

Master Thesis

Strukton Worksphere

First line managers and Human Resource Management

Supporting first line managers in the implementation of HR practices

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Preface

The research has been carried out for the University of Twente in Enschede and for the organization Strukton Worksphere in the Netherlands in order to examine the factors that determine the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of the organization.

The author is grateful to Anna Nehles and Maarten van Riemsdijk of the University of Twente for their advices and assistance during the research. Besides this, the author will thank the HR director of Strukton Worksphere, Hans van der Meulen, for the possibility to carry out the research in the organization and Elly de Jong and Judi Poels of Strukton Worksphere for offering support during the research and for sharing organizational information.

Executive summary

Nowadays, organizations locate operational HR activities with line managers rather than HR specialists, because line managers have direct contact with their employees on the shop floor. This trend is also implemented at Strukton Worksphere. However, previous research showed that the devolvement of operational HR tasks and responsibilities to first line managers at Strukton Worksphere ensures dissatisfactions about the perceived support by first line managers in the implementing of HR practices at the operational level of the organization.

The current research examines the factors which determine the perceived lack of support by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere. The researcher hypothesizes that the structure of the HR function, which is organized rather decentralized in a central HR department, Shared Service Center and local HR consultants, influences the effective communication and the consistency and understandability of the partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities between the HR director, HR consultants, the Shared Service Center and first line managers. This, in turn, leads to different expectations of the HR performances of all HR parties involved. Because the different expectations of the HR performances are not the same, first line managers perceive a lack of support from the HR function.

The data for the research is collected by the use of an interview protocol and a document analysis of function profiles. The results show that the support to first line managers is mainly offered by the HR consultants. The research determines that if the communication between HR consultants and first line managers is not frequently and structured organized, first line managers experience dissatisfactions about the HR performance of HR consultants. Besides this, if first line managers find the partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities between HR consultants and first line managers unclear, they are able to use own interpretations regarding the HR tasks and responsibilities of both HR parties. As a result, HR consultants and first line managers create different opinions about their HR performances.

HR consultants expect of first line managers that they ask for support, whereas first line managers expect of HR consultants that they show interest in their HR performance, give feedback and inform them about the partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities within the organization, developments in the field of Human Resource Management and identified problems. Besides this, HR consultants do not create partnership with first line managers, whereas first line managers expect this. As first line managers expect more support of HR consultants than they actually receive, first line managers perceive a lack of support from the HR consultants in the implementation of HR practices.

After discussing the results, it becomes clear that, besides the ineffective communication and the unclarity about the partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities between HR consultants and first line managers, the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants and the presence of HR consultants in their establishments influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers. Therefore, the research recommends the follow adaptations:

HR consultants should organize evaluation conversations with their first line managers at fixed bullet times which will stimulate the effectiveness of the communication. Besides this, in order to decrease the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants, some HR consultants should be responsible for strategic HR activities and other HR consultants should get concerned with

operational HR activities regarding the support to first line managers. This will result in a better understanding of the partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants within the organization. The research also recommends HR consultants to be present at their establishment or entity at least once a week in order to stimulate the communication and to ensure that they are reachable for first line managers. This will lead to positive value states of first line managers regarding the perceived support from HR consultants in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere.

Management samenvatting

In plaats van Human Resource specialisten zijn tegenwoordig lijnmanagers verantwoordelijk voor de uitvoering van operationele HR activiteiten binnen organisaties, omdat zij direct contact hebben met de werknemers op de werkvloer. Deze tendens is ook zichtbaar binnen Strukton Worksphere. Eerder onderzoek heeft echter aangetoond dat de verschuiving van operationele HR taken en verantwoordelijkheden naar teamleiders binnen Strukton Worksphere resulteert in ontevredenheid bij deze managers over de ondersteuning in de uitvoering van operationele HR activiteiten.

Het huidige onderzoek richt zich op de factoren die de ontevredenheid van de ondersteuning aan teamleiders in de uitvoering van operationele HR activiteiten veroorzaken. De onderzoeker stelt vast dat de structuur van de HR functie binnen Strukton Worksphere, welke bestaat uit een centrale HR afdeling, een Shared Service Center en lokale HR consultants, invloed heeft op de effectiviteit van de communicatie en de consistentie en begrijpelijkheid van de verdeling van HR taken en verantwoordelijkheden tussen de HR directeur, HR consultants, de Shared Service Center en teamleiders. Het gevolg hiervan is dat verschillende verwachtingen ontstaan omtrent de HR prestaties van de HR partijen in kwestie. Als de verwachtingen over de HR prestaties niet overeenkomen, zullen teamleiders een gebrek aan ondersteuning van de HR functie ervaren.

De gegevens voor het onderzoek zijn verzameld door het gebruik van een interview protocol en een analyse van de functieprofielen. De resultaten laten zien dat de ondersteuning aan teamleiders voornamelijk gegeven wordt door HR consultants. Het onderzoek definieert dat als de communicatie tussen HR consultants en teamleiders niet frequent en structureel georganiseerd wordt, teamleiders ontevreden zijn over de HR prestaties van HR consultants. Daarnaast definieert het onderzoek dat als teamleiders de verdeling van HR taken en verantwoordelijkheden tussen HR consultants en teamleiders niet duidelijk vinden, zij eigen interpretaties zullen gebruiken omtrent de taakverdeling van beide partijen. Hierdoor zijn HR consultants en teamleiders in staat verschillende meningen te creëren over hun prestaties op het gebied van Human Resource Management.

Gegeven de HR prestaties verwachten HR consultants van teamleiders dat zij ondersteuning vragen, terwijl teamleiders verwachten dat HR consultants interesse tonen in hun prestaties, feedback geven en hen informeren over de taakverdelingen binnen de organisatie, de ontwikkelingen op het gebied van Human Resource Management en waargenomen problemen. Daarnaast creëren HR consultants geen partnerschap met teamleiders, terwijl teamleiders het juist wel verwachten. Omdat teamleiders meer ondersteuning verwachten dan dat zij daadwerkelijk ontvangen van HR consultants, ervaren zij een gebrek aan ondersteuning in de uitvoering van operationele HR activiteiten.

Nadat de resultaten van het onderzoek bediscussieerd zijn, blijkt uit het onderzoek dat, naast de ineffektieve communicatie en de onduidelijke taakverdeling tussen HR consultants en teamleiders, de veelzijdige en complexe aard van de rol van HR consultants en de aanwezigheid van HR consultants in hun ondernemingen ook het waargenomen gebrek aan ondersteuning door teamleiders beïnvloeden. Hierdoor zien de aanbevelingen van het onderzoek er als volgt uit:

Om de effectiviteit van de communicatie te stimuleren, is het raadzaam dat HR consultants evaluatiegesprekken organiseren met hun teamleiders. Deze dienen op vaste tijdstippen plaats te vinden. Daarnaast is het aan te bevelen om de strategische en operationele taken en verantwoordelijkheden van HR consultants te splitsen. Een aantal HR consultants zullen hierdoor

verantwoordelijk zijn voor strategische HR activiteiten, terwijl andere HR consultants verantwoordelijkheid dragen over de operationele werkzaamheden, waaronder de ondersteuning aan teamleiders. Op deze wijze zal de verdeling van de taken en verantwoordelijkheden van HR consultants duidelijker worden binnen Strukton Worksphere.

De laatste aanbeveling van het onderzoek richt zich op de aanwezigheid van de HR consultants in hun ondernemingen. Als een HR consultant ten minste één keer in de week aanwezig is, zal de communicatie tussen de HR consultant en teamleiders en de bereikbaarheid van de HR consultant verbeterd worden. Dit zal ervoor zorgen dat teamleiders tevreden zijn over de ondersteuning die zij ervaren van HR consultants in de uitvoering van operationele HR activiteiten binnen Strukton Worksphere.

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1. Introduction

There have been considerable developments in the management of human resources during the last years. The allocation of tasks formerly undertaken by the personnel specialists to line managers (devolution) and the allocation of tasks formerly undertaken centrally to more local parts of the organization (decentralization) are trends across Europe (Brewster et al., 1994).

The debate about Human Resource Management versus personnel management has brought the devolution of HR responsibilities to the forefront (Hall et al., 1998). The HR department has had to become more business oriented, more strategic, and more oriented towards organizational change. As Ulrich (1997) put it, the HR department becomes a change agent and a strategic partner of the organization aligning HRM strategies and practices with business strategy. In order to change the role of the HR department, day-to-day HRM work should be integrated to line operations (Brewster et al., 2000). But why is the devolution of HR activities to the line crucial?

It is now widely believed that operational HR activities should be located with line management rather than HR specialist functions, because line management has frequently contact with the employees of the organization (Nehles et al., 2006). Providing these managers with the authority and responsibility for controlling and rewarding their subordinates means that the organization is more likely to manage its human resources coherently. First line managers will invest a lot of time in guiding, monitoring, coaching and motivating employees, sometimes in the context of regular, structured bilaterals and sometimes in less structured contexts. Therefore, first line managers become business managers; they should not only ensure conformance with rules, budgets and schedules, but they should inspire, should be alert to market and customer needs and should be adapt at creating appropriate responses to those needs (Storey, 1995). As a result, the people-oriented approaches and production/operations management-driven changes depend for their implementation upon the behavior of first line managers. For example, employee motivation, the degree of involvement and direct participation in an organization depend on a competent and willing first line management contribution.

However, Storey (1992) argues that the role of first line managers is improved, but that the way in which they handle HRM issues has not altered to the same degree. Many first line managers who were traditionally supervisors with no managerial qualifications continued to regard their 'new' role in the 'old way'. Brewster et al. (2000) mention that line managers, under pressure, tend to fall back on 'the usual way of doing things'; they are not particularly interested in HR issues and are often not able to keep up to date with the latest HR thinking. However, 'they were expected to embrace and embody the new managerial styles, become the key channel in the open two-way communication and they were to be monitored for involving and developing employees' (Storey, 1992, p. 240).

The problems with the changes in the role of the first line manager are discussed by many researchers (Storey, 1992; Lowe, 1992; Brewster et al., 1994; Cunningham et al., 1995; Renwick, 2000; Brewster et al., 2000; Bond et al., 2003; Whittaker et al., 2003; and Nehles et al., 2006). They argue that first line managers are reluctant to take on HR responsibilities, because they may not be willing to perform HR activities (lack of desire), have no time left to spend on those activities (lack of capacity), have insufficient competences to apply them (lack of competences), are not well supported by HR specialists (lack of support) or they are not provided with clear policies for performing the additional HR tasks (lack of policy and practices).

Nehles et al. (2006) examined those problems concerning the devolvement of HR responsibilities to the line at Strukton Worksphere. Strukton Worksphere operates in the technical service industry. It offers reliable and durable technical services and aspires a safe, efficient, comfortable and durable work environment in which people can perform optimally. The quantitative study of Nehles et al. (2006) focused on the hindrances first line managers experience in the implementation of HR activities and the needs and expectations on behalf of the implementation of those activities. The results of the research have been incorporated in appendix 1. The results show that first line managers are not satisfied with the support they currently get from the HR function. However, it is not known why first line managers are not satisfied with the support they get from the HR function and it is not known what would help them in the implementation of HR activities at the operational level of the organization.

The current research elaborates on the results of the research of Nehles et al. (2006) and will provide information about the unanswered questions concerning the lack of support, because this is the largest hindrance first line managers experience in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere. The purpose of the research is to clarify what the lack of support actually means at Strukton Worksphere and to help the organization to remedy this situation by providing them with advice how to decrease the lack of support first line managers experience.

The relevance of the research is the direct applicability of the results of the research at Strukton Worksphere, because the research is practice-oriented. The recommendations of the research will help the HR function to reduce the lack of support first line managers experience at Strukton Worksphere. In order to influence the factors which determine the lack of support, the organization gets inside information about what the lack of support actually means and is able to change those factors so that the lack of support will be reduced. To provide this information about the lack of support, the central research question of the current research is:

Central research question: Which factors determine the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere?

Based on the quantitative investigations I expect the specific situation of Strukton Worksphere regarding structure and allocation of tasks to be important to shed light on the support issue. For this reason, the situation of Strukton Worksphere will be elaborated in the next chapter.

2. Strukton Worksphere

Strukton Worksphere is a subsidiary company of Strukton Groep NV. The organization advises, designs, installs, manages, implements and maintains installations and technical systems in buildings. It offers installations and systems in the field of comfort, management and maintenance, communication, safety and fire security, law and legislation and energy management. The working process of the organization is based on a quick scan at its customers, risk analysis, strategic management and planning, implementation, analysis of the future needs and monitoring of the installations and systems.¹

2.1 History

The history of Strukton Worksphere starts with Worksphere as a part of Stork NV. in which Worksphere is a component of the division 'Technical Services'. In 2006, Stork NV. signs an agreement concerning the sale of Worksphere to Strukton Group NV. in order to concentrate her operations on products like plane components, textile machines and chickens processing machines (Strukton nv., 2008). In the acquisition approximately 1400 employees were involved.

