



From administrative expert to strategic partner

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Abstract

Purpose – Replicating Ulrich’s model, this study aims to investigate empirically the HR role performance of a case organisation. Despite the popularity of the model, both theoretical discussions and empirical research that build on the model are scarce.

Design/methodology/approach – The present study investigates HR professionals’ and line managers’ perceptions of HR roles in a regional full-service bank based on a combination of interviews and a questionnaire survey distributed to the HR executive and line managers.

Findings – The case study evidence reported suggests that not only are all four roles strongly represented, they are also equally shared between the HR executive and line managers.

Research limitations/implications – This study is limited by the usual problem of a wider application of findings provided by a small-scale single-case study. The generalisability of the findings would be improved by conducting more comparable cases within the field.

Originality/value – HR professionals are struggling to make top executives and colleagues recognise the value of their operations and initiatives. It is therefore increasingly important to demonstrate the value of the HR function, and a first step towards demonstrating its value is to define and clarify the roles and role expectations of the HR function in the organisation. This study demonstrates how an organisation can get a clear picture of the roles that are performed or perceived as performed by the HR function by using Ulrich’s relatively simple model, and thereby create a good basis for further discussion and clarification.

Keywords Human resource management, Line managers, Case studies, Job evaluation, Change management

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Combined with a decreasing ratio of HR professionals to employees, HR professionals are subject to vast changes in their need to demonstrate the added value of the HR function to the organisation. HR professionals meet high expectations in the delivery of HRM services, and in many organisations the HR function has been engaged in nothing less than reinventing itself. In line with HR activities being automated, streamlined, and re-engineered (Peretti, 1998; Sahdev *et al.*, 1999), HR professionals have come to experience greater variation in their work assignments, and have fewer routine activities. This development is combined with line managers having both a growing role and growing responsibilities concerning HRM issues.

Consequently, HR professionals are no longer the “people specialists” in a well-defined area that delivers traditional HR services. HR professionals must be competent in a number of different areas including strategic decision-making processes. One of the more prominent pieces of research arguing this is that of Ulrich *et al.* (1995), who examined the need for twenty-first century oriented HRM and offered



a useful conceptualization of the way that the HR function itself is developing. In a US study, Ulrich (1997) argues that the changing business environment and a growing focus on strategic management have led to HR functions gaining status and influence within organisations. Based on a survey of 256 mid- to upper-level HR practitioners, Conner and Ulrich (1996) identify four HRM roles:

- (1) strategic HR/IR planning and policy;
- (2) management of change;
- (3) management of employee welfare; and
- (4) development and provision of administrative and functional services.

This typology of the HR function has had considerable impact, both within the practitioners' and the academics' communities of HRM.

Building on Ulrich's HRM roles, this paper has two objectives. First, the paper discusses Ulrich's model. Some observers deplore the paradox that, despite its widely recognised importance, the HR function is often disconnected from the rest of the organisation (Tracey and Nathan, 2002). Second, the paper addresses the issue of the different HR roles that HR professionals must be able to perform, based on an empirical analysis conducted in a Danish bank. Despite the popularity of the model, research building on the model is scarce, though with a few exceptions (e.g. Renwick, 2002; Watson *et al.*, 2006; Harris, 2007), and there is hardly any empirical research on differences between HRM perception across organisational levels. The present study compares the perceptions of HR professionals and line managers of the HR roles performed in the bank. The findings show that not only are all four roles strongly represented, they are also equally shared between the sampled HR executive and line managers.

2. Theoretical foundation

Revolutionary change, increasing volatility, and the blurring of boundaries in the business world has resulted in an emphasis on the alignment of all functional activities of the organisation toward the achievement of strategic objectives. One consequence of this trend is that many (e.g. Schuler, 1992; Martell and Carroll, 1995) have called for a new strategic role for the HR function. Yet, little data exists with regard to the effectiveness of the HR function's involvement in the strategic management of the organisation. Of the few empirical studies in the field, one (Bennett *et al.*, 1995) actually found a negative outcome of HR's involvement in strategy, mainly due to HR executives being thrown into a strategic role for which they might not have the necessary skills.

