – may insist that such functions should be governed by them. This divergence of interests potentially blocks the realization of a more strategic role for the HR function. Hence, our choice of organizational change project in the healthcare sector is intended to be a critical case for the analysis of the HR function and the role of HR professionals in contemporary organizations – whether they are vanguards of change or stuck in a no man's land.

We afford an interpretivist perspective to the study of organizational change projects and the role of HR therein. The existing literature in the field focuses primarily on the strategic aspect of the HR function, and the transition from HRM

towards SHRM from a leadership and strategic perspective. As an antidote to this instrumentalization of HR work, we will study the constitution of the HR function by analyzing how the HR professionals interpret and make sense of their work practice and organizational position. This will also give us a unique analytical lens from which to observe the configuration of HR work, by actually looking at how it is being done and how that daily practices are narrated by the HR professionals.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT & RESEARCH QUESTION

Our interest lies in researching whether the organizational change processes affect the HR function, and how people within the function makes sense of this situation and define the core and content of HR work. How does this explicitly look in practice and what is the role of HR in the process of organizational development? According to Wim (2005) organizational change is a core field in the management literature. However, research focusing particularly on how the HR function is affected by a change is more scarce. When we started searching for an organization to make our study for, we agreed on that Region Skåne would be a relevant organization to study. Firstly, that is because of its history of multiple reorganization and secondly because healthcare is itself an interesting industry due to its knowledge-intensiveness. Region Skåne thus served our purpose since we find it interesting to study if the HR function contributes to organizational development within the healthcare industry.

The purpose of this study is therefore to research how the HR professionals interpret their situation within a healthcare organization, Region Skåne, and how it is constituted and affected by organizational change. In the following chapter a review of Region Skåne will be provided to facilitate the comprehension of the studied organization.

The problem statement described above and the forthcoming literature review have led us to the following research question:

“How do HR professionals perceive organizational change within a healthcare organization, and how is this articulated in terms of their views of work tasks and organizational development?”

2.1 Region Skåne

Region Skåne has a long history, including numerous organizational changes. Already in 1666 when the University of Lund was formed, a medical school with a license to conduct medical education was incepted. This formed the basis of Lund's first hospital in 1768, which was followed by Malmö General Hospital 1857. Until today, the leading healthcare institutions in Malmö and Lund were characterized by different

stages of development and reorganizations. However, it was not until 2010 that Malmö General Hospital and Lund University Hospital signed up for cooperation and formed Skåne University healthcare. Three years later, Skåne's University healthcare was reorganized again, to the current organization called Sus (www.skane.se). That was an overall organizational change that influenced all healthcare institutions in Skåne. Today, Region Skåne is divided into Sus, Sund, Kryh and Primärvården. Sus comprises the hospital of Lund and Malmö, Sund the healthcare of Landskrona, Helsingborg and Ängelholm, and Kryh the healthcare of Kristianstad, Hässleholm and Ystad. Primärvården is consisting of all district healthcare centres in Skåne. It is from this latter reorganization that this research takes its starting point.

On the website of Region Skåne, it describes its primary mission as to promote health, sustainability and growth in Skåne. Further, Region Skåne is given the aim of being responsible for the healthcare, public transport, development and business, culture, infrastructure, urban planning and environmental issues (www.skane.se). Due to the restricted length of this study, we have chosen to focus only on the healthcare part of Region Skåne.

The fundamental conditions for healthcare in Sweden are constantly changing (Envisio Consulting Resources, 2013). What has been noticed lately is the fact that most people are visiting the emergency room at hospitals, rather than visiting the district healthcare centre when they are feeling ill. This in its turn is a reflection of the structure of Swedish healthcare, where hospitals, but not district healthcare centres, have traditionally been easily accessible and where patients have traditionally sought care directly at the hospitals rather than by referral via the primary care system. This was the key factor that triggered the latest reorganization, which forms the backdrop of this study (ibid). As a result of a perception of an overburdening of the hospital system, Region Skåne decided to reorganise the entire administrative part of the organization in tandem with a reorganization of the health care delivery model. This involved the economic, IT, administration, communication and HR departments. In practice this meant that thirteen administrative bodies became four, all to facilitate the cooperation between hospitals and primary care (Magnusson, 2013). These four bodies, as mentioned above, are called Sus, Sund, Kryh and Primärvården.

This reorganization has been strongly criticised by employees as well as unions and politicians. The criticism has occurred mainly because the decision to reorganize was taken by the region manager, and not by politicians, and has therefore been perceived as an internal top-down decision, which has not been popular among employees, politicians or the society (Bringselius, 2012). The last few years Region Skåne has been engaged in several reorganizations and the employees have expressed unwillingness to more changes (Envisio Consulting Resources, 2013). The question remains whether the reorganization of Region Skåne can reverse this trend and other developing areas when it comes to the collaboration between primary care and hospitals (ibid.).

2.2 HR in a changing environment

The present research and theory of the field indicates that there is a link between competitive advantage and resourced-based management (Barney, 1991). In a fast changing market environment, organizations must be able to be innovative and identify their strength in a resourced-based view, focusing on developing humans and compete with unique knowledge (PWC, 2015). We believe that there is a gap in the field of HR management that can find answers and understandings about how HR can contribute to identify and develop these important resources. *“There is general consensus that competitive advantage built on human resource innovation is not easily imitable, and therefore vital to the sustainability of firm growth and competitiveness”* (European Business Review, 2013). The connection between HR and competitive advantage is here emphasized, although the question of *how* HR processes enables organizations to deliver superior performance and *what* they really do in practise, remains an area of ambiguity (European Business Review, 2013).

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter we will review the literature that we find valuable to our thesis and that we believe will provide us with an understanding of the studied object. The review starts with a walkthrough of Barney's (1991) theory on the resource based view. Further, a definition of the organizational structure is provided through Mintzberg's (1993) professional bureaucracy. Ulrich (1997) argues that there is a new agenda for human resources, which we will use as a platform in our study. Further we complement Ulrich's article with SHRM literature and arguments by Guest & King (2004), Legge (1978) and Boxall & Purcell (2000), to provide a more thorough base on different aspects of SHRM. This chapter is concluded by a description of organizational change, how it affects an organization and its specific context.

4.1 The Resource Based View

Barney (1991) argues that a resource-based view of an organization can be used to analyse the ability to create sustainable competitive advantage. The resource-based view emphasizes the relation between the company's internal characteristics and performance. This approach takes four crucial aspects of the resources in consideration: *value*, *rareness*, *imitability* and *substitutability*. Valuable resources are those that contribute to competitive advantage through the ability to perceive strategies that improve efficiency and effectiveness (Barney, 1991). Rare resources can be explained as resources that are absolutely unique among a number of crucial competitive firms, which will generate potential factors for sustainable competitive advantage. Further, when a company are able to conceive or has implemented a valuable or innovative resource, this strategy contributes to competitive advantage if other competitors and firms are not able to imitate it, as a lack of relevant knowledge. In this situation, the resource can be identified as an *imperfectly imitable resource* (Barney, 1991). Here, the factor of *social complexity* is important to take in consideration. This factor is based on the fact that a resource may be imperfectly imitable because it appears in a complex social phenomenon, beyond the ability of systematically managing influences, which makes it complicated for other firms to imitate (Barney, 1991).

The resource based view increases the understanding of why some organizations in the same industry differ from each other by taking advantage of their resources in different ways (Kraaijenbrink, Spender & Groen et al., 2009). The idea of considering an organization as a collection of resources was founded by Penrose (1958). Barney (1997) refers to Penrose (1958) who suggested that an organization can be understood through two assumptions: 1) as an administrative framework that links and coordinates a variety of individuals and groups' activities, and 2) as a composition of valuable, unique and imperfectly imitable resources. Penrose stressed that an organization's growth is limited by the opportunities that exist depending on the resources of the organization, and of the framework that coordinates the use of these resources (Barney, 1997). Barney (1997) argues that there are several organizations that provide the same resource, the greater the chance that this resource is used in a similar way.

These theories provide us with knowledge about how important the resources of the organization is to facilitate organizational development. In this thesis we study whether human resources can be seen as one of these important resources.

4.2 Professional bureaucracy

Another theoretical strand concerns the organizational structure and how that may impact on the HR function. According to Mintzberg (1993) the professional bureaucracy is an organizational structure that provides the human resources with great responsibility and is characterized by horizontal specialization, and decentralized control. This means that the coordination of the professional human capital is mainly done through standardization of knowledge. The employees of a professional bureaucracy know what they can expect from their colleagues. It allows employees to work relatively independently, and closer to their customers, patients and clients. This form of organization is thus common in stable and complex environments (Mintzberg, 1993). Mintzberg (1993) argues that there is an operational centre in the professional bureaucracy in which there are specialists who have significant control over their own work. A professional bureaucracy is an inflexible organizational structure where organizational change tends to be time-consuming because it requires a change of behaviour among the human expertise. The

professional bureaucracy is characterized by the principles that the organization is built upon practices, norms and rules created by the professions themselves and their human capital expertise. This results in an increased rigidity, which makes it hard to change the organizational structure (Mintzberg, 1993). In this study, we define the rigidity as the organizational structure and the human resources difficulty to change.

Further, Mintzberg (1993) argue that in order to understand the structure it is important to delineate the basic parts and mechanisms of an organization. The five basic parts that are enlightened are the *operating core*, the *strategic apex*, the *middle line*, the *technostructure* and the *support staff*. The operating core consists of the employees that produce the product or service of the organization. The top general managers and their personal staff are identified as the strategic apex and the middle line consists of the managers that sit in a direct line of formal authority between the operating core and the strategic apex. Further, the technostructure is not in the ‘formal line structure’, but consists of the analysts who apply the analytic techniques to the design and maintenance of the structure of the organization. The technostructure is also adapting the organization to the environment around it. Lastly, the support staff consists of the groups that provide indirect support to the rest of the organization (Mintzberg, 1993).

4.3 From HRM to SHRM?

Ulrich (1997) argued that an obsolete view of HR rules in most companies, which implies that it is seen as an ineffective, incompetent and costly business unit, primarily handling paperwork, manages the bureaucratic aspects of benefits and administers compensation decisions made by others, according to Ulrich (1997). Further, the HR function might also oversee recruiting, development programs or design diversity programs. The main point here is that HR often is disconnected from the real work in the organization. Therefore Ulrich (1997) claim that there is a new agenda for HR. Managers of today’s organizations face issues that are related to learning, quality, teamwork and reengineering. These issues are all related to how an organization treats their employees, and therefore addressed as HR issues.

External factors does also enlighten the importance of HR. Due to factors such as globalization, technology, profitability for growth, intellectual capital and change, HR need to take on a new role within organizations. These roles have Ulrich (1997) identified as “*partner with senior management in strategic execution*”, “*expert of organization work*”, “*champion of employees*” and “*agent of continuous transformation*”.