Strukton Group NV. is an organization with 5.514 employees that offers total concepts in the field of infrastructure and accommodations (Strukton nv., 2008). The aim is to create an environment in which the customer can enjoyably travel and comfortably remain. So far, expertise of technical installations in buildings was limited at Strukton. With Worksphere Strukton reinforces its position on the market of integrated projects and facility management.

2.2 Strategy

The mission of Strukton Worksphere is creating work and remain environments in which people feel comfortable and can perform optimally (Strukton Worksphere, 2008). The strategy of the organization is to ensure technical resources in buildings that the organization can manage and maintain against the best integrated cost, so that its customers can realize products and services more efficiently in an optimal environment during their whole life span. Therefore, the organization contributes to a safe, efficient, durable and comfortable work-and-stay environment. The services consist of providing projects and services, management and maintenance in the areas: energy, light, climate, safety and security elevators, automation, information technology and communication systems. Besides this, the organization also ensures 'main contracting'. Strukton Worksphere puts the customers at the centre of its services, applies for honest and safe treatments, durable and socially justified actions, well employers' contribution and prevention of failures. The organization is a proactive, commercialized service institution.²

The central topic of the HRM strategy is the maintaining of employees at Strukton Worksphere (Strukton Worksphere, 2008). To maintain employees, the organization focuses on the quality of leadership. This is supported by the offering of management trainings to managers and first line managers. By developing and offering trainings, Strukton Worksphere invests in the development of their employees. In total, the organization counts 1464 employees, of which the business unit

¹ <http://www.worksphere.nl/nl-nl/AboutUs/Pages/Werkwijze.aspx>, 16 June 2008

² <http://www.worksphere.nl/nl-nl/AboutUs/Pages/OurAmbition.aspx>, 16 June 2008

'Service, Management & Maintenance' has 1084 employees, the business unit 'Projects' has 78 employees and the business unit 'Technique' has 155 employees (Strukton Worksphere, 2008). Strukton Worksphere strives for one organization with one system and two processes. This means, that they want to have one organization who works in an univocal manner with the same rules, processes, resources and methods. The two processes consist of the business units 'Service, Management & Maintenance' and 'Projects'. The business unit 'Technique' ensures the technical support to those business units (Strukton Worksphere, 2008).

2.3 Structure

Strukton Worksphere has different business units, like the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance', the project business unit and the technical business unit. Controlling and Human Resource Management are the staff functions of the organization. The structure of Strukton Worksphere is shown in appendix 2.

The business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' focuses on jamming processes, maintenance processes for first, second and possible third lines jamming and service maintenance. The business unit consists of 14 establishments across the Netherlands. The structure of the establishments is shown in appendix 3. At large, complex projects the establishments engage the business unit 'Projects' to accomplish the tasks. The business unit 'Projects' ensures professional project management for complex processes. Both business units are technically supported by the business unit 'Technique'. Moreover, the business units operate independently (Strukton Worksphere, 2008).

2.4 HR structure

The HR function of Strukton Worksphere consists of the HR director, HR consultants and the Shared Service Center. The HR director is responsible for the strategic Human Resource Management and participates in the Executive Board of the organization. The HR consultants are responsible for both strategic and operational HR activities. The strategic tasks and responsibilities of the HR consultants differ. For instance, one HR consultant is responsible for training and development within Strukton Worksphere as a whole, whereas another HR consultant is responsible for reward strategies and structures. Every HR consultant is assisted by other HR consultants in formulating policies at the specific area. This ensures teamwork and harmonization between HR consultants at the strategic level.

Besides the strategic portfolio, the HR consultant is a member of the management team of one or more establishments within the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' or of the business unit 'Projects' or the business unit 'Technique' of Strukton Worksphere and offers support to the first line managers in performing their operational HR tasks and responsibilities. The Shared Service Center is responsible for the HR administration, varying from paying the salaries including making employment contracts and monitoring adopted rules. The first line managers are responsible for the implementation of operational HR activities such as appraisal conversations and employee career development. The direct hierarchical supervisor of first line managers is the manager of the establishment or entity. For specific HR cases, first line managers are supported by their HR consultant.

2.5 Implications of the HR structure

The HR function at Strukton Worksphere is organized rather decentralized in a central HR department, Shared Service Center and local HR consultants. The central HR department, consists of the HR director, HR consultants and the director of the Shared Service Center, deals with strategic HR issues. The Shared Service Center also operates at the operational level by offering HR administrative support to the employees of the organization. The local HR consultants, who also participate in the central HR department, operates at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere by offering support to first line managers. First line managers perform operational HR activities as well. However, the hierarchical supervisor of the first line managers is the manager of the establishment or entity. This situation might very well lead to rather vague ideas with all parties concerned about tasks and responsibilities regarding HR and ineffective communication to manage expectations. Not very well synchronized expectations about support between first line managers and the HR function might be of the essence in this situation.

Because of the complex HR structure, the different HR parties might have different expectations about each other. For instance, first line managers might expect from the HR consultants that they would advice first line managers in all HR issues, even administration ones, because HR consultants are consultants of the first line managers. However, the HR consultants might expect from the Shared Service Center that they help first line managers in difficult situation regarding HR administration, because they are the central administrative department. Besides this, the HR consultants might not see themselves as consultants of the operational level, but of the strategic level. For instance, they expect that they should consult the HR function in strategic HR issues. The different expectations that might arise from the complex HR structure of the organization, might lead to rather vague ideas about tasks and responsibilities of the several HR parties involved which might result in a lack of support experienced by first line managers.

Assumption: The complex HR structure of Strukton Worksphere might cause different expectations first line managers and the HR function have of each other which in turn may lead to a lack of support experienced by first line managers.

The communication between the HR parties might play a crucial role at forming expectations between the different HR parties. If the information is incomplete or transformed, different expectations between recipient and sender might arise. If support messages from HR consultant to first line managers are not well communicated, it might influence the expectations first line managers have concerning the received support from the HR function at Strukton Worksphere. For instance, if first line managers and HR specialists do not talk about the willingness to give support from the HR function and the need for support from the first line managers, both parties do not know what kind of support is expected or can be expected. This might result in different expectations which might not be realized. Because of this, first line managers might perceive a lack of support from the HR function.

Assumption: An ineffectiveness of the communication between the HR director, HR consultants, the Shared Service Center and first line managers might result in different expectations about the support first line managers receive from the HR function which in turn may lead to a lack of support experienced by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere.

If the division of tasks between the different HR parties involved is unclear and they do not agree on who does what, also might be a fundamental reason for the perceived lack of support by first line managers. The task contents or the task interdependencies might be not clear or not accepted by the employees of Strukton Worksphere. For instance, if first line managers do not know the responsibilities of their HR consultant concerning recruitment and selection, first line managers might expect that the HR consultant is present at the second application conversation of a new employee to transmit information about HR, such as contents of the contract. However, the HR consultant might not be responsible for it, but the first line manager is. The first line manager might experience a lack of support from the HR consultant, because, in his/her opinion, the HR consultant should be present at the second application conversation. The first line manager has no clear view about the HR tasks/responsibilities of the HR function.

Assumption: The vagueness of the division of tasks between the HR director, HR consultants, the Shared Service Center and first line managers might result in different expectations about the support first line manager receive from the HR function which in turn may lead to a lack of support experiences by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere.

So, based on the empirical information about the HR structure of Strukton Worksphere, both the communication and the factual division of tasks might influence the expectations of the HR performance by first line managers to the HR function and by the HR function to first line managers. The expectations of all HR parties concerning the perceived support may not correspond. For instance, first line managers might expect support from the HR consultant in preparing job evaluation conversations, whereas the HR consultant thinks that first line managers should be able to prepare the job evaluation conversation themselves and therefore is not willing to offer support. First line managers may experience a lack of support as a consequence.

Assumption: Different expectations of the HR performance by the HR function might lead to a lack of support experienced by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere.

The focus of this research will therefore be on the expectations of the different HR parties regarding the content and level of support rendered to first line managers influenced by the ineffective communication and the possible vagueness about the division of tasks. My assumptions about the factors which might influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers based on the empirical information about Strukton Worksphere will be discussed in the literature review.

3. Literature review

In the literature review I elaborate on the perceived lack of support and discuss the factors expectations, communication and division of tasks which might influence the lack of support first line managers (FLMs) experience at Strukton Worksphere in order to substantiate my assumptions that the structure of the organization leads to different expectations, ineffective communication and a vague division of tasks between the HR function and first line managers whereby first line managers might perceive a lack of support from the HR function. The HR function consists of the HR director, the Shared Service Center (SSC) and the HR consultants of Strukton Worksphere. Before I discuss the factors which determine the lack of support, I explain the support factor examined by McGovern et al. (1997), Hall and Torrington (1998), Cunningham et al. (1999), Whittaker et al (2003) and Nehles et al. (2006), so that a clear picture is created of what this factor exactly implies.

3.1 Perceived lack of support

Several researchers focused on the role of the personnel specialists after operational HR responsibilities are devolved to the line (Lowe, 1992; Brewster et al., 1994; McGovern et al., 1997; Hall et al., 1998; Cunningham et al., 1999; Brewster et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001; and Whittaker et al., 2003). This research shows that the role of HR specialists changes towards supporting first line managers in the implementation of HR practices.

According to these studies, the support factor consists of different aspects. First, according to Brewster et al. (2000) and Whittaker et al. (2003), the role of HR specialists to be played with the line is one of partnership. Interaction between first line managers and the HR function is essential, because this will give the implementation of the HR practices a more realistic chance. For instance, first line managers and HR specialists should work together in order to implement HR activities effectively at the operational level of the organization. This might counteract pay differentials that may cause problems in developing cross-sectional mobility in the organization (Whittaker et al. 2003).

Second, McGovern et al. (1997) argue that devolution is possible, but only if accompanied by increased monitoring by HR specialists. Monitoring is important, because the prospects for devolution are not promising given the current priorities of business. Brewster et al. (2000) and Wright et al. (2001) agreed with the statement of McGovern et al. (1997) by saying that without careful monitoring by a central HR department, coordination is extremely difficult or else fails to occur (Brewster et al., 2000, p. 207). The HR department has to ensure that local demands do not override the broader objectives of the organization.

Conform previous research; the third aspect of supporting first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of the organization is to give advice to first line managers. For instance, nowadays, many employees see the personnel department as being too remote (Cunningham et al., 1999); the personnel specialists are neither available nor visible to help managers in HR issues. The HR department has to ensure that first line managers can turn to personnel specialists for advice in situations that may be new, unusual, difficult or legalistic (Hall et al., 1998).

The support factor includes HR specialists supporting first line managers in the implementation of HR practices through partnership, monitoring and advice. In practice, first line managers are consulted less frequently over strategic issues relating to Human Resource Management (Hales, 2005). Besides this, the HR department is often seen as too distanced from or insufficiently robust to influence policies in the perception of the first line managers. This leads to a lack of commitment, leadership and direction from the HR specialists (Cunningham et al, 1999). So, in theory partnership, monitoring and advice are included in the support factor, but in practice those aspects of support are frequently not present in the form of commitment, leadership and giving direction. This might result in a lack of support first line managers experience from the HR specialists in the implementation of HR practices.

3.2 Expectations

With regard to the empirical information about Strukton Worksphere and the literature review about HR specialists supporting first line managers in the implementation of HR practices, I suggest that first line managers experience a lack of support if the expectations between the HR specialists and first line managers about partnership, monitoring and advice are not the same. First line managers and the HR function might have different expectations about the aspects of the support factor, but the several departments within the HR function, like the HR director, HR consultants and the Shared Service Center might also have different expectations from each other about their HR performance. Because these expectations are not in line, first line managers might experience a lack of support from the HR specialists. So, the focus is on what first line managers expect in terms of support from the different parts of the HR function and what the HR function is willing to offer in terms of support.

According to Hales (2005), HR specialists expect from line managers that they act as 'team-leaders/co-ordinators'. This includes the function of facilitating, co-ordinating, mentoring, coaching and leading teams and suggests a wider span of control and detached concern with work performance and quality. First line managers are expected to embody the new management style which includes involving, developing and communicating with employees and involvement in employee relation issues. Regarding the HR tasks, first line managers are responsible for operational HR tasks such as recruitment, performance appraisal and career development (McGovern et al., 1997 and Brewster et al., 2000).

The function of the HR specialists presents itself as a consultancy service to line managers (Brewster et al., 2000). The HR specialists should contribute their specific expertise, knowledge and skills to the debate, to argue their corner on the basis of that expertise. They should require additional trainings to first line managers and probably sharper monitoring of the process (McGovern et al., 1997). However, the line between HR specialists setting policy and first line managers implementing it is not as obvious as academics draw (Brewster et al. 2000). For instance, it is possible that the first line manager both places the advertisement for recruiting new employees and decides whether to recruit people for the unit and how to do it.

In practice, the distinction between making policy and implementing it is less clear and in many cases there will be advantages in having them brought together under one specialist. This unclear boundary might make it difficult to decide whether first line managers expect support from the HR specialists and whether HR specialists are willing to give support to first line managers. So, I suggest that the first element of expectations is based on the clarity of the distinction between the tasks and

responsibilities of the HR director, the HR consultants, the Shared Service Center and the first line managers of the organization.