Ulrich (1997) proposed a framework comprised of four HR roles, which together enable the HR function to be a business partner in the organisation. Through this focus, the HR function is value adding due to its potential for creating organisational competitiveness (Ulrich, 1997). The adding of value by the HR function is based on the creation of competitive advantage, which enables the organisation to compete over time. Consequently, through building the internal competences required to apply the appropriate practices, the HR function ensures creation of essential organisational capabilities (Ulrich *et al.*, 1995). By ensuring that the organisation "changes, learns, moves, and acts faster", the HR function contributes to the bottom line (Ulrich, 1997, p. 16). Conner and Ulrich (1996) offer a relatively simple and operational model of the

multiple HR role frameworks that are needed in developing organisational effectiveness. They prescribe that HR practitioners engage in a set of proactive roles defined along two axes:

- (1) strategy versus operations; and
- (2) process versus people.

The four key roles that emerge are:

- (1) partner in strategy execution;
- (2) administrative expert;
- (3) employee champion; and
- (4) change agent.

For the HR function to create competitive advantage, all four roles should be taken on by the HR function.

- (1) *Partner in strategy execution* – The positioning of the HR function as a key organisational player and a “business partner” is increasingly stressed as important by practitioners and academics. The role as strategic partner is organised around a strategic focus on processes, and is focused on designing the organisation to realise its purpose and direction and to achieve its goals. Consequently, this role is based on the outcome that the organisation should be able to execute its intended corporate strategies through the HR function cooperating with both senior and line managers in focusing on how to ensure the overall needs of the organisation (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005b). Implicitly, Ulrich (1997, 1998) argues that the main purpose of the HR function is to deliver the “best fit” in tailoring HR strategies to organisational goals, rather than adopting a “best practice”.
- (2) *Administrative expert* – The second role, the administrative expert or functional expert, as Ulrich and Brockbank (2005a, b) call the role in their reviewed model from 2005, is constructed around the task of ensuring that traditional HR processes such as staffing and training are carried out efficiently and effectively. The underlying notion of this role is that in considering employees as costs, a competitive advantage can be attained by reducing these costs and hence increasing efficiency (Ulrich, 1987). The HR function should be value adding in all its services and it should explicitly demonstrate its value to the organisation. Some HR practices are delivered through administrative efficiency (i.e. technology), and others through policies, menus, and interventions, expanding the “functional expert” role.
- (3) *Employee champion* – In shifting the operational focus from processes to employees, the third role, the employee champion, emphasises the needs of employees with the purpose of increasing commitment and capabilities (Ulrich, 1997). This role is related to employee well-being and to the psychological contract between company and employee. In his most recent modification of the model, Ulrich splits the employee-champion role into the “employee advocate” and “human resource developer”, placing the latter as a more future-focused process role (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005a, b). The employee champion role is

closely related to the more traditional elements of personnel management (i.e. training, development, and reward structures). What is different, however, is that commitment is a requirement due to lack of employees, and retention is therefore an important element in an organisation's HR strategy. In addition, competences are central to the organisation in the sense that they represent the uniqueness of the organisation. Retention and competencies are based on the presence of the right combination of human resources and on the creation of the right premises for applying these resources.

- (4) *Change agent* – The fourth HR role is based on a strategic focus on people and aims at managing the transformation and change faced by the organisation. The role of change agent consequently directs focus to the necessity of ensuring that the organisation has the capacity to handle change by assisting employees in their attempts to embrace and implement change (Ulrich, 1997). Change agents are responsible for the delivery of organisational transformation and culture change, and this role hereby creates value by ensuring that the whole organisation is able to change according to the conditions by building the capability to change into its core competences. Functioning as a change agent is relatively new to many HR professionals. The idea is that HR should function as a kind of promoter for change and as such should initiate change and make sure that the change capacity is high.

The sum of the four roles equals leadership, but being an HR leader also has implications for leading the HR function, collaborating with other functions, ensuring corporate governance, and monitoring the HR community. Sensibly, Ulrich argues that the roles of administrative expert and employee champion are still important and will still need to be handled effectively and with credibility. In future though, there will be an increased demand on the HR function to focus on the change agent and the strategic partner. Interestingly, these roles have different implications for the relationship with the line manager. Thus, those HR professionals who – at any particular point in time – act as administrative expert are, if performing their jobs successfully, likely to be viewed as a valuable source of advice. They would have knowledge on, for example, “how to get it done” as such information is obtained from the line managers. The HR professionals who are less successful in performing their multiple and often conflicting roles may be seen as bureaucrats, insisting that the systems drive the organisational behaviour. Table I summarises the four HR roles.