Ulrich (1997) argued that the HR function should become *partner with senior management in strategic execution*. Explicitly, this is referring to that HR should be a part in the strategic decision-making, which contributes to the organizational performance. Ulrich (1997) also claimed that, neglecting the HR function, senior management view organizational structure as consisting of only actions and decisions, ignoring the importance of systems and skills. It is argued that the senior management understand the organization primarily in terms of its values and therefore pays insufficient attention on how to get work accomplished. Senior management should be considered the “architect” of the organization, and the HR function’s role is to “shepherd” the dialogue about the “blueprints” of the organization (Ulrich, 1997). The HR function should also be able to identify architectural parts of the organization that needs to be renovated, i.e. propose and create change programs that are considered necessary.

As an *expert of organization work*, it is intended for the HR function to act as an administrative expert, but instead of only focusing on this, it is stressed that it should also focus on improving the efficiency of the entire organization. Ulrich (1997) argues that this entails many processes of the organization where the HR function can contribute to cost-cutting and enhancement of efficacy.

The champion of employee’s main task is to make sure that the employees are committed to the organization and that they perform their outermost to contribute. HR professionals should, Ulrich (1997) argued, take responsibility to inform the management on the importance of high working morale among the employees, and also come up with a plan on how to achieve it (Ulrich, 1997). To this matter it is also included to inform on sources of low morale. As a champion of the employees HR

should function as the employee's voice in discussion with the management and make sure that their opinions and rights are represented.

Finally, HR should act as an *agent of continuous transformation*. In this matter it is argued that it is HR's job to build the capacity of the organization to embrace change. It is also important that HR ensures that the broad vision statements behind organizational change are mediated. This will help the employees to identify what they can do to implement this change. The agent of continuous transformation should also mitigate resistance towards change. Further, it is argued that this should be done by using a change model, where the HR professionals introduce this model to their organization and guide the executive teams through it. It is also the responsibility of HR to answer the questions that are raised concerning this model, and make sure that the change is carried out.

To be able to succeed with the new agenda, four changes are necessary. Firstly, it has to be communicated to the organization that the "soft stuff" matters. "Soft stuff" is specified as cultural changes and human capital (Ulrich, 1997:133). Further it is enlightened that the deliverables from HR has to be explicitly defined and thereafter hold HR accountable for the result. It is also crucial to invest in HR practices and accordingly upgrade HR professionals (Ulrich, 1997).

As a conclusion, Ulrich (1997) argues that the increased expectations from the external world, means that HR professionals must begin to act professionally. It is enlightened that HR

must focus more on the deliverables of their work and less on just getting their work done. They must articulate their role in terms of the value they create. They must create mechanisms so that business results quickly follow. They must measure their effectiveness in terms of business competitiveness rather than employee comfort and lead cultural transformation rather than consolidate, reengineer, or downsize in order to turn a company around (Ulrich 1997:134).

It is expected that senior executives demand more, and invest in the HR function.

A similar reasoning was presented by Legge (1978), in a time when the HR-function still was identified as personnel administration in the restricted, Legge stressed the

lack of power among personnel managers and that they were primarily engaged in ambiguous work tasks, with limited access to strategic power. This was a critique of the prevailing way of looking at the HR function, and an argument for improvement of the HR role in organizations. Legge (1978) explained the ambiguity around the HR function as an outcome of vague work activities of the specialist field and the occupation itself, related to the specific organization it represents. Secondly the ambiguity refers to the difficulty to define the key factors between HR work and organizational progress. Finally the role of HR was self-defined in a position between a managerial responsiveness, and responsibility for the human capital in organizations. To overcome this undervalued situation, Legge (1978) argue that HR departments must be included in strategic decision-making. This would replace the traditional way of seeing HR, in forcing it to resolve personnel problems and crises instead of taking part of strategic activities. Guest and King (2004) argued, two decades later, that the ambiguity of the HR role was still applicable, and concluded that Legge's (1978) work was still relevant in explaining the uncertainty of the HR role.

Boxall and Purcell (2000) also highlighted the matter of SHRM, pinpointing the ways in which HRM could be seen as critical to organizational effectiveness. This statement is examined through research evidence and revealed high levels of complexity in relation to how, when and why the interconnection between HRM and organizational outcomes is achieved. Hence, Boxall and Purcell (2000) conclude that the HR strategies of organizations are heavily shaped by contextual contingencies. Although constrained in certain ways, underpinning principles of labour management still have relevance to practice as essential attributes of an organization's ability to compete in its markets. Further, Boxall and Purcell (2000) ask whether the resource-based view provides a better basis for the development of theory in SHRM and in understanding the contribution of HRM to the achievement of sustained competitive advantage. Boxall & Purcell (2000) identify limits to the utility of RBV in respect of SHRM theory, but also important implications for research.

In conclusion it is argued that researchers within HRM could play a central role in these developments because the capacity to attract, motivate and develop workers with critical and scarce abilities, and develop effective processes of work

organization, are fundamental in knowledge-based competition (Boxall & Purcell, 2000).

4.4 Organizational Change and Organizational Development

Due to the fact that this research aims to find out how the HR professionals perceive organizational change, the following part will present a theoretical background for the phenomenon of organizational changes, organizational development and how it occurs in a practical view.

Organizational development (henceforth mentioned as OD) can be explained as an observed approach to managing organizational changes for the last decades. Further it can be explained as an approach of finding strategies to develop individual behaviour and competencies of the human capital and improve the overall organizational performance (Sörgärde & Sveningsson, 2013). From this point of view, changes can be explained as a set of collected behaviour-based theories and techniques, with the main purpose of enhancing organizational work with focus on the people within it, and their job-related behaviour (Porras & Robertsson, 1992). Porras and Silvers (1991) makes a distinction between *organizational development* and *organizational transformation* (henceforth mentioned as OT), where OD is a planned approach to help the organization to adapt into its current environment or develop it into future expectations. OT is also a way of planning how to manage changes, done by communicating new visions and creating a “learning organization” with more continuous changing to better fit into future challenges (Porras & Silvers, 1991). The vision is here a crucial part of the organizational change, considering that it is the vision that has an impact on people’s beliefs and principles. “*The purpose of the organization grows from the beliefs to the purpose and at the same time drives the organization through the process to achieve the main purpose*” (Collins & Porras, 1989 in Porras & Silvers 1991:55). To be successful in changing an organization every individual organizational member must be taken into consideration, including the employee’s cognitive capabilities and behaviour (Porras & Silvers, 1991). Organizational behaviour in a complex environment is created by people's direct response to their experience of the work settings, and indirect from the organizational visions (Porras & Silvers, 1991).

Another core theme is the periodicity of organizational change. According to Weick and Quinn (1999), organizational changes can be divided into *episodic change* and *continuous change*. Firstly, episodic change refers to organizational changes that are characterised as infrequent, discontinuous and are often intentional. Episodic changes occurs in times when organizations are moving away from their native conditions and is a result of a developing misalignment between the deep inertial structure and the current circumstances of the environmental demands (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Episodic change belongs to “second-order changes”, which refers to radical changes in the cognitive framework of the people in the organization and the crucial aspects and activities that gives meaning to the organizational performance (Weick and Quinn, 1999).

In contrast to episodic changes, continuous changes mostly occur in organizations based on ideas of improvisation, translation and learning. These organizational changes are often linked to social practices, which are frequently activated as an everyday practice (Weick & Quinn, 1999). The main purpose of continuous changes is in fact an underlying aspiration to repeating translation of useful ideas and artefacts that fits the organization's overall purpose. The change is not a breaking point in order to make a radical change of the overall work structure, it can rather be explained as an necessity to develop and strengthening existing skills and capabilities (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Finally, the most obvious difference between episodic and continuous changes is that episodic change is realized because of an inability to keep up the original and everyday work, while continuous changes are more characterized as the inability to remain stable in the same position (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

4.5 The importance of the context in a change process

What is also important to take in consideration is the specific context in which the organizational change is created. Since organizations as hospitals and healthcare institutions are highly influenced by specific and professional knowledge, it is of importance to introduce the concept of how to manage and handle this knowledge-intensiveness.

Anders and Casidy (2014) argue that the specific context and the reason to why it emerges, answers the question of how much effort that must be given in the change process to achieve a beneficial outcome. Many unsuccessful attempts to managing knowledge, in order to improve organizational performance, can be explained by three central factors (Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough & Swan, 2009). First, it is a result of a defective contextual analyse. Secondly, it often refers to the absence of a clear purpose and goal. Finally, the management often fails to take every part and process of the organizational knowledge into consideration (ibid.).

A change can generally be explained as a “*noticeable difference in the features of things*” (Anders & Casidy 2014:133). But by putting the change process in its specific context, the process can be explained as a transformation from a given stage to an enhanced and desired stage. McBride and Mustchin (2013) investigate the Human Resource-function of a national healthcare institution in a change process, concluding that it is hardly regulated from its actual function. The authors present HR as a function, intended to drive the change with a positive attitude to achieve a greater and more flexible workforce, and to clarify roles and structures. This function is facing some problematic situations though. HR is seen as an inactive unit because it often only has insufficient access to crucial resources (McBride & Mustchin, 2013). In a multiple environment where different actors trying to integrate in a complex area, limited strategic influences is highlighted as a contributing factor to the insufficient HRM function as well. In this complexity, the HR function is often challenged and regulated by technical and professional control mechanisms.

4.6 Theory conclusion

Barney’s theory (1991) about the resource-based view of organizations can productively be deployed to analyse which resources within Region Skåne that are most relevant for the core task of delivering healthcare to the citizens. Resource dependency in its turn can be understood differently for different groups in an organization – it may mean one thing for healthcare professionals and another for HR professionals. As we intend to analyse a case of HR work within a change process, and see how such a change process affects the perception and practice of HR, we draw on Ulrich (1997), who argues that a new role and mandate for HR is evolving,

placing it at the centre of organizational strategy. This new mandate-theory can contribute to an understanding of the HR professionals perceptions of their work tasks and how they affect the organizational development.

As a theoretical supplement, we draw on theories of *organizational development* which highlight the difference between *episodic versus continuous change*. Such a distinction is analytically clarifying as it points at different ways of conceiving the process of change within the context of Region Skåne.



5. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we will describe how this study has been executed. It will start off with our metatheoretical standpoint, which is the platform of the study. Thereafter our choice of research design is presented, which leads into a review of our data and sample collecting, where we describe our choice of respondents and the organization of study. It is also argued for why we have chosen to study the HR function. The methodology chapter is wrapped up by a description of our reflexive consciousness throughout the study.

5.1 Metatheoretical Standpoint

Research is based on reasoning and observations. It is the relationship between these two that can be interpreted in different ways and therefore lead to different conclusions (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2008). To highlight our research design, the underlying philosophical thoughts will be explained. Positivism and interpretivism are the two main distinguished research philosophies that are used as underlying standpoints. When researchers investigate social reality by observing objective facts knowledge will be developed according to a positivist. Interpretivists on the other hand see knowledge development as something that occurs through developing ideas inducted from the observed and interpreted social constructions (ibid.). Positivism and interpretivism may also be combined in some philosophies. The most notable is realism (ibid.).