Based on the literature review about the function of the HR specialists, as described earlier, I suggest that the HR function is willing to support first line managers in their HR activities as team-leader/co-ordinator. They might contribute their specific HR expertise, knowledge and skills if first line managers have problems or get stuck in the implementation of their HR tasks and responsibilities because HR specialists have a consultancy service to line managers.

This means that the HR function is willing to help first line managers if they are not able or uncertain to perform the HR tasks and responsibilities themselves. For instance, on the one hand, if a first line manager does not know how he/she should perform an appraisal conversation, the HR specialist can support him/her by offering trainings in conversation techniques. On the other hand, if a first line manager is able to perform an appraisal conversation himself/herself because he/she is trained in it, the HR specialist should not offer support. So, I suggest that the kind of support the HR function is willing to give is dependent on the capabilities of the first line manager. Because of this, the second element of expectations is based on the capabilities of the first line managers.

According to Nehles et al. (2006), the support demanded from the HR specialists depends on the perceived relevance of support received from the HR function and the interest the HR function shows in operational problems. However, there is no evidence when first line managers expect support from the HR function and there is also no literature describing what support the HR function is willing to give to first line managers. For instance, on the one hand, first line managers might expect explanations from the HR specialists about how they must use the intended practices before they actually implement it. On the other hand, HR specialists might expect that first line managers should be able to implement the system without any explanations in advance, because the developed system will be translated in a way first line managers should be able to understand it. In this situation, the HR specialist would not support the first line manager in the implementation of the developed system. So, the third element of expectations is based on the willingness of the HR function to offer support. If first line managers know what kind of support the HR function offers, first line managers are able to create expectations that are in line with those of the HR function.

Concluding, the expectations depend on the clarity of the distinction between the tasks and responsibilities of the HR function and first line managers, the capabilities of the first line managers and the kind of support the HR function is willing to offer. If the HR function and first line managers have different contents of those elements, different expectations about the HR performance of the several HR parties might arise. This probably causes disappointments, disorder or dissatisfaction (Tubre and Collins, 2000), because the desired results of the several parties will not be reached. If the expectations about supporting first line managers in the implementation of HR activities are not univocal between the different parties concerned, first line managers might experience a lack of support.

The above described literature indicates that expectations of the HR performance between the HR director, HR consultants, the Shared Service Center and first line managers might influence the lack of support first line managers perceive at Strukton Worksphere. In the following paragraphs I will discuss the factors which might influence the different expectations.

3.3 Communication

As mentioned by Tubre and Collins (2000) and Brewster et al. (2000), communication is an important determinant to counteract differences in HR function's expectations and first line managers' expectations and help first line managers to effectively implement HR practices at the operational level of the organization. Communication involves individuals sharing ideas, helps to overcome ambiguity and uncertainty and provides information and power (Proctor and Doukakis, 2003). According to Koeleman (1997), communication is offering messages of senders to recipients who determine part of the same organization in order to realize organizational purposes and/or individual purposes (Koeleman, 1997). Sender and recipient can exchange their role frequently.

Effective communication consists of different aspects. First, managers should communicate to employees about why something needs to happen. It is important that HR specialists explain the 'why' of HR practices to first line managers instead of the 'what', because when first line managers understand the 'why', they generally accept the 'what' and do the 'how' (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). Because of this, first line managers will experience the usefulness of the information and will carry out what has been communicated. For instance, if a first line manager only knows what the HR specialists do, but not know why he/she does it in that way, they might not experience the usefulness of the working methods of the HR specialist. If a first line manager knows that he/she gets no support from the HR specialist on recruitment because that is not what he/she should do, the first line manager might experience a lack of support. However, if the HR specialist explains why he/she does not support the first line manager and that he/she perhaps can ask the Shared Service Center for support, the first line manager might understand the situation and might no more experience a lack of support from the HR specialist on this topic.

Second, if the communication is not complete or there is too little communication, the information will not be used effectively. For instance, if some support messages about recruitment are not sent at all, though they should have been sent, first line managers might not know to what extent HR specialists can support them in recruitment. Insufficient and incomplete communication might lead to different expectations about the support HR specialists are willing to offer to first line managers in HR practices concerning recruitment.

However, too much communication might also be ineffective. If there is too much communication, the recipient might find it difficult to follow or understand the information transmitted by the sender or different senders. The information might be interpreted incorrectly whereby perhaps expectations arise which can not be accomplished. For instance, if the HR specialist helps first line managers with appraisal conversations by preparing the conversation together and the next time the HR specialists is not willing to support them in the same situation and the Shared Service Center offers support, different support messages are send to the same first line manager. This might lead to different expectation about the clarity of the distinction between the tasks and responsibilities of the different HR parties. So, effective communication consistent of complete information which explains why something needs to happen.

According to Brewster et al. (2000), effective communication can be sustained by the use of an handbook. An handbook describes the HR responsibilities first line managers are responsible for, the HR activities they are to perform and how they can apply them in order to implement HR practices effectively. This is also argued by Bond et al. (2003) who mention that accurate awareness among

line managers is better where policies are clearly defined in a staff handbook. However, an handbook is based on a one-way communication and explains mainly the 'what' of the information. As a result, an handbook might be preserve the accurate awareness among first line managers, but the use of only an handbook is not sufficient for effective communication.

The 'why' of HR practices can be transmitted by the use of HR specific trainings for first line managers. So, in order to ensure effective communication between HR specialists and first line managers, the HR specialists should have an handbook available for first line managers. First line managers should use the handbook and they should be trained in implementing HR practices. The availability and usefulness of an handbook and HR specific trainings for first line managers ascertain that the 'right' support messages gets through.

So, effective communication is carrying out complete messages which can be supported by the use of an HR handbook and HR specific trainings. However, internal communication is not only carrying out messages by management, the channels along which the communication spreads themselves are at least as important (Koelman, 1997). Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) examine different channels like top-down information transmission and the bottom-up information transmission. Ulrich (2005) argues that there are some hindrances in the information transmissions. For example, bottom-up information flow does not occur naturally. First line managers might frequently recognize problems, but fear that the HR consultant will reject honest feedback with embarrassment or anger. As a result, first line managers might circulate wrong information whereby different expectations might be arise and first line managers might not receive the support they prefer. To counteract this, the HR function should stimulate bottom-up information transmission and make clear that even negative information is welcome.

To stimulate bottom-up communication HR specialists need to make sure that first line managers are trained in communication skills and that they have access to the messages that need to be shared and the information that is relevant for their respective teams (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). For instance, first line managers have to be trained in how to communicate with the HR specialists and have access to the HR handbook and the HR specific trainings. This ensures the two-way communication within the organization. For instance, on the one hand, first line managers should communicate what kind of support they need from the HR function. On the other hand, the HR function should communicate what their support role exactly implies, should listen to their first line managers, understand and adopt the logic, language and concepts they use to think about business and recognize their personal styles, thus the HR specialists know whom to better contact in person, by phone or by e-mail.

The two-way communication might influence the support first line managers experience, because if both first line managers and HR specialists communicate their expectations concerning the support factor, the HR function knows the expectations of first line managers in terms of support from the different parts of the HR function and first line managers know what kind of support the HR function is willing to offer. This is also examined by Koelman (1997) and Bowen and Ostroff (2004) who argue that if employees often communicate with each other, the cognitive structure shows overlap.

Complete, sufficient and frequently communication is important for the effectiveness of the communication. However, if the recipient concerned receives the information by means of several senders, there is a chance that the content of the communication has changed or deformed. The

results of indirect communication frequently leads to deformed and simplified information, where sometimes words are added to senses that are not incurred in the first place. The sender might distort the information in its own interest, thus charging information about another employee can be thickened, whereas positive aspects are simply omitted. If the messages between the HR director, HR consultants, the Shared Service Center and first line managers are not consistent, the messages are ambiguous and subject to individual interpretations of what people 'see' and report happening to them as they make sense to their environment (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).

With regard to the support factor, because a support message passes through too many people, who all add to or change or distort the original message, the information between the first sender and the last recipient might not be consistent. This might result in different expectations. For instance, if the Shared Service Center has send a message to a first line manager, but the information transmission should first passes the HR consultant, the information might be changed. As a result, expectations between the Shared Service Center and the first line manager might be different. Different expectations about the support role of the HR function might lead to a lack of support perceived by first line managers.

Concluding, to stimulate effective communication organizations should use an handbook and offer specific HR trainings, ensure two-way communication and transmit information by means of the shortest route. This might lead to first line managers' expectations and HR function's expectations about support that show overlapping whereby first line managers might not perceive a lack of support from the HR function.

3.4 Division of tasks

Besides the internal communication, I suggest that the division of tasks influences the expectations between the HR director, HR consultants, the Shared Service Center and first line managers about their HR performances.

The division of tasks refers to the partitioning of tasks between the different parties involved. Through the devolution of HR responsibilities to the line, the tasks of first line managers have been enlarged; they have more day-to-day people management responsibilities, more exceptionally increased financial responsibilities and customer/client contact (Hales, 2005). Nowadays, first line managers are responsible for most daily HRM procedures such as recruitment, training, assessment, determination of wages and salaries (within the frames of local agreements) and health and security (Brewster et al., 2004). The tasks of the central HR department are strategic management developments especially involving environmental scanning, competitor analysis, comparisons of HR policies, giving a central incentive to decentralized policy development, evaluation of the quality of the decentralized human resource policies and the provision of HR information (Brewster et al., 2004). Thereby, the HR consultants and the Shared Service Center fulfill a consultancy role and an internal service role.

The division of task consists of task contents and task interdependencies of the employees of the organization. Today, managers confront large numbers of interdependencies in their work. Task interdependency refers to the degree to which an individual is certain about whom he or she is reliant on and for what purpose (Wong et al., 2007). To the extent that there are uncertainties about one's job contents and interdependencies, one is likely to perceive greater uncertainty about how to

perform one's role. For instance, with regard to the devolution, first line managers are dependent on HR specialists, because they are able to translate HR systems which have been determined centrally in order to make it understandable for the operational level. If HR specialists are not informed about this interdependency, they might not be willing to support first line managers in the translation of the HR system. However, if first line managers are not able to translate it themselves, different expectations about task contents and interdependencies might arise.

Task contents and task interdependencies of the HR director, HR consultants, the Shared Service Center and first line managers concerning their HR performance should enact in such a way that a consistent and understandable picture emerges (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Consistency refers to features that establish consistent relationships over time, people and context (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). For instance, if first line managers are responsible for taking of appraisal conversations, they should perform it irrespective of the situation in which it occurs. Another example might be that if the HR consultants are responsible for helping first line managers in difficult situations during appraisal conversations, they should help them irrespective of the time in which it occurs. If the Shared Service Center is responsible for supplying data about employee turnover of the establishments to the HR consultants, the Shared Service Center should supply those data irrespective of the HR consultant so that the HR consultant is able to inform the first line managers about the determined situation.

Understandability refers to a lack of ambiguity and ease of comprehension of HR tasks content (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). For instance, if the task content of the HR function is unclear and difficult to understand, it is likely that first line managers do not know how the HR function can help them in the implementation of HR activities at the operational level of the organization. The complex HR structure of Strukton Worksphere might also be difficult to understand for all HR parties involved. Perhaps, first line managers might not know who is responsible for HR administration within the HR function or who is responsible for recruitment and selection. If first line managers not know the kind of authority HR specialists have in order to support them in their HR tasks and responsibilities, they might create expectations that cannot be proved. Different expectations about support between the HR function and first line managers might arise.

So, consistency and understandability about the division of tasks ensure that the HR director, HR consultants, the Shared Service Center and first line managers know who is responsible for different HR tasks including supporting first line managers in the implementation of HR activities and what the task interdependencies are. If the organization creates a shared understanding about the division of tasks and what is described also happens, the HR function and first line managers are able to form a collective sense of what is expected of them. If they are not able to do this, dissatisfaction or disorder might arise concerning supporting first line managers in the implementation of HR activities. This might ensures that first line managers perceive a lack of support from the HR function.

3.5 Research model

Concluding from the literature review, I suggest that the use of an handbook, the offer of specific HR trainings, two-way communication, information transmission by means of the shortest route and consistent and understandable division of tasks leads to clarities about the distinction of tasks and responsibilities of the HR function and first line managers, clarities about the capabilities of first line managers and clarities about the kind of support the HR function is willing to offer. As a result, the

HR function and first line managers are able to create expectations about partnership, monitoring and advice that will correspond whereby first line managers might not perceive a lack of support from the HR function.

Central research question: Which factors determine the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere?

Given the research question and the literature framework I come up with the following sub questions:

Research question 1: What does the HR function expect of the HR performance by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere?

Sub question 1.1: To what extent does the communication influence HR function's expectations of the HR performance by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere?

Sub question 1.2: To what extent does the factual division of tasks HR function's expectations of the HR performance by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere?

Research question 2: What do first line managers expect of the HR performance by the HR function at Strukton Worksphere?

Sub question 2.1: To what extent does the communication influence first line managers' expectations of the HR performance by the HR function at Strukton Worksphere?

Sub question 2.2: To what extent does the factual division of tasks influence first line managers' expectation of the HR performance by the HR function at Strukton Worksphere?