2.1 Problems with the model

Despite being one of the most cited and used models among HR academics and practitioners (Antila, 2006), the model is problematic. Ulrich and Beatty (2001) touch upon the problem with the model themselves by introducing the concept of HR players instead of partners. In their most recent modification of the HR roles model, six roles (i.e. coach, architect, builder, facilitator, leader, and conscience) are introduced. They argue that only the HR players who master these roles simultaneously truly add value and contribute to an organisation's ability to compete in a significantly expanded playing field. It is unclear from the article by Ulrich and Beatty (2001) how this framework is different from Ulrich's first model. The main question here is whether these considerations are already included in the strategic decision-making process,

Table I.
Ulrich's definition of four
HR roles

Role	Metaphor	Competency ^a	Activities	Results
Strategic human resource management	Strategic partner	Organisational awareness Problem solving Customer service Stress tolerance Oral communication	To implement strategies and build a value created organisation	To align human resource management practices with the organisation's choice of strategy and with the environment within which the organisation operates: organisational diagnosis
Management of human resource processes	Administrative expert	Attention to detail Oral communication Customer service Information management Legal, government, and jurisprudence Technical competence	To implement an efficient and effective infrastructure (i.e. getting things done better, faster, and cheaper)	To create congruence among the various human resource management practices and techniques: reengineering organisational processes
Employee advocate (EA) and human resource (HR) developer	Employee champion	Interpersonal skills Oral communication Teaching Flexibility Learning	To increase employee commitment and competencies	Employees are increasingly critical of the success of organisations. EA focuses on today's employee; HR developer focuses on how employees prepare for the future. Listening and responding to employees; providing resources to employees
Change management	Change agent	Reasoning Influencing/negotiating Integrity/honesty Creative thinking Stress tolerance Oral communication	To innovate in order to improve the competitive position of the organisation	To catalyse, change and manage the change capacity: managing transformation and change

Note: ^aCompetencies are not limited to the particular role. In reality, competencies will be fluid among the various human resource roles

perhaps unconsciously and unsystematically. It could be argued that managers of small and medium-sized organisations already have a more holistic perspective due to a need to be generalists. On the contrary, it could be argued that this is not the case since small and medium-sized organisations are not concerned with HRM issues, as the managers have neither time nor interest in conducting business in this particular area.

The premise of the HR role framework is that the HR function must perform all four (or six) roles in order to create an HR function that is a value-adding business partner for the organisation (Ulrich, 1997). While the rhetoric behind the framework emphasises the interplay between the roles, the tasks assigned to the different roles result in a ranking of influence. In a survey of how the roles and responsibilities of the HR function evolve over time, Caldwell (2003) compares Ulrich's (1997) theoretical framework to the empirical research results and finds that with changes in focus, HR is facing increased ambiguity regarding the content of this focus. Consequently, by suggesting a model where four (or six) roles must be performed simultaneously, tensions are created between the expected, perceived, and enacted roles simply because of inherent paradoxes. Role conflict arises due to opposing interests between roles. For example, the role of the strategic partner conflicts with the role of employee champion. The former requires the HR function to cooperate with top management, with the risk of alienating employees because long-term strategic planning and employee needs might not cohere.

Furthermore, Ulrich and Brockbank (2005b) do not explicitly place the role as strategic partner at the strategic level in the organisational hierarchy, but only mention the operative strategic level. Despite the model being unclear as to whether the role should be performed also concerning functional strategies, it makes good sense that the HR function should participate at the highest strategic level in the organisation. However, in order to participate at the highest strategic level, the HR professionals must adapt a strong strategic mindset and terminology. For many HR professionals this means that new competences must be acquired, as the HR professionals must constructively participate in the overall corporate strategies at a very early stage in the strategy process. Only by involving the HR professionals in the overall corporate strategies at an early stage will it be possible to translate and implement the strategies efficiently. However, it should be noted that HR managers' ability to contribute strategically is contingent on expertise in operational matters (Truss *et al.*, 2002) and their capacity to operate as HR generalists rather than HR specialists (Schuler and Jackson, 2005). Moreover, a growing number of analyses challenge the underlying assumption that "what is good for the organization is good for the worker" and call for a need to stress people centred day-to-day operational focus (Legge, 1999; Guest, 2002).