Positivists have three principles that define their basic beliefs: (1) the social world exists externally and is viewed objectively, (2) the researcher takes the role of an objective analyst and (3) research is value-free (ibid.). When taking a positivistic stance in research philosophy it is argued that research is conducted on a value-free basis, because all facts would be seen as objective and researchers would not affect the results. The purpose for positivists is to test whether research results fit the derived fundamental laws and to see to what extent the found casualties can be generalized (ibid.).

Interpretivists on the other hand have a different view of how research is conducted. Interpretivism argues that an objective observation of the social world is impossible. This is because of the researcher's preconceptions and understandings of the social world (ibid.). Interpretivists believe that researchers interpretation also is socially constructed and therefore the findings will reflect their motives and beliefs (ibid.). Further, the interpretation of the researcher will affect how and what questions being asked during the interview, but also how the answers will be interpreted afterwards. Interpretivism takes on a much more subjective view of the world than positivism. This because interpretivists believe that the social world cannot be researched in observable and concrete facts.

As argued above one can conclude that positivism and interpretivism are two opposing research philosophies. Realism contains characteristics from both philosophies. Like positivists, realists accept that a reality exists independent on human behaviour and beliefs. On the other hand realists also admit that people and their behaviour requires certain acknowledgements of the subjectivity that is implicit to humans (ibid.).

To choose the appropriate research philosophy is important so that the research design can be created accordingly. This study will be built on semi-structured, qualitative interviews. Therefore the thickness of descriptions will be emphasized, instead of basing results on large samples like in positivism (ibid.). Our interviews were aiming to find the subjective meanings of the interviewee and interpret the phenomena to detect how the role of HR is affected by an organizational change. The goal was to find out if it might exist differences and subjective meanings within the organization that gives us a deeper understanding on the role of HR. Therefore we argue that interpretivism was the best choice of research philosophy for our study.

What needs to be considered though, like in realism, is that subjective meanings found in our empirical data may not be unique and that interviewees can share the same interpretations on our field of study. By claiming this, we were able to make generalizations on subjective responses from our interviewees.

5.2 Research method

When using qualitative methods, one does generally use either an inductive or deductive approach. Induction has its starting point in the empirical data, while deduction is based on theory (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Though, our study was not completely applicable to any of these approaches. Throughout our study we have therefore used an abductive approach, which contains characteristics from both induction and deduction (ibid.). This approach allowed us to work exploratory by using a theoretical framework collateral with empirical research (ibid.). Our primary empirical data was gathered through the semi-structured interviews that were conducted. The empirical data was supported by our theoretical framework to provide us with a more nuanced view of the subject of study (Alvesson, 2003). When conducting an interview, the semi-structured approach offers both structure and openness (Merriam, 2002). This made it possible for the interviewee to respond in a natural way and talk freely about their interpretations on the role of HR. This also allowed the interviewers to pick up interesting statements and ask more in depth about them.

5.3 Data Collection - Quantitative versus Qualitative

There are two primary approaches to the conduct of social science research, namely through *qualitative* and *quantitative* research. Both research methods can provide a result to a problem and it is essential to apply the method that will provide the reader with the most accurate results. Both methods involve different approaches of collecting data and qualitative research can accomplish research objectives that quantitative research cannot, and vice versa. Furthermore, there are both advantages and disadvantages using both methods, but the key of using either successfully is to match the right approach to the right research context (Zikmund, 2010). Qualitative studies in general, tend to take an inductive approach, in which the emphasis is of generation of theories. Quantitative studies on the other hand tend to take a deductive approach in which the emphasis lies on the testing of theories. Though, as mentioned above, our study was most suitable to conduct with an abductive approach.

The choice of data collection is closely related to the research philosophy. Choosing a qualitative approach suited the proposed research question better as it was of importance to generate new knowledge as the already available information is inadequate and does not touch on the topic regarding the HR function's role in a changing organization environment. Therefore it would also be difficult to take on a quantitative approach, as it would be hard to find a hypothesis to test.

5.4 Sample Collection

Our sample collection has been divided into three parts - the choice of organization and the choice of respondents within this organization. We have also taken the context of the organization into consideration. In the following chapter we present and argue for our choice of organization, respondents and context.

5.4.1 Organization

When conducting a qualitative research, the ethnography of the study needs to be taken into consideration. According to Bryman (2008) there are four forms of ethnography where the study can take place. Firstly, one can take on an *overt* or a *covert* role as a researcher. When taking on a covert role, it is important that you do not disclose that fact that you are a researcher. The overt role on the other hand, is being open with your role as a researcher. Secondly, a research can be conducted in either an open or public setting, or a closed setting. An example of an open setting is conducting a study of the street life in a city, or a research on football hooligans. A closed setting is identified when making a research on a specific organization or movement.

Similarly, Bryman (2008) argues that when selecting a particular social setting to act as a case study, the criteria should be determined by the general research area in which the researchers are interested. We knew that we wanted to study the HR function in an organization that had been through some kind of organizational change. Therefore our research had to be conducted in a closed setting. To gain access to an organization, we also had to take on an overt role, since none of us was a part of that type of organization. Further, we found it convenient to work with an organization

that was geographically close. Both of us knew through media that Region Skåne was an organization that had been through many organizational changes. Thus, Region Skåne was an appropriate object of study.

5.4.2 Respondents

Doing a qualitative research often includes a strategic approach of finding the right respondents to answer the desired questions. Therefore, in understanding information of small groups of samples, there are three common approaches to select these respondents (Marshall, 1996). The three approaches are presented as *convenience sample*, *judgement sample* and *theoretical sample*. Convenience samples are based on a more practical approach to select subjects to the research, in using the most available and accessible respondents to save time, money and effort. However, this approach may result in insufficient information and lack of intellectual and relevant data (ibid.). Judgement samples are the most common approach in qualitative research and represent the technique of choosing the most appropriate sample, to answer the research question. This technique allows us to use respondents that are directly connected to the specific field of knowledge that might be useful for the result. This means developing a framework of variable that influence a person's contribution to the research (ibid.). The third technique of selecting research samples, the theoretical sample, means that the sample is based on a theoretical standpoint. This standpoint builds interpretive theories from upcoming data and then selecting new samples to examine on the new theory (ibid.).

In our study, we have used a combination of convenience and judgement sample. That is because we were convenient in the selection of respondents, when contacting them by telephone. We argued that it was appropriate to set up a meeting with people we came in contact with and that had a connection to some kind of HR work in Region Skåne, to ensure the amount of respondents to our research. However, we ensured that we find individuals within the right practical and academic field of HR, to being available of contributing with important knowledge. We found it appropriate to find people with connection to HR work and that had some insights in the change process from 2013. Marshall (1996) argues that it is common to use an overlap between the three main-approaches on selecting samples. What is crucial in balancing between

these depends upon the specific research-question and the methodological approach that has been chosen. What is important here, in a qualitative research, is the specific context of the study. That means to consider the characteristic of the individuals in the samples but even temporal and situational influences of the study (ibid.). We considered every individual's character and made an interpretation in before hand through telephone. That was to find out if the person in question was available and if they were interested in our study. If they were interested, we sent them an e-mail with more information regarding the study (Appendix 12.3). Through Region Skåne's website we found contact information to some crucial individuals, which connected us to the respondents that we later interviewed. Some of the respondents had only worked at Region Skåne for one or two years, and had not really experienced the change process of the organization. However, we found them interesting to our research of the reason that they could compare their information with the other respondents that had been in the organization for a longer time.

During the interviews, we decided to have a flexible starting point, in order to let the respondents decide where and when the interviews would be taking place. The interviews took place in different institutions within Region Skåne in Lund, Malmö and Helsingborg, connected to every specific respondents request. In total we made 10 interviews, with 10 different respondents who have different titles within HR at Region Skåne. A detailed review of the interviews can be found in the appendix. In the analysis we will refer to our respondents as R followed by a number, for example respondent one will be referred to as R1. This is to facilitate the reading.

5.4.3 Context

When we decided on Region Skåne as our subject of study, we thought that we would follow a linear change process, an episodic change, when looking at the reorganisation to the four administrative bodies Sus, Sund, Kryh and Primärvården. What we found when conducting our interviews was that this change process was not linear at all, and it was hard to track down what explicitly were traces of this particular change process. We soon came to realise that Region Skåne is an organization that is defined by constant continuous changes. Further, throughout the interviews with our respondents we found that the multiple change projects had

caused a search for purpose and an explicit role for the HR function within the organization, rather than just a shift of structure and works tasks. This fact lead to that we have taken a hermeneutic stance in our research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009), since we have been working back and forth with both theories and methodology. Therefore we have changed and adapted our research approach throughout this thesis.

5.5 Why the HR function?

When selecting a research subject, both of us had a genuine interest in Human resources management. The subject of the research was identified during the method-course in the master-program of *Managing People Knowledge and Change* at Lund University, the spring of 2015. The background of why this study is based on finding out answers of how organizational changes influence the HR function of an organization is based on our interest within the academic field and because it concerns the overall master-program in question. When conducting the literature review, we found that not much has been written about the HR function in this specific context, i.e. a healthcare organization. Therefore we found it interesting and challenging to take on this object of study.

5.6 Data processing and coding

We started off by transcribing all the empirical material. The interviews were made in Swedish, and therefore we translated the transcription into English. When that was done we read through all of the material independently to get a sense of what was going on. When we read the material the second time, we had the research question in mind. Accordingly, sentences and paragraphs was marked with a highlighter pen when identified as salient or explicit indications of how the HR function of Region Skåne had been affected by its organizational change. When looking through the highlighted text several times, mainly five themes were found. Thereafter, we “cut and sorted” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) the highlighted text into these five themes. Five different documents was created, where all the quotes that was identified as that specific theme where pasted. Through this method the write-up of the results was simplified, since it can be divided into the same themes as identified while coding.

5.7 Reflexivity

In this part of the methodology it will be described how reflexivity is used throughout this research. The reflexive standpoint will be stated and further discussed how it has influenced the work and the empirical material, but also how it has benefited the overall project.

Being reflexive is to have a critically awareness about one's own rating, how the researcher interprets the material based on underlying perceptions of the subject. That means, reflecting upon how different factors affect how we, as researchers, have interpreted the material and phenomenon that has been studied. One can say, that reflection is about paying attention to how theoretical, cultural, linguistic, social and political factors influence the knowledge process and how empirical material is constructed (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). By doing this, we construct our own social reality (ibid.).

Reflexivity can then be explained as the awareness of the fact that everyone is constructing their own reality, and that these aspects influence the outcome of a research. It is here, a question of avoiding empiricism, narcissism and linguistic reduction (ibid.). Otherwise, there is a risk to hang on to one's own perceptions and beliefs. This awareness encourages us to self-reflection, which facilitates the ability to achieve a fair interpretation of the material, based on linguistic, cultural and theoretical equilibrium. Self-reflection is the core factor in all research, to make interpretations or write anything relevant (ibid.). This ability provides a basis of generating knowledge that opens up opportunities for understanding and interpretations, rather than finding established truths (ibid.).