Research question 3: How do the expectations of the HR function and first line managers influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR activities at Strukton Worksphere?

The variables of the literature review and the research questions are reflected visually in the research model mentioned below.

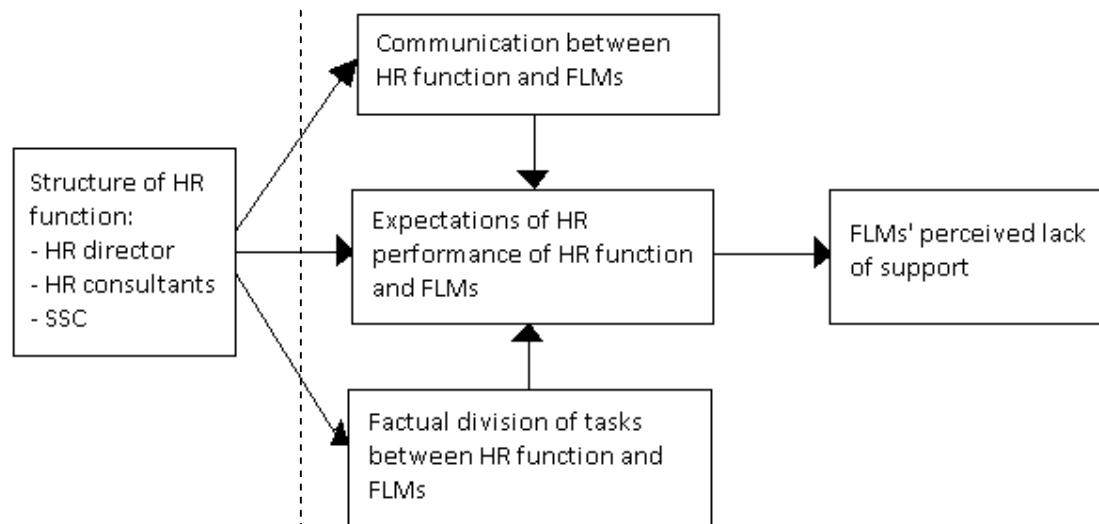


Figure 1: Research model

4. Methodology

In this chapter I will describe how the research has been conducted and the research population, variables, strategy, measurements and analysis I am going to perform.

4.1 Sample and participants

The qualitative research was carried out within the business units 'Service, Management & Maintenance', 'Projects' and 'Technique' of Strukton Worksphere across the Netherlands. The HR consultant and three first line managers of each of the three business units of Strukton Worksphere participated in the research. Besides this, the respondent population of the research consisted of the central HR director and the director of the Shared Service Center. The participants were selected on the basis of the results of the research of Nehles et al. (2006), the demands of the principal and the research questions.

The HR director is responsible for the realization of the strategy of Strukton Worksphere concerning the combination of organization development and the development of employees and has direct contact with the HR consultants and the director of the Shared Service Center. The HR consultants are HR professionals who contribute to further decentralized professionalization of Human Resource Management and have direct contact with first line managers of Strukton Worksphere. The Shared Service Center is the central department who controls and monitors the administrative HR activities concerning the employment of people at the organization. The first line managers are supervisors at the lowest level of the organization who have direct contact with their subordinates and are responsible for the implementation of HR activities at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere.

An overview of the sample and participants are incorporated in table 1.

Participants		Total sample				
HR director		1				
Director Shared Service Center		1				
HR consultants		3				
First line managers		9				
Business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance'						
	Sample	Gender	Age	Educational level	Years of work experience	Years of working in the current function
HR consultants	1	Woman	50	HBO/AC	8	8
First line managers	3	Man	44	MBO+ / HBO	25	6
Business unit 'Projects'						
	Sample	Gender	Age	Educational level	Years of work experience	Years of working in the current function
HR consultants	1	Man	48	HBO	11	11
First line managers	3	Man	47	MBO+	20	8
Business unit 'Technique'						
	Sample	Gender	Age	Educational level	Years of work experience	Years of working in the current function
HR consultants	1	Man	42	HBO	1	1
First line managers	3	Man	49,5	MBO+ / HBO	19	8

Table 1: Sample and participants

4.2 Procedure

In the presentation of the results of the research of Nehles et al. (2006), during an HR meeting of Strukton Worksphere, the HR director, the HR consultants and the director of the Shared Service Center had been informed about the current research. The research is based on a qualitative study, in which I examine the factors which influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere. The factors which influence the support factor is proposed to be the communication and the factual division of tasks at Strukton Worksphere, which in turn influence the expectations of the HR performance by first line managers to the HR function and by the HR function to first line managers. I hypothesize that if the expectations are not the same, first line managers might perceive a lack of support from the HR function.

The research took place in June and July of 2008. The data is collected by the use of an interview protocol and a document analysis of function profiles. The HR consultants informed the management team of their establishment or entity about the research in order to create a collective sense and to carry out the research from the top of the organization. This ensures internal support for the research whereby participation is more guaranteed.

The HR director recommended the establishment Utrecht within the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' to participate in the research and the HR consultants recommended the first line managers in the establishments they are responsible for, because the researcher was not able to determine which first line managers need support from the HR function in advance. Both the HR director and the HR consultants partially had a say in choosing a research location and the participants, because this stimulates the willingness of the employees of the business units to participate in the research.

For the document analysis, the function profiles were mailed to the researcher. For the interviews, the researcher contacted the participants in order to make an appointment. The HR consultants supported the researcher in contacting and communicating the research to first line managers by giving addresses of the first line managers and informing the first line managers about the research. On average, the interview with the participants of the organization lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. The interviews were taken at the head-office and three establishments of Strukton Worksphere. During the interview, a voice recorder is used to collect data in order to have the possibility to make a complete analysis of the interview. Every interview is transcribed to make sure that all information could be used for the analysis of the interviews. Moreover, confidentiality of responses is guaranteed by the researcher.

4.3 Apparatus and measures

4.3.1 Operationalization

In the operationalization, the different research entities based on the literature review are defined. Support for the following HR tasks is taken into consideration:

- Job evaluation conversations
- Appraisal conversations
- Recruitment
- Selection
- Staff absence
- Employee career development
- Leadership
- Personal development
- Taking difficult decisions
- Feedback

The items used to measure the unit of analysis are incorporated in table 2.

Variables	Operationalization
Communication	<p>Completeness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availability and use of an HR handbook - Availability and use of HR specific training courses <p>Quantity of communication between the HR function and first line managers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequency of communication between the HR function and FLMs - Consistency of the frequent communication between the HR function and FLMs <p>Information transmission between the HR function and first line managers by means of the shortest route:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct and indirect communication between the HR function and FLMs <p>Communication influence expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessing the communication between the HR function and FLMs
Division of tasks	<p>Consistency of task interdependencies between the HR function and FLMs</p> <p>Understandability of task interdependencies between the HR function and FLMs</p>
Expectations	<p>Expectations of support offered by the HR function regarding HR tasks</p> <p>Expectations of support received by FLMs regarding HR tasks</p> <p>Expectations about cooperation between the HR function and FLMs</p> <p>Expectations about communication between the HR function and FLMs</p> <p>Expectations about the task interdependencies between the HR function and FLMs</p>
FLMs' perceived support	<p>Partnership between the HR function and FLMs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperation between the HR function and FLMs <p>Control of HR tasks by the HR function</p> <p>Advice in HR issues by the HR function</p> <p>Support offered by the HR function regarding HR tasks</p> <p>Support received by FLMs regarding HR tasks</p>

Table 2: Operationalization of variables

The operationalization of the research items contributes to the validity and the reliability of the research, because it makes it possible to measure the selected variables based on the literature review. The use of an interview protocol was most suitable to find a valid answer to the research question which stimulates the internal validity of the research (Babbie, 2007).

First, in advance, the researcher gives assumptions of the factors that might determine the perceived lack of support by first line managers like the communication and the division of tasks. However, it might be possible that the researcher did not include all the factors that determine the perceived support by first line managers in advance. By the use of an interview protocol, interviewees are able to discuss other factors of which the researcher did not reflect on in the first place.

Second, compared to the use of a survey, an interview protocol makes it able to clarify questions if it is interpreted incorrectly by the participants and to clarify indistinctly answers by keep on asking. Besides this, the outcomes of the interviews can be ascribed to the participants, because the researcher had direct, face-to-face contact with them.

The researcher related the interview protocol with the operationalization of the research which makes it able to work systematically. The questions and subjects were determined in advance which contributes to answering the sub questions and by that to answering the research question. Besides this, the analysis of the interviews is also based on the operationalization of the research. Because of the systematicity of the research through the use of the operationalization for the interview protocol, the analysis and the results, the reliability of the research will increase (Babbie, 2007).

4.3.2 Measures

To collect data for the qualitative research, an interview protocol and a document analysis of function profiles is used.

Interview protocol

The interview protocols of the HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center, HR consultants and first line managers are incorporated in appendix 4.

Communication

The communication was measured by asking questions about the way the HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center, HR consultants and first line managers communicate with each other. The completeness of the communication was examined by asking the interviewee about the availability and usefulness of an HR handbook and specific HR training courses. Besides this, the quantity of the communication was measured by asking whether the interviewee had frequently and consistent consultations with the HR parties involved.

The influence of the information transmission by means of the shortest route was measured by asking questions about the influence of direct and indirect communication. The question: 'How do you communicate your support to first line managers' provided an answer to this (Ulrich and Brockbank, 2005). The HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center, HR consultants and first line managers had to assess the way of communicating within the HR function. Besides this, the question: 'To what extent does the way of communicating influence the perceived support experienced by first line managers?' was discussed. These questions gave an overview of how the

communication could influence the expectations about supporting first line managers in the implementation of HR practices.

Division of tasks

To measure the consistency of task interdependencies, the questions: 'Is the division of tasks consistent? why/why not?' were asked. The understandability of the tasks interdependencies were measured by asking if the interviewee understands the division of tasks and why the division of tasks is understandable or not. This provided answers about the possible vagueness of the division of tasks. The task interdependencies between all the different HR parties were taken into consideration.

Expectations

The expectations were reviewed by asking questions about the expectations of the different parties concerning offering support to first line managers and receiving support from the HR function. The expectations on both sides were questioned. For instance, the questions: 'What do you expect of first line managers at appraisal conversations?', what does the first line manager expects at appraisal conversations of you?' were included. The expectations about offered and received support regarding job evaluation conversations, appraisal conversations, recruitment, selection, staff absence, employee career development, leadership, personal development and taking difficult decision were discussed. These presentations of questions were also used at the questions about the expectations regarding the cooperation and communication between the different HR parties and the task interdependencies of the different HR parties in order to find similarities or differences whereby conclusions could be drawn concerning the perceived lack of support by first line managers.

First line managers' perceived support

The support factor was assessed by using questions about the support the HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center and the HR consultants offer to first line managers in the implementation of HR activities and the perceived received support experienced by first line managers.

The general question: 'how do you support first line managers' gave the possibility for the HR function to answer the question about the offering of support without a certain target. Moreover, the general question: 'how does the HR director support you?' provides an answer about the perceived received support by first line managers without a certain target.

The support regarding job evaluation conversations, appraisal conversations, recruitment, selection, staff absence and employee career development were discussed separately to measure both the support offered by the HR function and the perceived support by first line managers. Besides this, the interview protocol included questions about the offered and perceived support regarding leadership, personal development and taking difficult decisions by first line managers. The way of giving and receiving feedback could also be a kind of support experienced by first line managers and were also asked during the interviews.

The variables monitoring, partnership and advice were questioned by asking the interviewee if he or she controls or advises first line managers and if first line managers perceive monitoring and advice from the HR function. Partnership was separately questioned by asking about cooperation between

the different parties and literally asking the interviewee if he/she experiences a partnership with the HR function or the first line managers.

At the end of the interviews, the interviewees were asked to give recommendations about improving the received support by the HR function to first line managers. The answers might be possible recommendations to Strukton Worksphere that could be included in the research.

Function profiles

The function profiles are used to collect data of the contents of the HR tasks of the participants in order to find out if the contents of the HR activities were clearly described in advance. This improved the understandability of the division of tasks between the different HR parties. The function profiles consisted of descriptions about the position of the function in the organization, the aim of the function, the activities and the function characteristics. So, the document analysis of function profiles is supportive to the outcomes of the interviews regarding the division of tasks.

4.4 Analysis

The transcriptions of the interviews made it possible to analyze the answers of the questions given by the interviewees. The operationalization in table 2 was used to analyze the collected data. The descriptions of the function profiles were compared to the outcomes of the interviews about the division of tasks between the HR function and first line managers. After putting the answers in the associated items, the data within the items were compared in order to find similarities and differences. If the different parties had several expectations concerning the support offered by the HR function and the perceived support by first line managers, the researcher could determine that they ultimately influence the lack of support perceived by first line managers. So, the results of the research give an overview of the factors which might influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere.

5. Results

In this chapter I will describe the results of the interviews with the HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center, HR consultants and first line managers of Strukton Worksphere. Per factor, I discuss the factor within the HR function and between the HR function and first line managers. However, the results of the expectations will be presented by describing the results of the HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center, HR consultants and first line managers separately.