It could be argued, though, that Ulrich and Brockbank (2005b) take a too simplistic view upon determining what defines HR strategy. In their model, strategic HR is the shaping and delivery of the individual strategies such as for example delivery of fair and equitable reward, setting up policies, and streamlining structure. But, as argued by Boxall and Purcell (2003) strategic HR is concerned with explaining how HR influences organisational performance, which is not the same as delivering individual strategic plans for rewards and policies in alliance with an already decided strategic direction. Operating truly strategically implies that the HR strategy and the business strategy are mutually informative. It is therefore too simplistic to view strategic HR as something that stems from the business strategy in the way that it is presented by Ulrich and Brockbank.

In 2005, the model was again revisited, reframing the roles and proposing an additional role as HR leader (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005a, b). This role involved leading the HR function, collaborating with other functions, setting and enhancing the standards for strategic thinking, and ensuring corporate governance. As such, Ulrich and Brockbank's changing thinking might suggest that maybe there is no single definitive model.

Another problem with the role as strategic partner is the lack of inclusion of the organisational size, and hereby the number of strategic levels, of the organisation into the model. Whether the organisation is a large diversified organisation or a small and locally operating organisation, this will have implications for the involvement of the HR function. Likewise, the organisational size is also relevant for the translation and implementation assignments that the HR function must perform. This problem might be particularly relevant concerning Danish organisations of which the majority are small or medium sized. In 2001, Denmark had 297,706 workplaces. If workplaces with only one employee are disregarded, there were 176,009 workplaces of which 3,707 (i.e. 2.1 per cent) had more than 100 employees. 166,710 organisations – corresponding to 94.7 per cent – had between two and 50 employees (Statistical Yearbook of Denmark, 2001). These organisations have only one or perhaps a couple of managers. Often all responsibilities regarding HRM are placed with one of these managers as yet another area of responsibility. This means that strategic HRM questions regarding for example make-or-buy questions, collective learning, or competence development might be posed together with technological innovation questions by one and the same person.

All in all, the HR profession has always had the special responsibility of balancing the needs of the organisation with the needs and ambitions of the employees and the work values and standards society expects to be upheld, and despite the questionable points mentioned above, the model is still useful. First, the model has a strong appeal to HR professionals, as they often distinguish between people and processes in their everyday work. Second, the time perspective is relevant as more focus is being put on strategic and long-term HR activities. Third, the model demonstrates four relatively simple roles for HR managers to perform. These roles demonstrate a logic, which is relevant to HR management, and to the developmental progressions in the field.

3. Empirical evidence

This study is based on a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research. The HR role performance was measured using Ulrich's (1997) 40-item HRM Role Questionnaire. This study replicates Ulrich's original model, as the key value of his model is not seen to lie in the outlining of new structures but in his analysis of HR roles. Moreover, the case organisation used the original model as inspiration for its most recent launch of a new management and customer-oriented concept in regard to the private customer segment. The following organisational restructuring has led to changes in the HR function within the case organisation inspired by the original model.

Besides semi-structured in-depth interviews with the HR executive and the line managers, an electronic questionnaire survey was launched to the HR executive and all line managers of the private customer segment within the district of Funen. In the questionnaire survey, respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the HR roles on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from one "extremely ineffective" to five "extremely effective". Ten items focusing on strategy and policy were used to measure the role as

strategic partner. Ten items focusing on transformation and change were used to measure the role as change agent. Ten items focusing on management of employee welfare were used to measure the role of employee champion, and finally ten items focusing on the effectiveness of the corporate HR function were used to measure the role of administrative expert. From the pool of 28 respondents, 27 usable questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 96.0 per cent response rate. Table II shows the demographic data of the respondents.

The case organisation is a regional full-service bank that provides a full range of products, including private banking, to its retail and SME customers. Traditionally, retail banking is concerned with cost reduction in a saturated market where the way to compete is through automation and self-service via ATMs and the internet. The case organisation, however, is known for its differentiation based on reputation and customisation of service. As a regional bank, it benefits from close customer relationships.