Through the ability to study a material critically, with awareness of our own underlying beliefs, and how political and social factors influence the content, there are advantages to consider. Firstly, it provides an opportunity to break the pattern, from a frame of references, to be able to see what the material is not saying (ibid.). In that way, we were able to find more salient themes in our research, when not letting any influencing factors dominate the interpretation of it. Our reflexive ability has affected how we interpreted the empirical material, and how we created meaning and understanding of what our respondents told us.

We have a genuine interest in HR issues, which means that we are well informed about the field before conducting this study. Through an underlying theoretical approach to the topic, we have gained an understanding and an idea of what it means to deal with human resources in organizations, and how that affects the company as a whole. We also have individual political and objective views to the topic, which of course affects how we have interpreted our material. By being aware of this, we have been more neutral in how we interpreted the material and the information from the interviews, but at the same time conveyed in the work that this also affects how we explain and exemplify the phenomenon. This has allowed us to create a more fair presentation of the material.

We have been reflexive by discussing our biases and assumptions in beforehand of every interview. This includes discussing what preconceptions we have, connected to the respondents and his or her position of the company. This gave us the opportunity to be reflexive when studying the empirical material afterwards.

Through our reflexive consciousness, we have tried to interpret the material as neutrally as possible, to create a fair picture of our empirical material. We have also read through the empirical material by ourselves, and coded it individually. We did this to avoid a discussion on the themes that will influence the outcome of the research. According to Alvesson & Sköldbörg (2009), reflection can be explained by the ability to consider various basic dimensions in the work of interpretation. After the individual reading and coding we came together and discussed our interpretations to find a common way to continue with the research material. The reflective empirical research then shifted from handling the empirical material, towards a consideration of the linguistic, textual, political, perceptual, cognitive, theoretical and cultural circumstances that forms the interpretation.

Throughout the interviews we took a step back, and tried not to steer our respondents, which also helped us to manage our biases. This in combination with a carefully created interview-schedule consisting of open-ended questions, allowed the respondent to create his or her own view of the theme. We were able to do this by using semi-structured interviews, where the questions and the order were not in beforehand determined (Merriam, 2002). Through semi-structured interviews we took

on a more objective and flexible role, letting the interviewee build his or her argument, without our influence.

As we have taken a hermeneutic stance with an interpretive approach, we have tried to be aware of how we perceive and create our social world. Our former interpretations of the research have probably influenced the interpretation of the empirical material during this study. Therefore we have acted in a role, where we have considered ourselves as being impartially actors, to not let our underlying convictions and beliefs dominate the understandings and interpretation of the research.

Throughout the entire study we have tried to take an objective and open-minded standpoint to the subject. This was to avoid that the outcome of our research would only be a reflection of our own isolated worldview and construction of the social world (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

6. RESULTS

In this chapter we will make a short presentation of each factor that we found in our empirical material, factors that contribute to the understanding of the HR function's role in the organizational change process. This is to provide the reader with knowledge about the themes that later will dominate the analysis of this research.

On the basis of our studies, we can conclude that *five* central aspects is common when people within the HR function in Region Skåne make sense of their situation the impact of the organizational change project on their everyday activities. Our work started out with a theory-based depiction of the interplay between organizational change in general – and organizational change projects in particular – and the constitution of HR work within an assumed transition from Human Resource Management to Strategic Human Resource Management. By coding our empirical material it became clearer that a few specific themes were recurring in the discussion about the HR professionals perceptions about their role in the change process of the organization.

At first, the profession of an HR professional in the organization was often explained as an *undervalued function*, due to the professional bureaucracy. Secondly, the work within the field of HR seemed to be *separated from the operational core*, since their work has become geographically disseminated. Their role was also often compared to consultancy work to improve different processes, requested by the executives. We also found that our respondents had considerable difficulties to explain what they explicitly do within their everyday work, which we interpreted as *ambiguous work tasks*. The two latter aspects are processed in the same chapter in the following result review. This is because they are so closely connected to each other. The third aspect that was frequently recurring is that the HR function has a responsibility to act as a *supplier of competencies*, which can be explained as a challenge to replace lost competencies within the deficient professions. Such occupations are in this case especially identified as nurses and specialist doctors within healthcare. Finally we identified a fourth aspect that was interesting, which we interpreted as HR's role in a *“panic organization”*. This scenario was evident because the majority of respondents felt powerless, faced with the challenge to replace lost skills after cutbacks within the health sector. It seemed to be more important to recruit a large amount of people

within a short period of time, rather than finding the right people to the existing vacancies.

6.1 Undervalued function

In several of the interviews, our interviewees expressed sentiments of undervaluation in their profession. The reason for this is that the organization, as they saw it, was largely composed as an professional bureaucracy, where doctors and managers have the ultimate power over the critical decision-making. Since HR employees have no direct medical education, their competencies and freedom to make their own decisions are limited. R3 describe one typical example of this phenomenon: *“There is still a clear hierarchy here, unofficially anyway, so for example with a doctor, they do have a perception that HR is purely administrative work”*. Here, R3 stresses that the health care professionals embodied a hierarchical organizational environment and undervalued the strategic role of HR, instead relegating it to a predominantly service-based function. Along these lines, the interviewee highlighted the need to explain and clarify the HR role to the managers, articulating that his work not only deals with administrative tasks, but also on a more processual and managerial level.

6.2 Separated from the operational core and ambiguous work tasks

The second theme that we found while coding our empirical material was the separation of HR from the operational core of Region Skåne. The latest reorganization, i.e. dividing Region Skåne into four different bodies, incepted a separate administrative part of the organization, where the HR professionals are separated from the operational healthcare system, which also shows in geographical terms, as they are normally geographically distanced from the employees of Region Skåne that they are supporting. R5 enlightens that: *“Before this we used to belong to the different hospitals, one was a part of the psychiatric and somatic departments, we were connected in a different way. Now it is more like we are by ourselves, but still within the organization”*.

The separation of HR from the operational area has not only caused a feeling of exclusion from the organization, but it also seems to have caused ambiguity within

the role of HR. When we asked what their role as a HR specialist meant in practice, some of the respondents had problems identifying exactly what their role was. R9 describe her role like this: *“What it means? It is a very good question what a HR specialist does. Sometimes I would describe it as everything and nothing at the same time”*. This quote exemplifies the tendency of an ambiguous profession that we will analyse further in the upcoming part of the research.

6.3 Supply of competencies

In all the interviews, we got a clear understanding that Region Skåne was characterized by a shortage of important resources, in particular nurses and specialist doctors. When we asked what the greatest future challenge of the HR function was, the *supply of competencies* was always in focus: *“The supply of competencies is the absolute greatest challenge for the future. We will need to consume more healthcare, and it is actually about how we meet these needs in future.”* (R1).

R1 describes the situation as an important challenge for Region Skåne, namely to secure the supply of competencies. The respondent also draws parallels between an increased population growth, facing new and more refractory diseases, and the need to expand the human resource capital, especially those with the relevant and crucial skills. We can conclude that the supply of competencies was a key aspect of HR work where staffing and the filling of vacancies were the dominant expectations of HR staff, which leads us to the next aspect, the temporal dimension of HR work.

6.4 Panic organization

The last factor we identified was that Region Skåne was interpreted as a “panic organization”. By taking the lack of nurses and competencies in consideration, we interpreted the HR function as acting in a permanent emergency situation. The organization seems to be in constant (but varied) need of resources and competencies, which makes the recruitment process a focus on solely filling the gap of nurses and specialist doctors. The work process is based on securing the quantity of staff, with less regard to the aspect of content and quality (the strategic dimension of HR). A working environment with ambivalent and unclear roles also characterizes the panic

organization, where people related to HR work feel overburdened with an overall responsibility to find new skills and retain existing competencies. This responsibility is characterized by a panic environment, where the workspace area is wide, but where the decision-making still takes a long time in a hierarchical organization. What we can interpret here, is that the HR professionals perceive their situation as emergency-solvers.

7. ANALYSIS

As mentioned above, five recurrent issues emerged from the interviews to explain how the HR professionals in Region Skåne perceived the organizational change. The following analysis will be characterized by these factors and analyzed from our theoretical base. This is to unravel what we have found throughout our research.

7.1 A resource based view at Region Skåne

As mentioned earlier, HR related professionals in Region Skåne are employed to support professions in healthcare. Its area of responsibility seems to be extensive, while the profession of HR specialists has an unclear role in the organization and limited power to make their own decisions, due to the perceived underestimation of the HR function, both among the health care professionals and the management of Region Skåne. Most obvious was that the work within HR is devoted to replace lost skills, due to staff reductions during the organizational change in 2013. In the following quote, one of the respondents describes the situation of managing the demanding need of nurses, and that the change has been a contributing factor to this situation.

It is a very big organization, which also means that I am involved in managing change processes considering nursing staff /.../ we are having a lack of staff, it is complicated to recruit nurses and then we need to work in a different way than we do today (R6).

It seems to be important, especially in institutions like healthcare to be an attractive employer, in order to compete with other institutions about an insufficient amount of human resources. Barney (1991) also takes this scenario into consideration, arguing that intangible and unique resources are crucial to competitiveness. It also seemed to be of importance to build a stronger capacity to keep competencies and develop already existing skills within Region Skåne. Many respondents argued that too much attention was focusing on finding new people to cover the lack of nurses, forgetting the importance of enhancing conditions for staff that are already working within the organization.

It is obvious that we must invest in recruitment, but we should also put energy into keeping what we already have, and make sure that they stay in the district. And it is time to work with attractive working conditions and a better working environment (R6).

This argumentation can be compared to Porras and Silvers (1991), who argue that successful organizational changes are based on a complex relation between how the vision of the changes is communicated and how people within it experience their own positions within the work settings (Porras & Silvers, 1991). One problem, expressed by several respondents is that *"we can not compete with wages, it is difficult when it comes to nurses and we do not have a chance in that matter"* (R8). Even if the ambitions of being an attractive employer in the future exist, this is an obstacle that is difficult to ignore. It is obvious that Region Skåne, depending on its position within the public sector, do not have the same ability to offer as high salaries as a private healthcare actor. We may assume that Region Skåne, if it is to be an attractive employer, needs to provide a good and developing work environment to convince newly graduated nurses and doctors to take an employment at Region Skåne and stay with the organization. This is, however, a goal that is understated in the daily activities of the interviewed HR professionals.