The citations will be presented in Dutch in order to maintain the expressions of the participants. The English translations of the citations are incorporated in appendix 5. Each citation has a number which correspond to the number in the appendix.

5.1 Results interviews

5.1.1 Communication

This paragraph will describe the results regarding the completeness and quantity of the communication, the information transmission and the assessing of the communication within the HR function and between the HR function and first line managers.

Communication within the HR function

Completeness

The HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center and the HR consultants are informed about the availability of the HR handbook, which is published on the Intranet of the organization and is administered by the Shared Service Center. However, they do not know whether first line managers use the HR handbook frequently. HR specific training courses are also available, but the need for training courses of the first line managers is not expressed. According to the HR consultants, first line managers should ask for HR specific training courses if they need them.

HR consultant: 'het is aan hun (first line managers) om aan te geven; hé ik heb voldoende bagage of niet'. (1)

Each year, a training plan is drawn up by the HR consultants in which first line managers can announce their needs for HR specific training courses.

Quantity

Once a month, the HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center, the HR consultants and recruiters organize a central HR consultation in which general HR issues could be discussed. Besides this, two times a month, the HR director has lateral conversations with the director of the Shared Service Center to discuss specific HR issues concerning procedures and processes. The Shared Service Center and the HR consultants have no structured communication. The communication between those HR parties consists of calling each other when it is necessary.

Information transmission

To shorten the information transmission within the HR function, working parties are organized. A working party is specified in an HR area and consists of mainly three persons. For example, for improving the reward system, a working party is established which consists of the HR director, an HR consultant and the director of the Shared Service Center. They organize several consultations. If they have reached a decision, the outcomes will be discussed in the central HR conversation to inform the HR function.

Assessing the communication

The HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center and the HR consultants assess the communication within the HR function to be efficient. Both, the Shared Service Center and the HR consultants do not need structured communication with each other.

Communication between HR function and first line managers

Completeness

First line managers are informed about the availability of an HR handbook. However, three of nine first line managers never used the HR handbook on the Intranet. Six of nine first line managers are not informed about the availability and use of HR specific training courses. They experience this as an hindrance, because they do not exactly know what is expected of them and what their capabilities should be to be able to perform their HR responsibilities.

The answer of a first line manager to the question whether specific HR training courses are offered: 'Nee, je moet alles zelf aangeven. Ik zou liever willen zien dat vanuit HRM een aantal trainingen aangeboden worden..., dan heb je ook daadwerkelijk de training dat vanuit HRM gedacht wordt; die heb je nodig, dit heeft een teamleider nodig'. (2)

Today, by experience, first line managers learned how to implement HR practices. However, according to first line managers, R consultants should offer HR specific training courses which are connected to the competences first line managers should have.

Quantity

The HR director and first line managers have no direct communication with each other. Besides this, the communication with the Shared Service Center is unstructured. First line managers contact the Shared Service Center by phone if they have administrative questions.

The communication between HR consultants and first line managers differs. The differences are based on the working method of the HR consultants. One HR consultant has structured face-to-face contact with his/her first line managers, whereas the other HR consultants have no structured contact and contact the first line managers mainly by phone or e-mail if it is necessary.

The answer of an HR consultant to the question how the communication with his/her first line managers looks like: 'Ongestructureerd, ad hoc, naar aanleiding van concrete aanleidingen'. (3)

However, six of nine first line managers mentioned that they experience the unstructured communication as an hindrance, because it makes the accessibility of the HR consultant difficult.

Often, if they call their HR consultant, the HR consultant has no time for conversations. Those first line managers expect structured communication. Three of nine first line managers mentioned that the communication is mainly based on what happens in the business, but they would also like to experience a more personal approach by the use of informal communication.

First line manager: 'ik zou wel meer overleg willen hebben, al zou het alleen maar eens een keer informeel zijn'. (4)

So, structured communications as well as frequent communications are demanded by first line managers.

Information transmission

The information transmission between the Shared Service Center and first line managers goes by means of the HR consultant. However, six of nine first line managers find the communication structures within the HR function vague or have no opinion about it. First line managers have contact with their HR consultant, but they have no idea if and how the HR director, the Shared Service Center and the HR consultants communication with each other. Because of this, they had also no opinion about shortening the information transmission.

Assessing the communication

First line managers are satisfied concerning the unstructured communication with the Shared Service Center. If they have administrative questions, they can call the Shared Service Center and know which person can help them to answering their questions. Besides this, first line managers who have structured communication with their HR consultants are also satisfied. However, first line managers who do not have structured communication with the HR consultants are unsatisfied about the communication.

The answer of a first line manager to the question how he/she assesses the communication: 'nul. Er is geen communicatie. Niks anders dan goedemorgen, goedenavond, prettig weekend, meer niet...als ik die (HR consultant) één keer in de maand spreek dan is het echt veel'. (5)

Because there is no frequently and structured communication, six first line managers feel if they operate at their own island without any cooperation with the HR consultants within the organization.

Conclusions communication

First line managers are satisfied of the indirect communication with the HR director and the Shared Service Center. Therefore, it is more interesting to focus on the communication between the HR consultants and first line managers.

The results of the research show that the HR consultants know the availability of the HR handbook and HR specific training courses. However, it is interesting that they have no idea if first line managers use them or not. Besides this, every HR consultant has his/her own way of communicating with first line managers. There is no universal treatment concerning structured communication and information transmission.

However, first line managers who do not have frequent and structured communication are not informed and do not often use the HR handbook and HR specific training courses. They experience the unstructured communication as unpleasant and would like to communicate more frequently with their HR consultants, even in an informal way. As a consequence, those first line managers assess the communication as insufficient.

Because there is no frequent and structured communication, the cognitive structures of HR consultants and first line managers are not able to create overlap whereby I suggest that it results in different expectations regarding the HR performance of those HR parties.

5.1.2 Division of tasks

In this paragraph I will describe the results of the research about the division of tasks within the HR function and between the HR function and first line managers. The consistency and the understandability of the division of tasks are taken into consideration.

Division of tasks within the HR function

Consistency

The HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center and most of the HR consultants find the division of tasks within the HR function consistent. However, one HR consultant mentioned the division of tasks inconsistent. For instance, he/she reflects that HR consultants perform HR tasks concerning recruitment and selection, whereas it is a task of the central recruitment department. The reason to perform recruitment tasks is to shorten the recruitment procedure.

An HR consultant about performing recruitment: 'ik kan heel snel schakelen als vestiging met bureaus ... ik merk wel dat ik regelmatig de werving doe. Dan informeer ik recruitment waar ik mee bezig ben, maar eigenlijk zou ik mij daar ideaal gezien niet mee bezig moeten houden, dat moet recruitment doen'. (6)

The inconsistency in the division of tasks within the HR function is also caused by the past. In the past, the HR consultants of the organization had far-reaching autonomy. Today, the strategy of the organization is to create one organization with one system and two processes. For instance, it is no longer possible to develop HR systems concerning employee career development that applies for one establishment. Besides this, in the past, HR consultants performed operational HR activities whereas, today, first line managers are responsible for the operational HR tasks. However, those changes are not entirely incorporated in the organization. For example, one HR consultant performs more operational HR tasks than another HR consultant.

HR consultant: '...dat we op papier één bedrijf zijn, 11 vestigingen, business unit projecten, centrale techniek afdeling en een centrale SFH organisatie, 1 bedrijf, one company, maar dat we per saldo nog steeds een opsomming zijn van allerlei, heel verschillende bedrijfjes, die veel minder op elkaar lijken dan dat we elkaar doen geloven'. (7)

Two of three HR consultants mentioned that the HR function should be able to work more uniformly. However, according to one HR consultant, addressing each other on each others' responsibilities is not very confident in the organization.

Understandability

The HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center as well as the HR consultants find the division of tasks within the HR function understandable.

Division of tasks between HR function and first line managers

Consistency

Five of nine first line managers noticed the HR consultant as the HR function, whereas the HR function consists of the HR director, HR consultants and the Shared Service Center. According to seven first line managers, the division of tasks between first line managers and the HR function is consistent. They mentioned that the HR tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants and first line managers correspond in same situations. Two first line managers did not have an opinion about the consistency of the division of tasks. They have not worked as first line manager for long, whereby they have not experienced the same situations and could not conclude if the HR consultant uses same approaches.

Understandability

Seven of nine first line managers mentioned the division of tasks unclear. For instance, in advance, the division of tasks concerning staff absence is not clear for first line managers. They do not know the division of tasks between the HR consultants and first line managers concerning HR tasks beforehand.

First line manager: 'het is gewoon niet duidelijk, wie doet nou wat...duidelijkheid scheppen, ik denk dat daar alles om draait'. (8)

First line managers find the division of tasks unclear, because it is not explained what they exactly should do, why they should do it and what they can expect of the HR consultants in the implementation of HR activities. This applies for the HR responsibilities of first line managers as well as the HR responsibilities of HR consultants.

First line manager: 'eigenlijk is het (the HR responsibilities of the first line manager) nooit op het bord gevallen, er is nooit wat gezegd. Dat moesten we zelf ontdekken....maar ik had nog steeds in mijn achterhoofd de andere rol van HRM'. (9)

Today, first line managers use their own interpretations about the division of tasks of which they think they can expect of the HR performance of first line managers and of which they think they can expect of HR consultants. The role of the HR consultants is changed of an administrative role to a supporting role. However, still, some first line managers think that HR consultants are responsible for operational, administrative HR tasks.

First line managers: 'als je geen ondersteuning ontvangt, dan kun je zelf je eigen weg bepalen'. (10)

According to first line managers, based on previous research, the division of tasks becomes clearer. For instance, if first line managers have experiences in long-term staff absence and an employee becomes ill for a long-term, they probably know what their HR responsibilities are and which HR responsibilities can be expected of the HR consultant.

First line manager: 'wij moeten meer HRM taken gaan doen en functioneringsgesprekken zijn daar onderdeel van...dat is niet altijd duidelijk geweest. Dat is gegroeid vanuit de rol als teamleider...dat wordt eigenlijk, proefondervindend kom je daar achter, dat is een taak van mij.' (11)

First line managers experience the unclarity of the division of tasks between the HR function and first line managers as an hindrance. If it becomes more transparent, first line managers are able to specifically ask for support, because than they know which HR tasks are the responsibility of the HR consultant and which HR tasks are the responsibility of the first line manager.

Conclusions division of tasks

HR consultants find the division of tasks consistent and understandable, but doubting if first line managers have the same opinion. In fact, HR consultants should know whether first line managers have a clear picture of the division of tasks. Other interesting points of the results of the research are that first line managers see the HR function as only the HR consultant and find the division of tasks with the HR consultant consistent, but unclear. In advance, they do not exactly know what the HR tasks and responsibilities are of HR consultants and first line managers.

Because the division of tasks between HR consultants and first line managers is unclear, first line managers are able to use own interpretations regarding their HR responsibilities and the HR responsibilities of HR consultants. However, the interpretations of some first line managers are based on the 'old' operational, administrative role of HR consultants. This mainly leads to rather negative responses about the reputation of the HR function, such as:

First line manager: 'Een HR consultant doet niks voor onze afdeling en dat is gewoon jammer'. (12)

Because first line managers do not know the division of tasks between HR consultants and first line managers and because of this, use own interpretations about the division of tasks, I suggest that different expectations about the HR performance of the different HR parties exist.

5.1.3 Expectations

Both the unstructured communication and the unclear division of tasks within the organization might lead to different expectations about the HR performance of HR consultants and first line managers. In this paragraph I will demonstrate if those factors lead to different expectations of HR consultants and first line managers of Strukton Worksphere regarding the HR performance of the different HR parties. The expectations of the HR director and the director of the Shared Service Center are also taken into consideration.

Expectations of HR director

HR director's expectations of the HR performance of the Shared Service Center

The HR director expects of the Shared Service Center that they support HR consultants in the HR administration and take responsibility for all the administrative operations concerning the employment of people. Concerning cooperation and communication, the HR director expects interplay with the Shared Service Center regarding existing and new processes and administrative developments. The expectations about task interdependencies are based on the correct processing of the data so that realistic analyses can be made.

HR director's expectations of the HR performance of the HR consultants

The HR director expects of HR consultants that they facilitate and organize processes, coordinate communication, are involved at organization institution, the distribution of responsibilities, consultation structures and reward proportions, support and monitor the line and give demanded and unasked advice. Besides this, HR consultants should give first line managers the correct information, methods and resources so that first line managers can perform their operational HR tasks and responsibilities. If the HR consultants identify something which is in contrary to the strategy and purposes of the organization, they should indicate and discuss it instead of waiting until it is too late.

The HR director: '...de HR consultant, als die iets ziet, als de teamleider of de bedrijfsleider met een knoop in zijn buik rondloopt, dat je dan een stap naar voren durft te zetten.' (13)

Concerning cooperation and communication, the HR director expects of HR consultants that they work together in working parties, formed on the basis of specific HR areas like reward, in order to develop new procedures and discuss general HR subjects during the central HR conversations. The HR director expects task interdependencies, because he needs input from the HR consultants to reach a decision.