The bank is firmly based in the Funen district and benefits from a strong franchise and high market shares in its local market and surrounding islands area. It also has a strategy of rapid growth in the Triangle area, as reflected in the opening of branches in three cities in Jutland in recent years. The bank has a number of strategic partnerships, which are seen as crucial for maintaining a dynamic bank with the development potential needed to compete with large Danish financial institutions. These partnerships provide economies of scale in terms of both income and expenditure. The bank is classified as a “MidCap” company on the Copenhagen Stock Exchange. It has more than 26,000 shareholders, most of whom are also customers, giving the bank strong roots in its market territory.

The bank has approximately 600 employees who are strongly committed to their job (i.e. a relatively high degree of seniority). Strong and visible values replace strict rules and formalities in the bank, and the everyday behaviour is regulated through values and convictions. The bank emphasises the creation of a common vision and common basic values, which promote dynamic organisational structures. The employees are not seen as anonymous, standardised labour input, but as engaged and responsible enthusiasts with a high level of personal commitment.

Demographic variable	Category	<i>n</i>	Percentage of respondents
Hierarchical position	HR executive (male)	1	3.7
	Line managers	26	96.3
Gender	Male	19	70.0
	Female	8	30.0
Years of tenure with the company	0-4 years	1	3.7
	5-9 years	10	37.0
	10-14 years	8	29.6
	15-19 years	4	14.8
	20 + years	4	14.8
Number of staff that the line manager is responsible for	0-10 employees	12	46.2
	11-25 employees	13	50.0
	26 + employees	1	3.8

Table II.
Respondent characteristics

Table III shows the results of the present study. Using Ulrich's means of measurement (Ulrich, 1997), all four roles seem to be carried out relatively efficiently. Ten items for each role are to be answered using a five-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the more effectively the role is performed. For a fully effective role performance, the score in the present study would be 50.00, whereas the score for non-performance of a role would be 5.00. The lowest score in the present study is 34.50 (i.e. male line managers' score on the administrative expert role) and the highest score is 45.00 (i.e. the HR executive's score on the employee champion role). From the analysis it is clear that the HR function is perceived as being efficient in its strategic contribution, its administrative function, its role as employee champion, and its role as change agent – both according to the perceptions of the HR executive and the line managers. From the point of view of the HR executive, the role as employee champion is strongest, whereas the role of strategic partner is weakest. Seen from the point of view of the line managers, HR has a strong position in regard to performing its role as strategic partner and change agent, whereas the role as administrative expert is less pronounced (see Figure 1). Despite the usual problem of a wider application of findings provided by a small-scale single-case study, this study indicates strong support for the model. In the empirical work of Conner and Ulrich (1996), support was found for only three roles since the strategic partner and change agent roles loaded together as one factor. These

Table III.
Score

	Strategic partner	Administrative expert	Employee champion	Change agent
HR executive (<i>n</i> = 1)	38.00	41.00	45.00	41.00
Line managers	41.23	35.96	39.15	41.65
Difference	- 3.25	5.04	5.85	- 0.65

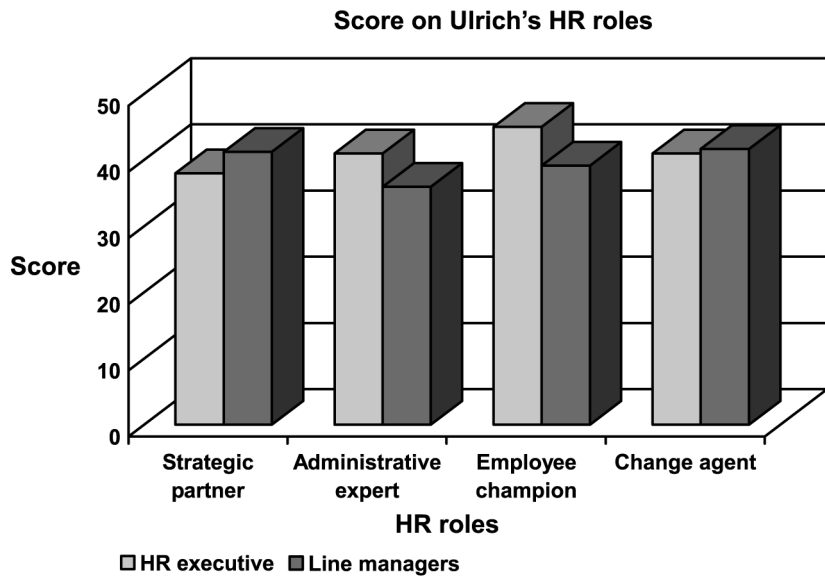


Figure 1.
HR professionals versus
line managers

two roles were also combined in the current study to form the strategic business partner scale, as they both dealt with the strategic role of the people-management function (e.g. strategic HR policy and organisational change) in the commercialization process (Wood and Jones, 1993).