The organizational change project with four divisions has created both positive and negative outcomes for the HR professionals. For example, R9 argue that the organization have lost both competence and trust among employees. *"And it was, to be honest, not greatly managed and this resulted in us losing a lot of competencies when the reorganization was executed. And they lost quite a lot of trust on the way"* (R9). Considering this respondent's assumption, it can be said that HR's role in the change process has been misled due to poor communication and a vague vision articulated for the change. As a result of this, people with different occupations within Region Skåne express a lack of satisfaction with their new work conditions, which resulted in resistance and people leaving the organization (R9). From this view, the HR function was affected in a negative way due to the organizational change, since people had a hard time to find their new roles and an understandable purpose with the new conditions. R9 pointed out that the division already had done a comprehensive reorganisation, when the hospitals of Lund and Malmö were set together, five years before it was broken into the current four districts.

So we had made that journey, and we had come a long way and now we had to enter another change. Maybe, we did not quite see the profit in it, in psychiatry, but we thought that it was decoupled from the somatic. Then I can say that it was not the best move to reorganize, it was a big change and it is hard to make it perfect in any way /.../ HR and finance were the units, that were first to be reorganized and put in place, and it was in all honesty, not greatly managed (R9).

In the quote above, R9 describes the change as something unnecessary and poorly managed.

In summary, we may refer to three crucial aspects, explaining why the change was not perceived as a successful initiative by the HR professionals and was therefore not interpreted as an opportunity to work in a more strategic manner. The vision and requirements of the change were, according to the HR professionals, weakly communicated and the employees had problems with finding their new roles and a meaningful connection with the new environment. Finally, the change was interpreted as not taking every part of the organization with respect to its specific context, into account. This argument stays in relation to what Newell et al. (2009), states about organizational changes, arguing that vital aspects to avoid unsuccessful change-work is to take each part of the organization into account. Here, its specific situation and communication of a clear purpose is crucial to consider. Further, the parallel that R9 connects with an unclear vision of the change, stays in line with Collins and Porras (1989), argue that the vision is a crucial part of an organizational change, since it is the vision that have the final impact on people's beliefs and principles.

As a result of a decreased workforce and lack of trust, the HR function in this case also perceived its primary role as to replace the gap of lost competencies. Again, the HR function within Region Skåne had to face a responsibility to rebuild a good reputation, in order to be an attractive employer. The human capital, that could be recognized as every employee in Region Skåne might have an influence in the organization's capability to offer a good healthcare service to the society. Barney (1991) states that an organization's internal characters, the so-called living system, are directly connected to its ability to achieve a viable outcome and compete with unique resources. Seeing it from a resource-based view, Region Skåne is facing a challenge

in order to attract their most important resources. This resource can in this case be identified as nurses, doctors and all other occupations that have a role in the challenge to be a strong actor within healthcare.

If a strategic perspective on HR work would have been the goal, Region Skåne would be challenged to build its attractiveness on a new and competent human capital, rather than offering acceptable healthcare and ensuring that staff shortages are avoided. According to most of the interviewees, the challenge would best be addressed by providing good working conditions. Barney's (1991) theory can in this case rather be exemplified to clarify a context around what an organization's resource dependency looks like. In the situation of Region Skåne, it makes sense to be a competitive actor in relation to private actors, making competent nurses and doctors choosing them instead of another healthcare organization. The resource-based view is here a useful tool to build an understanding of why a better unique and strong human capital can be the crucial difference of advantage, compared to other actors in the industry (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2009).

The shortage of competent nurses is a significant factor in Region Skåne and it is deemed crucial to solve this problem. Here, the HR function perceives itself as an important and responsible role in the various divisions.

Many times, you become desperate, thinking about the recruitment problems. We want to recruit because there are holes in the system. We stop at nothing to be able to recruit. You will be offered a lot of money to recruit, but the question is how to start the blood flow instead? One should also think of how to retain nurses (R10).

In the quote above, R10 describes the desperate need for new personnel, but also points out the importance of promoting and exploit existing competencies within the organization. According to this information the HR process should be seen as a central player in mobilizing resources and be an attractive player in the promotion of human resources. As an overall interpretation of the interviews, people related to HR work within Region Skåne appears to handle crises and lack of resources, rather than finding the perfect competence to a certain position and create competitive advantage (Porras & Robertsson, 1992). With this fact in mind, it seems that time and knowledge are two important factors for the HR function to handle this situation.

7.2 The role of HR within a professional bureaucracy

Mintzberg (1993) describes the professional bureaucracy as an organization with human resources that possess great responsibility through standardization of knowledge. This makes the professional bureaucracy an inflexible organizational structure, which is built upon practices, norms and rules created by human capital expertise. Further, this results in an increased rigidity, which makes it hard to change the organizational structure (Mintzberg, 1993). A hospital is a good example of a professional bureaucracy. Doctors work independently and they can rely on the fact that their colleagues do the same and that they possess the knowledge that is crucial to do so (Mintzberg, 1993). The physicians and nurses of a hospital are therefore recognized as a part of what Mintzberg (1993) identifies as the operational core within a professional bureaucracy.

What Mintzberg (1993) does not touch upon, is how departments or units that does not belong to the operational core are functioning in this kind of organizational structure. What has been prominent throughout the interviews is how the HR function perceives itself as excluded or undervalued.

Sometimes it feels like we disturb more than what we contribute, when we are demanding and want numbers for different projects. It feels like we have to give a second thought to what we request from managers and their attention (R3).

Further, the same respondent considers the role of HR as more respected today, and that the physicians now consider HR professionals to be just that, not just an inferior and distant administrative function. R10 argue that it in general might be harder for HR to penetrate certain kinds of professional groups, but also that it depends on the mentality of the manager: *“There are some managers that detest HR. They consider HR to be a controlling bitch or enemy that prevent them from executing their plans”*. R9 also describe that: *“It is not like the managers cheer when we come up with things that they have to do”*.

Our respondents all perceive the medical professions as difficult to work cooperatively with. Nonetheless, there is a certain dynamic in the relation. Even though it is the general apprehension that HR is a subordinated function of Region Skåne, it

seems as if that opinion has been decreasing the latter years. For instance, HR is now a mandatory part of the board. R6 tell us that: *“A couple of years ago it was not like this. Finance has always been a part of it all, but HR has not. It could be about the individual making the decisions, and then if you were lucky maybe you could join, but we have not been a natural part of this”*. R3 on the other hand, argue that HR has taken on a careful role in the board: *“One can get a feeling of being way in over your head sometimes, but if it is a pleasant atmosphere in the board it is all right to speak your actual opinion”*. He continues with a description of the medical doctor’s approach to HR:

It is still a very clear hierarchy here, at least unofficially, so the doctors have the notion that HR is only administrative work. One most often get that kind of tasks, and then one has to explain your role again and tell them that ‘this is not my job, we have different jobs within HR as well, and I am not like the old kind of personal administrator who is only in charge of schedule’ for example.

The professional bureaucracy, according to Mintzberg (1993) is built upon norms, rules and practices created by human expertise. In the case of Region Skåne, which is heavily based on professional expertise, it can be argued that this affects the HR function. The human expertise is identified as the physicians and nurses, and what we can interpret in our empirical material is that the HR function perceive that they are not accepted as an equal partner with that of the human capital expertise, and therefore not a part of the operational core either.

Further, the HR function could also be seen as a part of the technostructure of the organization. The technostructure should be applying techniques to the design and maintenance of the organizational structure so that it can adapt to its environment. In the case of Region Skåne, the HR function as the technostructure would for example provide the organization with long term staffing programs and organizational training to adapt the organization to the lack of competencies. This aspect would situate the HR function in a more strategic role, rather than being a part of what Mintzberg (1993) coins the support staff, the part that support the rest of the organization. This is, however, the part of Region Skåne where the HR professionals seem to perceive themselves to be.

7.3 SHRM at Region Skåne?

In Ulrich's article "A New Mandate For Human Resources" (1997) it was argued that there is an old view of HR in most companies today. The old view of HR is that it is seen as an ineffective, incompetent and costly business unit (Ulrich, 1997). HR mostly handles paperwork, manages the bureaucratic aspects of benefits and administers compensation decisions made by others, according to Ulrich (1997). What is highlighted in this article is that HR should take on a new agenda and be seen as a real business unit, and be measured in business competitiveness, to reach its full potential. This article was written in 1997, almost two decades ago. Therefore we would assume that HR should have taken on this role by now if Ulrich (1997) was correct in his prediction.

During our study at Region Skåne it was interpreted that HR still does most of the "old" work tasks. Some of the "new" tasks have been adapted, but not all of them. Most of HR's tasks have to be confirmed or delegated by a manager.

All parts are very different from each other. One is involved in most processes, but the managers do most of the things, they have the full responsibility for personnel matters. One can say that they have three responsibilities. They are responsible for the operational area, finances and personnel. We are functioning more like consultants (R9).

Further, R5 argued: *"It is never an HR issue, it is always the managers that are operating the tasks"*. This situation can be interpreted as a sign of desperation among employees and people related to the HR department in Region Skåne, where the overall interpretation of the respondents is that HR does not have the power to be a part of strategic work at managerial level. That is also one of the most important points of Legge (1978), arguing that the biggest challenge to raise HR from its low status, is to be included in strategic decision making processes. Seeing it from this point of view, as we have interpreted it, the situation as the HR professionals describes Region Skåne can also be related to Guest and King (2004) who view HR work as being ambiguous and difficult to synchronize with top management performance. The low priority of HR in top management can also be related to the inability to communicate the importance of including HR at a strategic level.

The new roles that HR should manage according to Ulrich (1997) are identified as “*partner with senior management*”, “*expert of organization work*”, “*champion of employees*” and “*agent of continuous transformation*”, as described in the literature review. It is also stressed that the deliverables from HR has to be explicitly defined, and thereafter HR should be accountable for the result (Ulrich, 1997). Looking at Region Skåne, it can be interpreted that the HR Professionals perceive themselves as “*partner with senior management*”, due to their mandatory seat in the board of the organization. R8 argue that: “*I believe that some part is due to our presence. Since we are now a part of the board, one can say that we have gotten immunity. It feels like we are treated with more respect now*”. But its position in the board has not given HR the authority that Ulrich (1997) predicted.

We are functioning as a reflective surface, providing statistical material and most prominently we are interpreting the role of the operational area where we are supposed to act as a support function. We have to listen a lot, to be able to help the managers to bring out what they want (R10).

R6 reiterated the point:

It is the manager of the unit that does the job, without them this would not be possible. They are taking on the heavy loads of work and make sure to establish it with colleagues, and that is a challenge in itself.

R9 similarly argued that: “*We are the ones who operate the whole process, but it is the managers that do the job*”. None of our respondents take on the credit for what they are performing, but give most of the credit to the managers. Further, Ulrich (1997) highlights that HR should function as the “*shepherd of the blueprints*”, and accordingly discover parts in the organization that needs to be “*renovated*”. We found little evidence of this within the HR function of Region Skåne. Change projects and “*renovations*” within Region Skåne were identified by the top management, not the HR function. In summary, the HR Professionals have received a mandatory position within the board, but this is not interpreted as a greater strategic responsibility for HR.