HR director's expectations of the HR performance of first line managers

The HR director expects of first line managers that they do not need any direct support from the HR director. He expects that first line managers stick to the rules and appointments, values and standard which have been established by the Executive Board. Besides this, first line managers should take responsibility for their own employees. For instance, first line managers should ensure that their employees actually follow training courses, take off appraisal conversations and job evaluation conversations, call employees if they are ill, accompany employees in the labour process and support their employees in their career development.

The HR director: 'als je teamleider heet, heb je ook een team, dus ben je ook verantwoordelijk voor dat team, nou gedraag je je er dan naar, ga niet zeggen; dat moet jij doen, dat moet jij doen.' (14)

However, this does not mean that first line managers know all the rules and laws regarding the several HR activities or that they know how to perform an appraisal conversation. The HR consultants can support first line managers in those issues.

The HR director expects no cooperation, communication or task interdependencies toward him from the first line managers.

Expectations of Shared Service Center

Shared Service Center's expectations of the HR performance of the HR director

Concerning the communication and cooperation, the director of the Shared Service Center expects that she can discuss exceptions, processes, striking data and modifications with the HR director whereby the HR director finally takes decisions. In this way, the director of the Shared Service Center expects tasks interdependencies with the HR director.

Shared Service Center's expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants

The Shared Service Center expects of HR consultants that they supply correct data and use correct forms, because the Shared Service Center should be nourished by the HR consultants. The director of the Shared Service Center expects of HR consultants that they identify if first line managers have problems or struggle with HR issues and undertake concrete actions to remedy it.

Concerning cooperation, the director of the Shared Service Center expects different kind of cooperation with HR consultants, because the support depends on the demands of HR consultants. For instance, one HR consultant finds it easy to work with administrative systems whereas another HR consultant finds it very difficult and needs more support from the Shared Service Center.

The communication with the HR consultants is expected to be open, because the Shared Service Center regards their relationship with the HR consultants as their 'sparring partners'.

Director of the Shared Service Center: 'wij horen bij HRM'. (15)

Concerning the task interdependency, the director of the Shared Service Center expects of HR consultants that they supply work in the right way, so that the employees of the Shared Service Center can optimally perform their tasks.

Shared Service Center's expectations of the HR performance of first line managers

The same as with the HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center expects that first line managers need no direct support of the Shared Service Center. However, the director of the Shared Service Center expects of first line managers that they contact the Shared Service Center for administrative questions if necessary. Before calling, first line managers should consult the HR handbook, because probably the answers of the questions have been described already.

Besides this, she expects of first line managers that they communicate their needs and wishes if they for instance need more support from the Shared Service Center. Because the Shared Service Center gives no direct support to first line managers, she expects no cooperation. Concerning task interdependencies, the director of the Shared Service Center have no idea what to expect of first line managers on this topic, because they do not reveal their needs.

Expectations of HR consultants

HR consultants' expectations of the HR performance of the HR director

The HR consultants expect that the HR director takes central decisions and is responsible for the HR strategy of the organization. Concerning the cooperation and communication, HR consultants expect that the HR director informs them about the strategy of the organization and supports them if necessary. For instance, if the Executive Board decides to pursue a certain direction, the HR director has to inform the HR consultants so that they can inform their management team. This is also a task interdependency. However, finally, the HR director determines what happens.

HR consultants' expectations of the HR performance of the Shared Service Center

The HR consultants expect of the Shared Service Center that they are responsible for the staff administration, staff mutations, absence administration, training recording, administrative support at recruitment and selection and monitoring processes. By centralizing the HR administration, two of three HR consultants mentioned that they have more time left to spend on making HR policies.

Concerning cooperation, HR consultants expect that the Shared Service Center provides information and answers administrative questions about for instance domestic regulations, jubilees and pension. HR consultants should ask for support and should receive support if necessary.

One of the HR consultants expects that the communication between the Shared Service Center and first line managers can be more efficient. Today, the Shared Service Center communicates information, which is relevant for first line managers, by means of the HR consultants. According to the HR consultant, information from the Shared Service Center about staff mutations and organizational regulations like applications for Parental Leave could also be transmitted directly to first line managers.

The HR consultants expect task interdependencies, because they are not able to perform the administrative HR tasks themselves. The ability to perform administrative HR tasks depends on the availability of time and the capabilities of the HR consultants.

HR consultants' expectations of the HR performance of first line managers

The HR consultants expect that first line managers are responsible for and can carry out job evaluation conversations, appraisal conversation, staff absence, employee career development, selection and personal development. They should show initiative to perform their HR responsibilities. This means that first line managers should ask for support if necessary. However, if they have questions concerning the implementation of operational HR activities, they should firstly have reflected and prepared the questioning before they ask the HR consultant for support.

HR consultant: 'gewoon er wordt ondersteuning gegeven als het gevraagd wordt'. (16)

The HR consultants expect that first line managers should be supported in taking difficult decisions and one of three HR consultants discusses the possibilities for HR specific training courses. However, the HR consultants expect that first line managers are committed to their HR tasks and responsibilities so that they feel responsible for performing the HR tasks themselves as much as possible. For instance, this means that first line managers should perform the appraisal conversations within the period they must be kept, they should act conform the procedures and do not ask HR consultants to implement operational HR tasks which in fact are the responsibilities of the first line managers.

Concerning cooperation, HR consultants and first line managers cooperate for example at issues regarding long-term staff absence, dismissal or official warning. The HR consultants expect two-way communication. However, it is mainly based on requested support. One of the HR consultants expects no task interdependencies. The other HR consultants expect task interdependencies based on the transmission of knowledge. For instance, first line managers can inform HR consultants about

HR issues that happen on the shop floor and HR consultants can transmit HR specific knowledge to first line managers whereby they are able to perform their HR activities.

Expectations of first line managers

First line managers' expectations of the HR performance of the HR director

First line managers expect no direct support of the HR director. They also expect no cooperation, communication and task interdependencies.

First line managers' expectations of the HR performance of the Shared Service Center

First line managers also expect no direct support of the Shared Service Center. However, two of nine first line managers expect that they receive extra information from the Shared Service Center compared to the information which their employees receive. For instance, they expect to be premature informed of the information which will be sent to their employees so that they can clarify information if it is necessary.

First line managers expect no cooperation and frequently communication. But if they have questions, they expect that the Shared Service Center supports them and gives clear answers. Concerning the task interdependencies, first line managers expect that their questions will be answered so that they are able to perform their HR tasks and responsibilities.

First line managers' expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants

First line managers expect requested support of HR consultants in HR issues. For instance, they expect support in appraisal conversations, staff absence conversations, taking difficult decisions, selection and recruitment if they ask for it.

First line manager: 'ik vind dat als je op dit niveau opereert, dat je niet afwachtend moet zijn (until you receive support)'. (17)

However, six of nine first line managers demanded more support from the HR consultants. They expect that HR consultants give feedback, show interest in the HR performance of first line managers and inform first line managers about their HR tasks and responsibilities.

Concerning feedback, only one of the first line managers perceives feedback from the HR consultants. First line managers expect feedback about the content of the appraisal forms, training courses and development of their employees, developments in the field of HR within the organization and current HR actions. Today, questions like, what happens with the information at the appraisal forms after it has been filled in? are the requested training courses approved? what are the circumstances concerning HR policies so that we can take it into account and manage employees in that direction in advance? are not answered. Regarding the results of the communication, those questions can be discussed if first line managers have frequent and structured communication.

Concerning showing interest in the HR performance of first line managers, one of the first line managers expects that HR consultants are jointly responsible for employee career development, because training and education are the spearheads of HRM within the organization. Because of this,

the first line manager expects that HR consultants show interest in career developments of his/her employees.

First line manager: 'we moeten alle trainingen zelf uitzoeken en daarin zou HRM denk ik wel een actievere (support) rol in kunnen spelen, omdat men het ook belangrijk vindt dat mensen op niveau blijven en ook nog wel op een hoger niveau komen.' (18)

Three of nine first line managers expect of HR consultants that they show interest in new employees and contact new employees concerning terms of employment. Besides this, six of nine first line managers expect that HR consultants should reduce the distance with the shop floor.

Concerning the explanations about first line managers' HR tasks and responsibilities, two of nine first line managers expect of the HR consultants that they inform them about first line managers' HR responsibilities and the HR responsibilities of the HR consultants. For instance, on the one hand, HR consultants should inform first line managers about what first line managers should do if an employee is not able to work or how they should perform staff absence conversations. On the other hand, HR consultants should inform first line managers about what HR consultants should do if those situations occur. This result is also in line with the results regarding the understandability of the division of tasks. HR consultants do not inform first line managers about the division of tasks, in advance. However, first line managers expect that HR consultants explain where 'the baton should be transferred'.

A first line manager's opinion concerning informing first line managers about the HR responsibilities of HR consultants and first line managers: 'we krijgen gewoon jaarlijks weer een envelop met beoordelingsformulieren, functioneringsformulieren over het muurtje gegooid.' (19)

According to first line manager, informing about first line managers' HR tasks and responsibilities should also be done if employees start in the function as first line manager.

First line manager: 'ik krijg mijn leidinggevende functie; functioneringsgesprekken, beoordelingsgesprekken, ziekteverzuim, loopbaanontwikkeling enzovoort; dit is hoe wij het doen, op die en die manier, dit is het beleid van de organisatie betreffende deze HR aspecten. Nee, dat in feite weet ik niet'. (20)

First line managers expect that they receive training and information packages for starting as a first line manager. Today, however, first line managers who have been carried on growing within the organization just started the function without any training courses or explanations about what is expected of them.

First line manager: 'dat is het vreemde, als je gewoon doorgroeit dan heb ik het idee dat ze (HR consultants) denken dat je alles weet'. (21)

Concerning cooperation, three of nine first line managers expect of HR consultants to be available. However, six of nine first line managers find the HR consultant difficult to contact. They expect cooperation regarding informing first line managers about HR policy and HR specific knowledge and informing HR consultants about the implementation of HR practices and HR issues on the shop floor in order to solve problems.

First line managers expect that HR consultants communicate the HR policy and the changes and developments in the field of HRM and organize evaluation conversations. For instance, first line managers want to know when you assess someone well or badly, which HR tasks they should perform, what the rules and regulations are and what the current actions are of the HR consultant in the field of recruitment.

First line manager: 'een manier van communiceren is ook zeggen wanneer je iets nog niet voor elkaar hebt'. (22)

Besides this, first line managers expect that HR consultants communicate the identified problems, also when the first line manager does something wrong. They should make it discussable which will create a feeling of trust and a back up for first line managers.

First line managers expect task interdependencies with the HR consultants, because they expect to need the HR knowledge about e.g. laws and regulations in order to perform their HR activities.

Conclusions expectations

Overall, the expectations of the HR performance within the HR function agree. As the results show, the main differences are perceived by the expectations of the HR performance between the HR consultants and first line managers. This is in line with the results of the communication and the division of tasks which also show dissatisfactions between HR consultants and first line managers. The expectations of the HR performance between HR consultants and first line managers are incorporated in table 3.

Operationalization expectations	Expectations of HR performance of first line managers by HR consultants	Expectations of HR performance of HR consultants by first line managers
Support regarding HR tasks	Ask for support Reflect and prepare questions Support in taking difficult decisions	Offer requested and proactive support Give feedback / organize evaluation conversations Showing interest in the HR performance of FLMs Informing FLMs about HR consultants' and first line managers' HR tasks and responsibilities
Cooperation	Cooperation in difficult situations like long-term staff absence, dismissal and official warnings	Cooperation in difficult situations Reachable
Communication	Requested two-way communication	Communicate the division of tasks Communicate developments in HRM Communicate identified problems
Task interdependencies	Transmission of knowledge	Transmission of knowledge

Table 3: Expectations of HR performance between HR consultants and first line managers

HR consultants and first line managers agreed about the requested support HR consultants offer to first line managers. However, the results show that first line managers expect more in terms of support. They find themselves responsible for operational HR tasks, but they expect of HR

consultants that they give feedback. Giving feedback can be done by organizing evaluation conversations. During the conversations, HR consultants are able to inform first line managers about the division of tasks, the developments in the field of Human Resource Management and communicate identified problems.

If we compare the results with the results regarding the communication, it can be noticed that the evaluation conversations stimulate the structured communication. HR consultants informing first line managers about their HR tasks and responsibilities are also in line with the results regarding the division of tasks. Today, first line managers find the division of tasks unclear. Because of that, they expect of HR consultants that they clearly describe the division of tasks towards first line managers.

Also, first line managers expect that HR consultants show interest in the HR performance of first line managers. This finding is in line with the results of the communication, because showing interest can be stimulated by organizing evaluation conversations. Besides this, showing interest is expected of HR consultants, because first line managers would like to experience a more personal approach by the use of informal conversations, as mentioned by the results regarding the communication.

The expectations about the cooperation between HR consultants and first line managers are the same. They both agree about the cooperation in difficult situations, like long-term staff absence, dismissal and official warnings. However, according to first line managers, HR consultants should be easy to contact. Again, if we look at the results of the communication we find out that first line managers experience unstructured communication as an hindrance whereby HR consultants are difficult to reach.