This study, despite its limitations, cannot support findings from other studies (e.g. Peretti, 1998) which demonstrate a tendency for HR professionals to assess the HR function more positively than line managers do. Holbeche (1999) suggests that the line managers are often more short-term oriented, whereas the HR executive in general has a longer timeframe.

4. Analysis

An important punch line in Ulrich's model is that all four roles should at best be carried out in practice. It is not enough that for example the HR function is performing the role as a strategic partner just because there is a growing focus on strategic management. In addition, it is not enough that the HR function focuses on the more traditional people-operations of the administrative expert as most organisations historically have done. The gap between HR and the rest of the organisation seems to exist mainly for two reasons. First, many organisations still fail to include HR managers in strategic decision-making processes and therefore reduce the role of the HR manager to mere implementation. Second, HR functions do not always interact productively with line management and are often caught up in administrative routines with little impact on organisational effectiveness. An isolated HR function can easily lose its footing if it does not simultaneously perform all four roles. If the HR function does not contribute to the overall performance it is at risk of being outsourced. If the HR function does not act as both change agent and HR developer it will lose its footing. The role as change agent is a balance between continuity and change, between continuation of a culture and a cultural change depending on the specific context of the specific organisation. On the one hand a strong identity must be created, and on the other hand the organisation cannot allow itself to take root. In regard to personnel development, this is only possible if the strategic platform is in place.

The HR function is often oddly disconnected from the rest of the organisation (Tracey and Nathan, 2002). In the sampled organisation, however, there does not seem to be a gap between HR and the rest of the organisation. In this particular organisation, the HR executive is included in the strategic decision-making processes, and therefore the role of the HR manager is not merely to implement strategic choices, but also to participate in the strategic preparations. Studies within other fields of management (e.g. Brewster and Mayne, 1994; Sinding *et al.*, 1994) support this and have previously found that HR functions in Denmark generally aim at contributing to the formation of corporate strategy by conducting opinion surveys, work environment surveys and participating in industrial negotiations in close cooperation with the executive committee. The findings of this study demonstrating an almost equally efficient contribution in all four HR roles might be a result of a country-specific management culture.

Also, the HR function interacts productively with line management. Based on the findings of this study it seems reasonable to expect that a HR function in practice can operate in the paradox between strategy and operations, and between processes and people. One of the criticisms of the model has often been that Ulrich only gives vague

suggestions as to how to operate in these paradoxes. This study shows that it is possible to both participate in the strategic decision-making processes and conduct management by “walking around”. The study also shows that the HR executive can operate as administrative expert and change agent simultaneously. In practice, however, there seems to be a split in the performance of the roles so that the HR executives set the policies whereas the line managers implement the policies. From the interviews it was clear that the less glamorous task mainly seemed to be performed by the line managers. However, it was clear that with the spread of intelligent information and communication systems, more of the HR roles are likely to be performed by the line managers without the intervention of the HR executive. This development, combined with an increase in HR outsourcing, may result in the role as administrative expert being heavily reduced.

In the sampled organisation, the HR executive perceives himself to be acting mainly as an employee champion. In such a situation, the HR executive may well find himself at odds with the line manager in a kind of “loyal opposition” role between being a strategic partner and an employee champion. In the same way, where the HR function acts mainly as a strategic partner it may well be that the line managers take on an employee champion role. Hereby the line managers may try to protect their staff from the callous interventions of HR, or ensure, for example, training, even when the HR function believes that it is not directly justified.

From the scores in regard to the role of the change agent there seems to be stronger agreement between the HR executive and the line managers. An explanation could be that the change agent needs to be closely involved with his/her line managers if they want to perform that particular role effectively. Particularly in regard to change, collaboration is needed. The objective of the collaboration between the HR executive and the line managers is to develop mutually agreeable HR policies and practices that, because they have been wisely argued and thought through, will have a realistic chance of implementation.