Boxall and Purcell (2000) highlighted the matter of SHRM, signalling the ways in which HRM could be seen as critical to organizational effectiveness. It is argued that researchers within HRM could play a central role in the development of SHRM

strategies because the capacity to attract, motivate and develop workers with critical and scarce abilities, and develop effective processes of work organization, are fundamental in knowledge-based competition (Boxall & Purcell, 2000). When looking at the HR professional's interpretation of Region Skåne, we can assume that the HR strategies within this organization are heavily shaped by contextual contingencies, such as the shortage of staff and the continuous organizational changes. This is just what Boxall and Purcell (2000) are highlighting as well.

When looking at the other three requirements though, we find it hard to see that the HR professionals are apprehending that Region Skåne is fulfilling them either. The HR function within Region Skåne is an expert of organizational work as Ulrich (1997) argues, but does not, according to the interviewees, act to enhance the efficiency within the entire organization. This is mainly because most of the pure administrative work has been outsourced to the common service function (GSF), which seems to have made the processes even more inefficient.

They are quite sloppy, and you never know if things have been done. One sends them a request and asks 'can you fix this and this?' and when you do not get a reply, you just assume that it has been done. /.../ And I have heard from other people in the organization that it exists a certain frustration considering the fact that it was better before GSF was implemented (R5).

The part of acting as a champion of the employees is also difficult to discern for the HR function at Region Skåne. Due to the extreme shortages of specific professions, the focus is mostly put on finding new employees, rather than acting to empower the current employees in discussion with the management. It is prominent throughout the interviews that this is the most important matter, even though this is causing a bad reputation for Region Skåne. From an OD perspective, emphasize should be put on finding a strategy to develop already existing human competencies and behaviour, in times of change. By this focus, the organization will find a basic opportunity to improve the overall organizational performance (Sörgärde & Sveningsson, 2013). Based on an interpretation from the interviews, Region Skåne is facing a lack of focus on its current employees. This turns out in a very high turnover rate, which in the next place does not improve the reputation of Region Skåne as an employer.

The last new role for HR is, according to Ulrich (1997), to act as an agent of continuous transformation. It is here implied that it is HR's job to prepare and help the organization through a change process. The interpretation is that Region Skåne's HR function does not fulfil this requirement either. In this case, none of our respondents have been initiators, or even involved in managing the change process. Some are not even sure why the latest reorganization has taken place. This can also be related to Guest and King (2004) who view HR work as being ambiguous and difficult to synchronize with top management performance and therefore may result in the inability of HR to be a part of strategic decision making.

This leads us to the interpretation that the HR function in Region Skåne is still considered to belong to Ulrich's (1997) old mandate where it is in the position of a No Man's Land within Region Skåne. HR professionals do not express major opportunities of either personal or professional development.

Well that was what enticed me. When I was working in Helsingborg my title was specialist of follow-up and systems within the HR field. And the thought now is that these specific matters should be conveyed to the board of the body or the district and at the very end of the organization we should be acting like generalists. So I have lost those responsibilities, since I was transferred from Helsingborg. So when looking at the big picture, HR specialists have no possibilities for personal development or to make career choices (R10).

to conclude, Ulrich (1997) argues that increased expectations from the external world, would propel the professionalization of HR professionals. In parallel, it is also expected that senior executives would invest in the HR function and elevate the status of HR work within the organizations. Hence, HR would be transformed into a business unit to realize its full potential and be upgraded accordingly. Even though HR has been elevated in the formal organizational hierarchy of Region Skåne, the HR professionals apprehend that their current work tasks still bears many of the signs and symbols of the old HR paradigm, relegated to routine tasks and forced to act to ensure that sufficient numbers of staff are available.

7.4 How has HR made sense of the organizational change?

At the beginning of this project, we based our assumption on the biases that the change in Region Skåne was by nature an episodic change with a more comprehensive reorganization, which intended to change the organization basically. That may also be the case, considering an overall reorganization to the divisions of Sus, Sund, Kryh and Primärvården, which primary affected the whole organization. However, we found during the research, that the organization was characterized by constant major or minor changes. It was also revealed that HR related workers saw this as a regular, everyday activity, rather than a radical and unusual process.

No it is not as it had been before, we have to keep up. What happens to all the people born in the 90's and the 00's? How do they work and what do they want? So it is very much about work-related environment questions, which I think we need to focus even more on actually (R8).

As quoted above, it can be interpreted that HR is working continuously with changes, both internal and external. Much of its work is based on planning the future and tries to anticipate how the healthcare delivery system may be improved. Further the HR function within Region Skåne, at least if judged from our interviews, expresses ambiguous thoughts about their everyday work and this brings an unpredictable future. Considering this, HR is still left with unclear roles and ambiguous work even after the change process, and has to struggle with questions like R8 highlights above. This can be interpreted as a weakness in the change project, considering that the main purpose of a change, according to Porrás and Robertsson (1992), is related to enhancing organizational work with focus on work related behaviour.

HR work within Region Skåne, can still be seen as a constricted function, separated from the operational function according to the HR professionals. Even if HR has been elevated in formal status, its primary function and role retain many of the traditional routine-based characteristics of HR work. The overall interpretation of the empirical material is that the HR related employees have not been integrated in the change process. This may in fact hamper the efficacy of the change projects. Porrás and Silvers (1991), for example, state that to be successful in implementing an organizational change, management must ensure that every part of it has been rated

from based in its specific conditions. Working with not only change organizational processes, but also individual behaviour and beliefs, can then be seen as a crucial part of changing a complex and labour intensive organization (Porras & Silvers, 1991). Further, organizational change has also meant that HR has become an actor of a wide range of tasks, especially to support managers in their overall work. However, at the same time as the amount of responsibility and tasks has increased, the changes have meant that HR professionals are working at a longer distance from the people they are supposed to support. In the following quote, R1 exemplifies this development:

There are of course advantages and disadvantages of the change. My primary task is to support managers in their daily work, mostly by mail nowadays, and it has become a big difference over the years, it has shifted. It is a very wide range of tasks (R1).

Those engaged in HR have perceived the changes as a messy process, since it is hard to find individual connection to the new conditions. According to McBride and Mustchin (2013), HR should work as a positive driver for organizational changes in order to clarify and ensure new rules and structures. To compare this statement, the HR professionals believe that Region Skåne seems to face some problems in integrating HR as an important player to be successful in organizing a successful change. R1 argues that the role as an HR specialist can be both isolated and unclear.

We meet about once a month, and then try to look at various processes and what we are going to work with for now, and the coming year / ... / It is pretty lonely to be located where I am. One is not physically close to any colleagues at all anymore. Most of my colleagues are located independently, some have one other colleague nearby, but the rest are by themselves (R1).

It is clear that R1 in this case has been significantly influenced by the organizational change. Partly, a positive impact on the HR role as more highlighted and important function is showcased by the interviewee, due to the loss of competence and partly that it for the recent years has gained a more natural place in the board of each division. However, it is clear that HR is still peripheral when crucial decisions are made, and that it is still subordinated by managers in a hierarchical environment. The negative impact of the organizational changes is here presented as an inadequate and unclear role, which involves isolated and distant office related work. The HR

professionals in Region Skåne assumed that they would play an important role in the change process, and that this would enhance their status in the overall organization. But as many respondents describe it, *“you can have a plan, but it will not always turn out as expected”* (R6). The reasoning above can be compared to McBride and Mustchin (2013), arguing that HR in healthcare organizations often have insufficient access to their most crucial resources and limited strategic influence, since they are undervalued by the professional bureaucracy. This can be explained as a contributing factor to the inert development of the HR unit in Region Skåne.

The organizational change project also contributed to a fragmentation of HR professionals. It occurred that there is not much co-operation between the four different bodies, which results in a hard time for the HR specialists to get a comprehensive picture of the entire organization and their own work. R3 told us that: *“It is a little bit worrying, this part with us being stuck in our division. It is a disadvantage that there is a separation between the divisions and that you only work where your workgroup belongs. This makes it hard for HR to work coherently throughout the organization”*. Most respondents also agree upon the fact that the HR function would do a better job if they were located closer to the operational area. R1 argue that: *“I work at distance from the managers within Region Skåne that I support, and I believe it would be a great difference if one had the HR function situated on the spot instead”*.

R2 is working in Region Skåne’s common service function for recruitment, and perceives the change as the district wanted, detailed and it has increased the quality of the recruitment process. This is because the supply of competencies, as mentioned earlier, has become a central issue for the whole organization.

The human competencies have become more and more important /... / But one has to consider that HR is not only about recruiting. Especially when we are located in the middle of the organization and lack the knowledge of the operations in detail. Then the doctors have to compliment the data, so that we can understand (R2).

This is a typical example of the predicted developments in HR, which says that it should become more involved in strategic decisions, but in reality it rather goes in the

opposite direction. HR rather will be more shielded from the operating core, and concentrated on specific tasks to support the manager's needs. In summary, even though one would assume that the HR function within Region Skåne would become more important than before, considering the increasing need of new competencies, HR professionals express sentiments of undervaluation and that they work with insufficient resources and limited power to make important decisions. HR is seen as an external function that can be taken for granted to fill gaps and needs rather than a core unit in sustaining the organization over time. As the recruitment-system has been outsourced as a shared service function, it clarifies the great future challenge and responsibility to rebuild a strong human capital. Today the function is still undervalued and not justified for its total capacity and qualification as a contributing part of important strategic questions. The HR professional's interpretation is that the majority of the information about the recruitment is today, still on a managerial level.

7.5 Organizational changes in healthcare causes ambiguity in HR

Anders & Casidy (2014) stress that it is important to consider the specific context in which the organizational change is created. Since organizations as hospitals and healthcare institutions are highly influenced by professions and professional knowledge, it is of importance to be aware of how to manage this knowledge-intensiveness when communicating a change. Furthermore, Anders & Casidy (2014) argue that the specific context implies how much effort that must be given in the change process to succeed with an organizational change.

The reorganizing at Region Skåne has affected the HR function in many different ways. It has now been two years since the organizational change project was executed and throughout the interviews it is interpreted that this change is not yet fully implemented or sustained.

When it comes to HR in reorganizations, partly because this is such a big organization, one has to presuppose that it will be quite time consuming before everything is in the right place. I do still think that there is a great ambiguity in the role of HR /.../ and what our task is, what should be delegated to others and what the managers are supposed to do (R4).

It also surfaces that the purpose of the reorganizing remains vague to the HR function. The communication considering why and how the reorganization should be executed is interpreted to have been insufficient. R10 tells us that:

It was this huge change, the hospital was split in two parts administratively, but we still had the same locations as before. I left that hospital in connection with the reorganization, but I have heard from former colleagues that this has caused huge adaption problems.

Further the same respondent stresses that: *“Our tasks are more unclear, one was supposed to do changes that back then one had no idea about what they would turn out to be. So one was leaving an environment that was safe and distinct, for something uncertain”*.