The expectations about task interdependencies between HR consultants and first line managers are the same. HR consultants as well as first line managers expect task interdependencies based on the transmission of knowledge. However, it is surprising that one HR consultant expects no task interdependencies with first line managers.

If we compare the results regarding the expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants and first line managers with the expectations of the HR director and the Shared Service Center towards HR consultants and first line managers, it can be noticed, that the HR director, just like first line managers, expect of HR consultants that they should give demanded and unasked advice whereas HR consultants only offer requested support. Besides this, according to the HR director, HR consultants should offer first line managers the right information, methods and resources to perform their operational HR tasks. But, today, first line managers are not able to perform their operational HR activities, because HR consultants do not inform first line managers about their HR tasks and responsibilities. Besides this, many first line managers are also not informed about the availability of HR specific training courses, as mentioned by the results of the communication between HR consultants and first line managers.

Moreover, the director of the Shared Service Center expects of the HR consultants that they identify if first line managers have problems or struggle with HR issues and undertake concrete actions to remedy it. Therefore, it is surprising that HR consultants only expect of first line managers that they should ask for support and the communication between the HR consultants and first line managers only takes place if it is requested. So, as the results regarding the expectations of the different HR parties show, first line manager as well as the HR director and the Shared Service Center expect of HR

consultants that they show interest in the HR performance of first line managers and support first line managers in the implementation of HR tasks and responsibilities.

Concluding, mainly the expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants and first line managers are not the same. Moreover, the expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants towards first line managers between the HR director, the Shared Service Center and first line managers agree for the most part. As a consequence, I suggest that the differences in the expectations of the HR performance between HR consultants and first line managers lead to a lack of support perceived by first line managers.

5.1.4 FLMs' perceived support

Because the HR director and the Shared Service Center do not directly support first line managers and the main differences are perceived in the expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants and first line managers, I will only discuss the results of the research regarding the offered support by HR consultants and the perceived received support by first line managers in this paragraph.

Offered support by HR consultants

Partnership

The HR consultants experience no partnership with first line managers. According to HR consultants, first line managers do not feel themselves committed to HRM. There are several HR procedures and processes described and HR consultants can support first line managers in the implementation of it, but there is no cooperation. According to the HR consultants, first line managers perform HR tasks, because it has to, it belongs to their jobs, but they do not feel committed to it. This is in line with the expectations of HR consultants that first line managers should be committed to their HR role.

HR consultant: 'als het woordje 'moeten' erin voorkomt (if first line managers should implement HR tasks) dan heb ik zo iets van; volgens mij hebben wij geen partnership'. (23)

Two of three HR consultants do not aim to look for partnership with first line managers, because they consciously attempt to create partnership with the management team of the establishment or entity. This depends upon the opinions about the position of the HR consultant in the organization. HR consultants do not need partnership with first line managers, because they believe that their target group is the management team of the establishment or entity. For instance, they cooperate with the management team about organizational developments. However, one of the HR consultants doubt if it is right that he/she only creates partnership with the management team of the establishment or entity.

HR consultant: '...ik weet niet of het goed is, ik ga veel nadrukkelijker met het hoger management het partnership aan'. (24)

Monitoring

Concerning monitoring, one of the HR consultants indicates that he/she ensures monitoring. For instance, it concerns monitoring that operational HR tasks remains in the line as much as possible. Monitoring is mainly showed during conversations with first line managers in which the conditions of

the accomplishments of their HR tasks and responsibilities are discussed. However, as the results of the communication show, HR consultants mainly do not organize evaluation conversations.

Another HR consultant mentioned that HR consultants do not control whether first line managers show the right behavior. For instance, if a first line manager followed a training course, after finishing that course, the HR consultant does not monitor whether he/she actually shows the learned skills in practice. Two of three HR consultants also mentioned that if you control first line managers and you notice that he/she does not function well, the organization has no procedure to settle accounts with first line managers.

Advice

All HR consultants indicate that the offered support consists of giving advice to first line managers, of which one of the HR consultants said that by definition giving advice is unasked. However, advice is mainly given during conversations which normally are requested by first line managers. HR consultants give advice regarding all the HR responsibilities of first line managers, like advice regarding selection, training courses, appraisal conversations, job evaluation conversations and staff absence. For instance, HR consultants give advice about how first line managers start conversations with their employees, whether first line managers can increase the salary of an employee and how they should perform job evaluation conversations.

Offered support regarding HR tasks

Concerning job evaluation conversations and appraisal conversation, HR consultants offer support in preparing conversations if it is demanded and by giving information about the function profiles, salary scales and required competences. First line managers are trained in performing the conversations with their employees. When the conversations should be performed, HR consultants ask first line managers if they need support from them.

Concerning recruitment and selection, first line managers are not responsible for the recruitment of new employees, so they need no support of the HR consultant in this area. The HR consultants cooperation with the manager of the establishment regarding recruitment. According to HR consultants, first line managers also need no support in selection conversations. First line managers should be able to perform the conversations themselves. However, if they need support, they should ask for it.

All HR consultants mentioned that they offer support in the procedure of staff absence if it is required. However, first line managers should indicate their needs. One of the HR consultants expresses that he/she helps first line managers in the analysis of staff absence. Besides this, first line managers are primary responsible for the employee career developments, but they can be supported in the preparation of the conversations. One of the HR consultants mentioned that only support is offered in employee career development which applies for a long period. For instance, the support is offered by informing first line managers about the career opportunities within the organization.

Concerning leadership, personal development and giving feedback, HR consultants offer support in order to develop first line managers in their HR role. For instance, HR consultants frequently insist first line managers to actually implement HR tasks instead of HR consultants taking over the HR responsibilities of first line managers. Besides this, HR consultants can be present at conversations in

order to give feedback concerning how the first line manager performed their HR task. For those aspects also applies that first line managers should indicate what kind of support they need from the HR consultants.

If first line managers should take difficult decisions, HR consultants offer support in terms of discussing the issue and the opportunities. The HR consultants can act as a mediator or sparring partner if it is asked.

Perceived received support by FLMs

Partnership

Three of nine first line managers experience partnership with their HR consultant. They mentioned that they feel connected to the HR consultant. He/she offers information if necessary and if the HR consultant does not know the answer, he/she will ask other HR consultants or employees in the organization for support. For instance, those first line managers experience cooperation with the HR consultant regarding staff absence and the assumption of new employees. Moreover, those first line managers also have structured communication with their HR consultant.

However, six of nine first line managers experience no partnership with their HR consultant. They do not feel connected to the HR consultant and experience no cooperation. Those first line managers experience the lack of partnership as an hindrance for the implementation of HR tasks and responsibilities, because they have the feeling that they operate without any back-up from the HR consultants.

First line managers about his/her HR consultant: 'je moet die man weten te vinden, hij is ondersteunend aan ons, dus wat dat betreft, moet dat gewoon een vrije relatie zijn...wat dat betreft hebben we gewoon een eigen eilandje, daar lijkt het tenminste wel op'. (25)

First line managers who experience no partnership have also no structured communication with their HR consultant whereby it also might be more difficult to create partnership.

Monitoring

Three first line managers assume that HR consultants monitor their HR performance regarding the implementation of HR tasks whereas six first line managers experience no monitoring. Monitoring is assumed regarding the delivery of correct employee data in time and the conditions of the accomplishments of their HR responsibilities. Today, first line managers who do not experience monitoring, gladly would like to experience it in the form of evaluation conversations about the condition of the accomplishments of their HR responsibilities.

First line manager: '...als ik afspraken met mensen heb gemaakt voor een bepaalde opleiding, dat er vanuit HRM ook een toetsingsmoment komt van; hé hoe is dat nou geregeld, is dat met elkaar afgesproken, we hebben nog niks gezien, zet je dat ook in gang.' (26)

Again, those first line managers have no structured communication with their HR consultants.

Advice

Regarding advice, three of nine first line managers perceive no advice from the HR consultant.

The answer of a first line manager whether the HR consultant gives advice: 'Nee, helemaal niets, nul komma nul, nul, nul, niks. Het klinkt misschien vreemd, maar dat is wat er gebeurd'. (27)

However, for instance, those first line managers would like to perceive advice regarding the selection of new employees to inform them about working conditions. The other first line managers perceive advice if it is requested regarding their HR tasks and responsibilities. For instance, they perceive advice regarding the opportunities if an employee is absent for a long term, the selection procedure and observed problems on the shop floor. Six of nine first line managers experience no proactive advice from the HR consultants in terms of calling first line managers or sending messages to them in order to offer unasked advice.

Perceived support regarding HR tasks

Concerning job evaluation conversations and appraisal conversations, first line managers perceive support in terms of receiving information about how to perform the conversations. First line managers can ask for support if necessary. All first line managers have followed training courses about how to perform the job evaluation conversations and appraisal conversations. First line managers also perceive support from the manager of the establishment or entity regarding the assessment of their employees.

Concerning recruitment and selection, first line managers receive no support. If first line managers notice that employees are interested in vacancies within the organization, they will inform their HR consultants. Three of nine first line managers mentioned that the preparing of contracts is performed by the secretariat of the HR consultant instead of the HR consultant. Those first line managers contact the secretariat if they have questions about working conditions.

The perceived support regarding staff absence is mainly based on requested support. This also applies for the support regarding employee career developments and personal developments. For instance, first line managers ask for support if they notice problems or if they want to know the opportunities for employees to move on in the organization. Three of nine first line managers ask the secretariat of the HR consultant for support regarding staff absence. Besides this, six of nine first line managers perceive no support regarding leadership and feedback.

First line managers ask the HR consultant to discuss the current situation with each other before they have to take difficult decisions. First line managers can also ask the HR consultants to be present at the conversation and act as an independent person so that they can support or give directions during the conversation if it is necessary. However, first line managers should ask for support if it is demanded regarding taking difficult decisions.

Conclusions FLMs' perceived support

The HR director and the Shared Service Center do not directly support first line managers which is in line with the first line managers' opinions that they do not expect direct support of the HR director and the Shared Service Center.

The results of first line managers' perceived support is shown in table 4. The expectations of support regarding HR tasks of HR consultants by first line managers are also incorporated in the table in order to be able to compare both results.

Variables	Offered support by HR consultants	Perceived received support by first line managers	Expected support by first line managers
Partnership	No partnership	No partnership	Partnership
Monitoring	Monitoring	No monitoring	Monitoring
Advice	Advice	Advice	Advice
Support regarding HR tasks	Offering requested support	Receiving requested support	Offer requested support Give feedback / organize evaluation conversations Showing interest in the HR performance of FLMs Informing FLMs about HR consultants' and first line managers' HR tasks and responsibilities

Table 4: First line managers' perceived support compared to the expectations of support regarding HR tasks of HR consultants by first line managers.

It can be noticed that HR consultants and first line managers have different opinions about partnership, monitoring and advice. Concerning partnership, HR consultants do not create partnership with first line managers, because they are focused on the management team of their establishment of entity. However, first line managers, who do not have structured communication, perceive no partnership, but they expect it of HR consultants.

Concerning monitoring, HR consultants monitor first line managers, but most first line managers do not perceive it. Three of nine first line managers perceive monitoring during the evaluation conversations. As a result, first line managers who do not have structured communication do not perceive monitoring, but would like to experience it. This is also related to the expectations of HR consultants by first line managers regarding showing interest in first line managers' HR performance.

Concerning advice, HR consultants mentioned that they give advice to first line managers, whereas six of nine first line managers experienced it. Three first line managers experience no advice of the HR consultants and experience it as an hindrance in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of the organization. However, comparing to the results of the expectations, first line managers do not receive advice if they do not ask for it.

In general, the offered support regarding HR tasks mentioned by HR consultants and the perceived support regarding HR tasks mentioned by first line managers are the same. Both HR parties agree that HR consultants receive requested support. However, a striking result is that first line managers also perceive support from the secretariat of an HR consultant regarding employee contracts and

staff absence, whereas other HR consultants offer the support regarding employee contracts or staff absence themselves. This finding is based on the different working methods of the HR consultants. The different working methods of the HR consultants are also shown in the communication. Some HR consultants prefer face-to-face contact with their first line managers whereas other HR consultants only have contact by phone or e-mail.

However, as the results of the expectations show, first line managers are not satisfied about the perceived requested support of HR consultants. They expect more unasked support in terms of giving feedback, showing interest in the HR performance of first line managers and informing first line managers about their HR tasks and the HR tasks of the HR consultants. Therefore, it can be concluded that first line managers perceive a lack of support, because they expect more support of the HR consultants than they actually offer.

Table 4 gave a general overview of the results regarding first line managers perceived support. In the next paragraph, the results of the different factors will be discussed by business unit.

5.2 Results interviews by business unit

The results of the research show differences between the several business units of the organization. In this paragraph the results are shown divided by business unit.

First line managers' opinions about the different factors that determine the perceived lack of support by first line managers divided by business units 'Service, Management & Maintenance', 'Projects' and 'Technique' are shown in table 3.