5. Conclusions

In summary, this study offers several contributions to the HR literature and to HR operations. From the study, it is clear that substantial pressure is placed upon the HR function in regard to the number of roles the function is expected to perform. This is in line with the general trend that organisations increasingly are expecting more from the HR function. The HR function is expected to be both participating in strategically building the competitive organisation and to be responsible for implementing “the plan”. In this way, HR has become central to business competitiveness and by combining the multiple roles, the HR function is both strategic and operational, as well as process- and people-oriented.

The model presented in this paper does not outline a new structure for HR, but pays attention to some basic issues that HR must consider, especially in regard to strategy and support of line managers. The study demonstrates that many HR assignments are performed by or in collaboration with the line managers, and as such, it could be argued that the more traditional HR function is changing. It could even be argued that talking about a function in an organisational design framework is less relevant. HR is increasingly integrated with top management and at the same time, it is also distributed between the HR function and the line managers.

Research shows that in many organisations the HR professionals are not key members of the top management team (Znaider and Larsen, 2006). This study, however, is an example of the opposite, and this might explain why all four roles of Ulrich's model are represented. However, more studies on organisations with HR professionals represented in the top management team must be conducted in order to draw further conclusions on this matter. Another explanation could be the HR tradition in Denmark, which is less calculative than, for example, the HR practices in the UK, France, and Spain (Gooderman *et al.*, 1999). The less calculative HR is characterised by a more collaborative HR approach which, as phrased by Gooderman *et al.* (1999), is a "culture of partnership between employer and employee as well as among employees".

5.1 Implications for practice

The HR function must be both strategic and operational, and it must also be both process- and people-oriented. Hereby, the function must be able simultaneously to plan ahead and to implement. In addition, the function must be able to interact productively with line management without being caught up in administrative routines. By participating on more levels, ownership is expected to be high, benefiting both the organisation and the members of the organisation. By encouraging the HR executive and the line managers to take interest in the overall strategic plans, a more committed and more critical management team is obtained, which remains longer with the organisation.

Simultaneously, being both a strategic partner and an employee champion is a fine balance. The role as strategic partner involves being part of the top management team, whereas the fundamental basis of the role as employee champion is confidentiality with line managers and employees. The question is whether it is at all possible to fulfil both roles simultaneously. If possible, in many organisations it would be expedient to split the roles between the different employees in the HR function, although this might be problematic.

Having to fulfil multiple roles, as suggested by Ulrich and Brockbank (2005a, b), means that changes in HR careers are likely to happen (Tamkin *et al.*, 2006). The requirement for HR generalists is most likely to decrease, whereas HR professionals specialised in business strategy who can demonstrate their ability to add value will increase. This might lead to a scenario where HR professionals will not be able to switch organisations and industries as easily. HR professionals must demonstrate how they added values in previous positions, otherwise qualifications and years of experience may count for little.

In general, HR professionals are struggling to make top executives and colleagues recognise the value of their operations and initiatives, although HR functions are gaining increasingly more influence in the business operations. It is much easier as a sales manager to report that a new order has been accepted, which will raise this year's profit with a certain percentage, than it is for a HR executive to demonstrate the value of an increase in employee satisfaction. It is therefore increasingly important to demonstrate and measure the value of the HR function. The first step towards a measurement of the HR function is to define and clarify the roles and role expectations of the HR function in the organisation. By using Ulrich's relatively simple model, organisations get a clear picture of the roles that are performed or perceived as performed by the HR function. A good basis for further discussion and clarification is hereby created.

5.2 Implications for research

The findings of this exploratory study are revealing, though simply indicative as they arise from a small convenience sample of one HR executive and 26 line managers employed in a Danish bank. As such, they reflect their own observations rather than empirically established facts. Further exploration is certainly needed to determine the extent to which these outcomes might reflect the respective job roles of HR managers in different countries and different segments of the industry.

A second step would be to investigate the percentage of work time spent in the various HR roles as defined in the Ulrich model. Comparisons between time spent in the various roles by the HR executive and the line managers respectively would give a much clearer picture of the effectiveness of the roles performed. Other studies show that particularly line managers are adamant about the need to reduce the administrative workload (Raub *et al.*, 2006). By combining Ulrich's measurement with time spent on the various HR roles, a more nuanced picture will appear.

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