According to Anders & Casidy (2014) it is of importance that the change process has sufficient time to prepare the employees and that the organization has the right managerial and personal capabilities to implement the change in a sustainable way. It is the interpretation that this is not the case within region Skåne. *“There are many parts and aspects that needs to be implemented and sustained, so in another three years we might be in another place. It is a process to reach that place. It takes time, especially in a big organization like this one”* (R9). Also the clarity in the change process appears to have been lacking, argues R4: *“No maybe not worse, but I definitely believe that one needs to improve the clarity. I believe that clarity is the key factor in all kinds of business. It most often the reason why things go wrong and therefore I think it should be more prioritized”*.

These constant changes seem to have caused problems for the HR function to find itself a distinct role within Region Skåne. This has also brought an ambiguity considering the role of the HR function in general. When we asked what their role as a HR specialist meant in practice, most of the respondents had problems identifying exactly what their tasks really implicates. R6’s title is HR controller, which is perceived as an ambiguous role as well:

It is not that simple, this was a title that appeared a couple of years ago, which is called HR controller. So I am the HR manager of this unit, but also a controller. But this controller title, well there are others with the same title within the district that have different tasks than I have.

This title is something that the board of the district have established, therefore it is not really deeply rooted in the district in the way that my colleagues and me are working.

Another example of this phenomenon is when R4 compare Region Skåne with his former employer: *“The managers always have their support units to obtain, and that feels a bit fuzzy. I don’t know what the strategy is to get around this and create clarity. I do also experience that there is an ambiguity around who’s doing what, but that is my opinion of course, based on previous experiences. But my experience is that it is ambiguous”*. Furthermore, R7 also agrees upon the ambiguity: *“Yes, well my title is HR specialist and that is quite misleading since I am a generalist. I don’t know why we are titled specialists since I work with supporting managers within all HR areas”* and R8 argue that: *“I work very generally and very broad I would say, more like a generalist rather than my title, which is HR specialist. So it is very broad”*.

The ambiguity is not only about what tasks that are included in the professional title of HR. We do also interpret that there is an incomprehension considering why the reorganization has been taken place. R9 explain that:

Where are we in the organization? It is like, whom should I blame? Haha, no I don’t really know how to express it, but I have not really seen the efficiency of having the HR function organized like this, and I don’t think they have explained explicitly what they want to achieve by having HR as an independent unit.

The demands from higher levels in Region Skåne want HR to work as generalists close to the operational area, but still they want them to be a function that has their own agenda, according to R9. R10 clarifies that point: *“We get our tasks from other places. At the same time, a part of our mission is to be close to the managers. We have to take both parts into consideration and still manage our time schedule. That does not always make sense”*. All respondents imply that the reorganization still has not been fully implemented or sustained, and the role of HR in this new organization is not clear. R3 concludes that: *“Since we do not know who to turn to, new managers are hired and our HR roles are redefined, it all gets extremely messy when nobody knows anything. That is where we are today”*.

What was considered to be a distinct organizational change project seems to have turned into a continuous change pattern (Weick and Quinn, 1999). The HR function has not had the time to adapt to the previous change before the next change takes place. Therefore the role of HR in Region Skåne is perceived as ambiguous, considering that it causes problems for the people in the HR function to make priorities and know what is required from them in their daily work.

7.6 Panic Organization

One of the key themes that we found while coding our empirical material was the indication of a somewhat panic-like situation at Region Skåne. The lack of nurses and specialised doctors permeates the entire organization in everything they do, both in terms of processes and strategies. This puts the HR function in a rather extreme position, since it has to adapt to the shortages in virtually everything it does. Furthermore, it also causes difficulties for the HR function to manage its daily work.

It is extremely hard. It is very hierarchical. And especially, since it is such a lack of specific competencies, it is very hard to recruit. Those groups of professions are very hard to work with. It also happens that we recruit the wrong person for the job, unfortunately. And that is not good; you lower the requirements in some way. That might be both consciously and unconsciously, if we would have a larger selection base maybe that person would not have gotten the job. But we have to choose and sometimes recruitments take the wrong turn, because we need more staff (R5).

This tells us that the HR function might even be aware of the fact that this person is not suitable for this position, but that it has to recruit him or her, because there is nobody else. There is also despondency in how to make people apply for a job at Region Skåne.

Another big problem is the competition. The competition causes a limitless behaviour, and one always has the free will to quit an employment to start working for a competitor. And that creates a huge gap of staff in some places. There is a desperation that causes violations against the salary policies. /.../ The psychiatry department in Skåne have vacancies for 43 nurses this summer, and it is possible to apply at our webpage. And then we get 3 applications, and it is most often applicants that aren't really interested in actually getting the job (R10).

It is not only the national competition that causes panic reactions at Region Skåne. Many Swedish nursing and doctor students are studying in the Baltic countries, since admission to the programmes there is more lenient than in Sweden. Many students stay there when they have graduated and do not move back to Sweden. The attractiveness of the Norwegian labour market is also causing problems for Swedish healthcare. The salaries in Norway are significantly better for nurses than they are in Sweden. The emergency solution to this is at the moment to use staffing companies. This is both expensive for the organization simultaneously as it creates an incoherent environment to work in, which does not attract newly graduated nurses or doctors.

When there is a lack of a certain profession, it puts the entire organization in a stressful position. How should one make the wheel spin, if there are vacancies in half of the nurse's positions? Every shift becomes a war, and I can only imagine that one gets very exhausted in a short period of time. Meanwhile all the other tasks should be managed properly, it is hard (R10).

This quote provides us with the interpretation that Region Skåne seems to have created a vicious circle for itself, and that the predominating situation can be compared to a panic organization.

8. DISCUSSION

In this section, we will present a summary of the discussed analysis, to create an overall understanding of how the HR professionals of Region Skåne interpreted the organizational change. This part will include a review of what has been studied, what the theoretical assumptions can contribute to in order to find an understanding of the phenomenon, and what has been seen and interpreted in the basis of the practical approach of the interviews.

What we have studied

Given our research question, we intend to contribute with knowledge concerning how organizational change is interpreted by the HR function within a professional bureaucracy, and also study how this is articulated in terms of work tasks and organizational development. This has been conducted through semi-structured interviews with 10 respondents who are operating within the HR area at Region Skåne. This has provided us with information that pointed out something completely different than what our theoretical starting point prepared us for.

What our theories prepared us to find

If one should proceed from our theoretical base, we thought that the case of Region Skåne would look different. The organizational change project of dividing Region Skåne into four administrative bodies could be seen as an episodic change. What we wanted to investigate was how the HR professionals perceived this change project and how this was articulated in terms of their views on work tasks. According to Barney (1991) an organization's most important resources are the ones that can be identified as rare, valuable, inimitable and impossible to substitute. The resource-based view could therefore argue that the human capital in a healthcare organization could be identified as this type of resource. Therefore we assumed that significant emphasis would be put into the HR function in Region Skåne, as this is the primary function that provides the organization with this resource. To reinforce the argument, Ulrich (1997), Legge (1978), Guest & King (2004) and Boxall & Purcell (2000) highlight that the HR function can be expected to have a more prominent role in contemporary organizations, as they act to facilitate continuous change processes. On the other hand though, Legge (1978) is also highlighting the fact that HR is often not taken seriously

in planning and that the recipe on succeeding in HR is ambiguous. This matter puts HR in a position that is seen as inefficient.

What we found

When we started our research we soon came to realise that there was a stark deviation between the theoretical assumptions and the material. Five aspects were identified as crucial, and have dominated the analysis: *undervalued function*, *separation from the operational core*, *ambiguous work tasks*, *supplier of competencies* and *panic organization*. It has been obvious that the people within HR related work in Region Skåne, has been markedly affected by the reorganization to Sus, Sund, Kryh and Primärvården. It can also be concluded that the four aspects named above were recurring themes and can be seen as central to create an understanding of how the HR professionals has perceived this organizational change.

During the study, it became obvious that organizational changes were a part of the everyday work at Region Skåne. The change to the concept of Sus, Sund, Kryh and Primärvården can be seen as one major episodic change, but the everyday climate of Region Skåne rather seemed to be characterized by continuous changes.

Therefore, people within the HR function were not that confronted by this specific organizational change, and instead found themselves operating in a panic-oriented environment, shaped by desperation rather than by planned change. It was a distinct interpretation that HR was supposed to support the organization with relevant knowledge and expertise about how to manage the future need of an increased and competent workforce. As mentioned before, the most time-consuming activity was to rebuild a stable function after what was interpreted as a misleading change, that resulted in ambiguity and lack of trust among the employees. That is an obvious example of the HR work as we have identified as *ambiguous work* and *supplier of competencies*.

Instead of being given the power to solve the problems of reproducing and cultivating competence for the organization, the HR professionals interpreted the situation as if they had to stand back and act as support to the managers, in a hierarchical order. This allows us to see HR, in Region Skåne, as a function that still remains in its traditional

position as a secondary support function, dealing primarily with auxiliary tasks rather than a strategic vanguard. This assumption is based on the ignorance of HR's overall capacity to contribute to organizational development, especially at a managerial level. On these dimensions, it was most clearly articulated that the HR work showed signs of being an *undervalued function, separated from the operational core*.

It was also visible that people linked to HR felt misled in an organization characterized by disorder and poor communication of roles. To many respondents, the period after the reorganization was marked by role seeking, due to lack of leadership, a clear goal and vision for the role of HR in Region Skåne. The role of HR specialists and HR generalists was often articulated as diffuse and difficult to explain in its practical meaning. This scenario exemplifies the theme of a *panic organization*, identified as a work environment where people are confused and unaware of what their future will look like. Panic also refers to the role of meeting and confronting panic situations.

Therefore we can state

According to Barney (1991), a resource-based view makes it possible to analyse the organizational capacity in relation to other actors within the same industry and is a competitive advantage by being a unique actor through their human capital. There is no doubt about that Region Skåne's most important resources are the human capital, meanwhile it is also these resources that they lack the most, or at least where they experience recurrent shortages. Barney (1991) suggested that an organization should identify resources that are rare, valuable, inimitable and non substitutional to gain competitive advantage. Region Skåne seems not to be able to work actively with this because of the predominating constraints. The shortage of resources has forced Region Skåne to hire staff that do not fulfill Barney's (1991) requirements, but rather the basic requirements to make the organization function at all. It can therefore be interpreted that the resource-based view cannot be applied to the case of Region Skåne in the way that Barney (1991) intended.

We can also state that HR professionals within Region Skåne are interpreted to not have found a place in what Ulrich (1997) predicted would become a new mandate for the HR function. Ulrich (1997) thought that the HR function would be a crucial team

player and a contributing factor in strategic progresses. The role of the HR function within Region Skåne can still be interpreted as a constricted function, taken much for granted. This may be due to the fact that this HR function is operating within a professional bureaucracy, which affects the HR function to a considerable degree.

The professional bureaucracy in Region Skåne is characterized by the dominance of human expertise. The human expertise is identified as the physicians and nurses and what we can interpret in our empirical material, is that the HR function is rather given a secondary role in relation to the health professionals. Mintzberg (1993) argued that the standardization of skills is the major coordinating mechanism within a professional bureaucracy. In the case of Region Skåne it is the interpretation of the interviewed HR professionals that the standardization of skills is possessed by the employees within the operational core. This raises the question of how much the HR professionals can influence the organization at all. If skills are standardized within the operational core according to the predominating educational requirements of a hospital, do HR technologies or actions even influence the organization in any way? As long as the proper standardization of skills is provided the organization should be functioning in a proper way, if one should follow what Mintzberg (1993) is suggesting. The HR function of a professional bureaucracy could be identified as both a part of the technostructure and the supporting staff, depending on what work tasks it has. As a part of the technostructure the HR professionals would provide the organization with maintaining activities, such as organizational training. The HR function as a part of the support staff is instead providing the operational core with basic supporting activities. When interpreting what the interviewed HR professionals is telling us during our interviews, it seems as if the HR professionals find themselves to be the supporting staff part of Region Skåne. Further, it is interpreted that the HR professionals apprehend the organizational change as a factor that placed the HR function within the supporting staff rather than a part of the technostructure. Mintzberg (1993) stressed that the influence of the technostructure within a professional bureaucracy is minimal, since the complex work of the operating professionals cannot easily be formalized. The supporting staff though, carries a much greater responsibility since their work tasks consist of supporting the high-priced professionals.

Our interpretation of the HR professional's stories of their situation, is that the organizational change of Region Skåne situated the HR function in the supporting staff. Though, if Region Skåne is categorized as a professional bureaucracy, can the HR function ever become something else than the support staff? The technostructure within a professional bureaucracy is, according to Mintzberg (1993), a very small part of the structure. The support staff on the other hand, is significantly larger. It might therefore be difficult for the HR function to find a place in the technostructure at all, since it does not have a crucial role in this kind of organizational structure. What can be interpreted from our empirical material is that the HR professionals seem to view the constant organizational changes as pushing the HR function towards being a part of the support staff, rather than the technostructure. This can be interpreted through their statements of feeling like an undervalued function, being separated from the operational core and finding their work tasks ambiguous.

Our assumptions is basically in line with what Legge (1978) argued would be a start for HR to become a visible and more important actor in organizations. First, it must handle the role of being responsible for the human capital in a way that includes them in strategic decisions. Second, HR must also be an important player on managerial level to elevate its status. If this process will success, the HR function could be allowed to make its own decisions and not be dependent on access from people higher up in the hierarchy. As we have interpreted the situation in Region Skåne, this development of the HR function is far away from being completed. The HR function in Region Skåne is depending on the power of the executives in the professional bureaucracy. Seeing it from this point of view, the HR function in Region Skåne can be compared to both Ulrich (1997), Legge (1978) and Guest and Kings (2004) argument, which implies that the HR function is undervalued and detached from the operational core of the organization. With these author's arguments in mind, this finding cannot be seen as surprising.

We are aware of the fact that this phenomenon might not be applicable to the HR function in other organizations, since this type of professional bureaucracy like a healthcare organization, has specific characteristics that are hard to compare with other organizations. Therefore our conclusions and results are most likely not applicable in any other study.

And the answer to our question is

Based on the discussion above we would argue that the answer to our research question is: in our case, the organizational change can first of all not be seen as one episodic change, but rather as many continuous changes. These changes have, according to the interviewed HR professionals, affected the HR function both in terms of work tasks and organizational development. Firstly, the HR professionals believe that the work tasks of HR have become more demanding, mostly due to the predominant situation with recurrent profound shortages of competencies. Secondly, the HR professionals do also perceive that the work tasks have also become ambiguous, since the HR function is still trying make sense of its own role in this panic organization. In addition, the HR function continues to be separated from the operational core, which makes it hard for the HR professionals to develop a coherent understanding of the whole organisation they are working within.

When it comes to the HR function's contribution to the organizational development, it is – based on our interviews – very limited, because of the professional bureaucracy they are operating within. HR can therefore be interpreted to be an undervalued function, since it is marginalized by the healthcare professions within Region Skåne, which apprehends it as a support function; in addition, its role in the formulation and implementation of organizational change projects is also quite limited and it primarily continues to serve the traditional role of staffing and reporting, which several SHRM authors (Ulrich, 1997; Legge, 1978; Guest & King, 2004; Boxall & Purcell, 2000) already have predicted in their reasonings.

9. CONCLUSION

The HR professionals are experiencing distinct difficulties with making sense of their situation in a constantly changing organization like Region Skåne. The fact that Region Skåne is undergoing continuous changes makes it hard for the HR professionals to find their role and to quickly adapt to it, before it is another change to adjust to. The professional bureaucracy is constraining the HR function to make sense of their role in Region Skåne. The professionalism of the managers, physicians and nurses is pushing away the HR function and makes it hard for them to develop into a part of the technostructure or anything else that would put the HR function in a more strategic role, but remains in what Mintzberg (1993) identifies as the support staff.

What we could not anticipate was the situation with the extreme number of vacancies in Region Skåne. This has influenced the HR function's situation in the organization as well. Our interpretation is that if this situation had not existed, the role of HR would probably have been different. The deficiency does not only affect the HR function, but the organization in whole.

As the organization we have studied currently does not have the opportunity to compete for human capital with factors as high salary, given political and financial constraints, it must attract their employees and especially newly graduated nurses with other factors than money. Their resource-based strength is rather a capacity to offer a good work environment and the possibility to develop individual competences and skills. This fact might also be the most tangible and important challenge for the Region Skåne's future.

It is obvious according to the HR professionals that the cultivation of human resources will be crucial to the survival of the organization. But due to the extreme shortages of specific professions, the resource-based view could be applied in a way that enlightens the importance of access to resources, rather than the importance of them being inimitable, rare, valuable and impossible to substitute. If this deficit-situation would not have been predominant, we believe that our research would have had a different outcome, where the resource-based view might have been applicable and Region Skåne could focus more on finding resources that gives them sustained

competitive advantage. In the case of Region Skåne it is a question of survival, rather than the latter.

Our research has been distinctly affected by the shortage of competencies. All of the answers that we have received from our interviewees have we interpreted as coloured by this situation, and therefore it has been problematic for us to study our original research question. Region Skåne are situated in a position that is critical, and most resources are required to figure out how to solve this shortage. We believe that the results of our study would have turned out in a different way if this problem had not existed. Based on the interviewed HR professionals stories, we can interpret that the HR function in Region Skåne is still seen as undervalued and detached from the operational core. This might be because of the organizational structure, which is identified as a professional bureaucracy, where Mintzberg (1993) argues that the support staff has a greater role than the technostructure. The HR professionals do also seem to believe that the organizational changes has facilitated the “push” towards being support staff rather than a part of the analytic technostructure. This because of the HR professionals interpretations of the organizational changes as something that have pushed the entire HR function further away from the operational core. What we do not know, is if this is what Region Skåne really looks like. Our study is based only on the interpretations of the HR professionals, and we can therefore not assume that this is the reality. Though, according to the HR professionals the “old mandate” of HR still remains in Region Skåne.

10. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Due to the restricted length of this research, we have had to make certain limitations about what to include, and what not to include. Therefore we also find it important to highlight what could be further investigated in future research.

Firstly, we believe that this study would be interesting to conduct on a healthcare organization in another country than Sweden. Mainly, Norway could bring some other interesting aspects on this research area. This because, almost all of our respondents told us that the newly graduated nurses in Sweden seek employment in Norway, due to better salaries and working conditions. As we mentioned above, we argue that our study would most likely have a different outcome if it would not had been for the shortage of competencies in Region Skåne. Therefore we believe that it would be rewarding to conduct further research in Norway and the operations of the HR function there.

Secondly, another interesting aspect could be to research this issue in another type of organization. Since our results were clearly affected by the relation between the HR function and a well-organized profession within Region Skåne, we believe that an organization that is not identified as a professional bureaucracy most likely would provide a different result than our study.

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12. APPENDIX

12.1 Interview schedule

1. Tell us about yourself, what is your role within HR and how did you get here?
2. For how long have you been working with HR?
3. What does your day-to-day work look like?
4. What have been the greatest challenges due to the organizational change?
5. Do you experience that the competition on the market has been stronger? How do you work with this?
6. What processes in your work do you recognize as important for contributing to a positive development of Region Skåne?
7. What has the Sus/Sund/Kryh/Primärvården divination meant to the HR function? Pros and cons?
8. If you have new working routines, how have these been implemented? And what is the result of them?
9. How much knowledge do you have within medicine and healthcare?
10. What is Region Skåne's main competitive advantage?
11. How do you differ from other healthcare institutions in HR work?
12. How do you work to identify the correct competencies when recruiting?
13. How do you work with developing these? Teaching? Workshops? Teamwork?
14. How do you experience the HR work within Region Skåne today, compared to before the change?
15. Do you need to work more proactively than before?
16. Are you focusing mostly on recruiting or development of existing competence? Have these methods changed?
17. How does your work affect the organization as a whole?
18. What challenges and future needs does HR stand in front of today?
19. Is there anything we have missed, or is there something you would like to add?

12.2 Respondents

Respondent 1

HR-specialist within children's psychiatry

Friday 27/3 14:30 Malmö, Sweden

Respondent 2

HR-administrator at GSF (Common Service Function)

Friday 27/3 15:30 Malmö, Sweden

Respondent 3

HR-specialist at the supply of competencies

Wednesday 1/4 10:00 Lund, Sweden

Respondent 4

HR-controller

Tuesday 7/4 10:30 Malmö, Sweden

Respondent 5

HR-specialist within medicine

Tuesday 7/4 14:00 Helsingborg, Sweden

Respondent 6

HR-specialist within psychiatry

Tuesday 7/4 15:30 Helsingborg, Sweden

Respondent 7

HR-specialist within Primärvården

Wednesday 8/4 14:00 Lund, Sweden

Respondent 8

HR-specialist within thorax & neurosurgery

Wednesday 8/4 15:00 Lund, Sweden

Respondent 9

HR-specialist within psychiatry

Monday 13/4 13:30 Lund, Sweden

Respondent 10

HR-specialist within psychiatry

Wednesday 22/4 10:00 Lund, Sweden

12.3 E-mail to respondents

Hi,

We are conducting a study on Master's level at Lund University, and we are contacting you with hopes that you would like to participate to help us with reflections considering your daily HR-work, and how it has changed due to organizational changes. We intend to conduct our study at an organization where the human capital is a main part of the competitive advantage.

Primarily we are looking for a person that is working with/touch upon HR-processes on a daily basis, and therefore can provide valuable information and perspectives on this matter. We would be grateful if you could help us with an interview during March or the beginning of April. We are flexible in terms of time and place, and therefore provide you with the opportunity to choose a suitable date. Approximately we need half an hour of your time. All aspects and perspectives are gratefully received, and will contribute to valuable empirical data in our study.

Thank you for you time.

Best Regards,

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MSc in Managing People, Knowledge & Change

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