	Business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance'	Business unit 'Projects'	Business unit 'Technique'
Communication	Informed about handbook Informed about training courses Structured communication	Informed about handbook Not informed about training courses Unstructured communication Shorter information transmission	Informed about handbook Not informed about training courses Unstructured communication
Division of tasks	Consistent Unclear	Consistent Unclear	Consistent Unclear
Expectations HR performance of the HR consultants	Offering requested support Informing FLMs about HR consultants' and first line managers' HR tasks and responsibilities	Offering requested support Give feedback Showing interest in the HR performance of FLMs Informing FLMs about HR consultants' and first line managers' HR tasks and responsibilities Reachable Communicate developments in HRM and identified problems	Offering requested support Giving feedback Showing interest in the HR performance of FLMs Informing FLMs about HR consultants' and first line managers' HR tasks and responsibilities Reachable Communicate developments in HRM and identified problems
FLM's perceived support	Partnership Monitoring Advice Perceive requested support	No partnership No monitoring No advice Perceive requested support	No partnership No monitoring Advice Perceive requested support

Table 5: Distinction by business unit

Generally, first line managers of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' are rather positive about the HR consultants. They are informed about the availability and use of an HR handbook and HR specific training courses, they have structured communication, they find the division of tasks consistent, feel a partnership with the HR consultant, receive advice and are monitored. However, they do not understand the division of tasks whereby they expect of HR

consultants that they are to be informed about the HR tasks and responsibilities of first line managers and HR consultants within the organization.

The first line managers of the business unit 'Projects' express themselves less positive about the HR consultants. They are not informed about HR specific training courses, have unstructured communication, have the opinion that the information transmission between HR consultants and first line managers can be shorter and find the division of tasks unclear. Besides this, first line managers expect of the HR consultant to give feedback, show interest, inform them about the division of tasks, communicate developments in the field of HRM and communicate identified problems. First line managers also experience no partnership, monitoring and advice. However, first line managers are positive about the availability of an HR handbook, the consistency of the division of tasks and the offering of support when asked for.

The first line managers of the business unit 'Technique' are also more negative about the HR consultants. On the one hand, they are not informed about HR specific trainings courses, have unstructured communication, find the division of tasks unclear, expect more support and contact with the HR consultants, receive no feedback and experience no partnership and monitoring. On the other hand, they are informed about the availability of an HR handbook, find the division of tasks consistent and receive support and advice of the HR consultant if it is asked.

The positive value states of the first line managers of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' and the negative value states of the first line managers of the business unit 'Projects' and 'Technique' are caused by different factors. First, the research shows that the structured communication has influence on the value states of first line managers. First line managers who have structured communication do not expect of HR consultants that they should give more feedback, show interest and should be easier to reach. The structured communication ensures that those aspects happen.

Second, the perceived support not only depends on the offered support by the HR consultants, first line managers have to play a part in it as well. There should be an interaction between HR consultants and first line managers. On the one hand, if a first line manager never expresses his/her needs, the HR consultant might not be able to offer them. On the other hand, if the HR consultant never expresses his/her HR responsibilities, the first line manager is not able to know what to expect of him/her in terms of support. However, if HR consultants only focus on the management team of the establishment or entity, interaction with first line managers would not be stimulated. The use of HR consultants' own interpretations regarding the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants leads to different expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants which in turn influence the perceived support by first line managers.

Third, the presence of the HR consultants at the establishment or entity plays an important role as well. In the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance', the HR consultant is present on the establishment every day, whereas the HR consultants of the other business units are not always present on the shop floor because they are responsible for several establishments. According to first line managers of the business units 'Projects' and 'Technique', the presence of the HR consultants is related to the perceived support by first line managers. First line managers have to call the HR consultants to make an appointment and they are not able to have face-to-face contact with the HR consultant every day.

First line manager: 'we hebben hier geen HR zitten en dat vind ik raar. Als hij hier nou echt fysiek 1 of 2 dagen zit, ...dat je even naar hem toe kan lopen (to ask for support)'. (28)

Concluding, the results show that there are differences in the perceived support by first line managers and the offered support by HR consultants between the several business units which are caused by the factors that are examined. However, the differences are probably not only caused by the unstructured communication and the unclear division of tasks, but also caused by different circumstances such as the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants and the presence of the HR consultant in the establishment or entity.

5.3 Results document analysis of function profiles

The results of the document analysis of function profiles show if the contents of the HR tasks and responsibilities are clearly described in advance, which will improve the understandability of the division of tasks between the different HR parties. The results of the interviews show that the HR director and the Shared Service Center give no direct support to first line managers. Therefore, only the function profiles of the HR consultants and the first line managers will be discussed.

Function profile of HR consultants

Generally, the function profile of the HR consultants describes that HR consultants are responsible for the co-ordination, monitoring and implementation of the Human Resource policy for part of the organization. The HR consultants are considered to work within the determined frameworks. Within those frameworks, they can give an own interpretation with small or indirect supervision. So, the HR consultants are rather autonomous concerning how they fill in their multifaceted and complex HR role. Because HR consultants are able to use own interpretations, it is not surprising that HR consultants use different working methods which will not stimulate the understandability of the division of tasks.

Function profile of first line managers

The function profile of the first line managers describes that first line managers accompany HR matters for their own group and are possibly supported by the HR consultant with this. This only applies for first line managers with approximately 5 to 10 employees. The function profile for first line managers with approximately 15 employees does not appoint the possibility to receive support by the HR consultant. However, the function profile does not describe the kind of support first line managers will receive regarding HR tasks.

Conclusions function profiles

So, the function profiles do not clearly describe which HR tasks the HR consultants are responsible for and how this is related to the HR tasks of the first line managers. This also does not become clear in the function profile of the first line managers. The function profile of first line managers describes the possibility to receive support from the HR consultants. However, it is interesting to notice that it mentions a possibility, so it would not determine that first line managers actually receive support and what the content of the support should be. Besides this, the use of own interpretations with small or indirect supervision by HR consultants would not stimulate the understandability of the division of tasks. Concluding, it is not clearly described whether first line managers should receive support, what kind of support they should receive and if they should ask for it.

6. Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the results of the research. The results of the research show that the ineffective communication and the unclear division of tasks between the HR function and first line managers lead to different expectations about the HR performance of HR consultants and first line managers which in turn influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers. Besides this, the results of the research also show that the multifaceted and complex role of HR consultants and the presence of HR consultants within their establishments influence the perceived lack of support.

Regarding the communication, first line managers of the business units 'Projects' and 'Technique' have no frequent and structured communication whereas it was expected of the HR consultants. However, overall, first line managers of the business unit 'Service, Management and Maintenance' are rather positive about the communication with their HR consultant, because they have frequent and structured communication. For instance, the HR consultant of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' organizes evaluation conversations and gives feedback. This finding is in line with Koeleman (1997), who stated that structured communication is important for the effectiveness of the communication.

Regarding the division of tasks, the division of tasks between the HR consultants and first line managers is consistent, but unclear. Therefore, first line managers and HR consultants are not able to form a collective sense of what is expected of them. This finding is in line with Koeleman (1997) and Bowen and Ostroff (2004), who stated that if the organization creates a shared understanding about the division of tasks and what is described also happens, employees are able to form a collective sense of what is expected of them. However, it can be discussed that the unclarity of the division of tasks and the ineffective communication might also influence each other.

The division of tasks might be unclear for first line managers, because it is not well communicated. This is related to the results of the research which show that first line managers expect of HR consultants that they inform them about the HR tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants and first line managers. Therefore, unstructured communication might influence the fact that first line managers find the division of tasks unclear, because if first line managers and HR consultants frequently communicate with each other about the division of tasks, a collective sense about the division of tasks can be created.

However, first line managers of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance', who have structured communication, also find the division of tasks unclear and expect of HR consultants that they also inform them about the division of tasks. Therefore, overall, it can be concluded that the unclarity of the division of tasks is caused by the fact that HR consultant do not communicate it with first line managers. However, the reason that HR consultants do not communicate the division of tasks might be that they do not know that they are responsible for communicating the division of tasks to first line managers.

HR consultants might think that first line managers know their HR tasks and responsibilities and the HR tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants, because it should be described in the function profiles. However, the research shows that the descriptions in the function profiles about the HR performance of HR consultants and first line managers are unclear. The function profiles do not

clearly describe what kind of support HR consultants should offer, whether first line managers should receive support, what kind of support they should receive and whether they should ask for it.

Because of the unstructured communication and the unclear division of tasks, HR consultants and first line managers are not able to create collective expectations. As a consequence, HR consultants and first line managers use own interpretations of their HR performance and the HR performance of other HR parties.

The use of own interpretations should not be a problem if the interpretations between the different HR parties agree. This is also shown in the results of the research. The results regarding the expectations between the HR performance of the HR director, the Shared Service Center and first line managers correspond. On the one hand, first line managers not expect direct support from the HR director and the Shared Service Center. On the other hand, the HR director and the Shared Service Center not expect of first line managers that they need direct support of them. However, the results show that there are different interpretations about the HR performance of the HR consultants and first line managers. For instance, first line managers expect of HR consultants that they offer requested and proactive support, whereas HR consultants only offer support when asked. As a consequence, first line managers perceive a lack of support from the HR consultants.

In advance, based on the structure of the HR function of Strukton Worksphere, the researcher determined that the communication, the division of tasks and the expectations of the HR performance of the HR function and first line managers influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers. However, the results of the research show that more factors influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere, which are not determined in advance.

First, the results show that the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of the HR consultants of Strukton Worksphere is a very important determinant for the different expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants and first line managers. At Strukton Worksphere, HR consultants are responsible for both operational activities as well as strategic activities. The strategic tasks and responsibilities of the HR consultants differ. For instance, one HR consultant is responsible for training and development within the organization, whereas another HR consultant is responsible for reward strategies and structures. Besides the strategic portfolio, HR consultants are members of the management team of their establishments within the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' or of the business unit 'Projects' or the business unit 'Technique'. Besides this, HR consultants also operate at the operational level of the organization by offering support to first line managers in performing their operational HR tasks and responsibilities.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the HR consultants have no main role to perform which makes it multifaceted and complex. For instance, HR consultants are both the 'Change Agent' and the 'Employee Champion' as defined by Ulrich (1997). HR consultants deliver organizational transformation and culture change and they maximize employee commitment and competence.

However, if we compare this finding with the roles of the HR director and the Shared Service Center, it becomes clear that they have to perform just one role. The HR director helps to successfully execute HR strategy and meet customer needs. Therefore, he can be described as the 'Strategic Partner' (Ulrich, 1997). Besides this, the Shared Service Center operates as the 'Administrative

'Expert', because they constantly improve organizational efficiency by reengineering the HR function and other work processes.

The results of the research show that the HR performance of HR consultants differs and that they experience some tensions in the fulfillment of their role as both the 'Change Agent' and the 'Employee Champion'. For instance, two of three HR consultants mainly focus on the management team of their establishments and conscious attempt to create partnership with them, whereas one HR consultant tries to create partnership with his/her first line managers. Besides this, first line managers also expect partnership with HR consultants and they expect of HR consultants that they reduce distance on the shop floor. For instance, they desire to experience cooperation with HR consultants regarding staff absence and the assumption of new employees. Six of nine first line managers experience the lack of partnership as a hindrance for the implementations of HR tasks and responsibilities. They argue that they operate without any back-up from the HR consultants in the organization.

To what extent HR consultants should operate as 'Change Agent' or as 'Employee Champion' is not clear. For instance, it is not clear how much time HR consultants should spend on performing their role as 'Change Agent' and how much time they should spend on performing their role as 'Employee Champion'. For example, one HR consultant uses the secretary to support first line managers in the implementation of HR practices, whereby he/she creates more time to spend on his/her role as 'Change Agent'. However, other HR consultants support first line managers in the implementation of HR practices themselves.

The tensions in the fulfillment of the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of the HR consultants at Strukton Worksphere are also examined by Caldwell (2003). He focused on role ambiguity and role conflict between the different roles as mentioned by Storey (1992) and Ulrich (1997). Role ambiguity arises from tensions between expected, perceived and enacted roles, and the processes of 'role conflict' that often emerge when a person performs more than one role. The HR consultants might deal with an inter-role conflict which arises when the performance or execution of one or more roles comes into conflict with that of others. This might cause discrepancies in performance, competing demands and potential role overload. For instance, HR consultants might be overloaded with strategic HR activities whereby they have no time left to spend on their operational tasks and responsibilities. In order to perform the operational activities, HR consultants might have chosen to outsource those activities to the secretary.

As a consequence, HR consultants use own interpretations regarding their fulfillment of their role which leads to differences in the HR performances between HR consultants. Therefore, it is difficult to create a collective sense of what is expected of the HR performance of HR consultants within the organization which leads to a perceived lack of support by first line managers.

Because it is difficult to create a collective sense of what is expected of the HR performance of HR consultants, first line managers are also able to use own interpretations regarding their HR performance. For instance, if first line managers expect of the HR consultant that he/she informs them about the division of tasks, first line managers would probably not ask the HR consultant to explain the division of tasks in the first place. As a consequence, first line managers are able to use own interpretations regarding their HR tasks and responsibilities, which in turn leads to differences in

the HR performances between first line managers. It can be assumed that first line managers might interpret the division of tasks based on experiences in the past.

In the past, HR consultants performed at the operational level of the organization and were responsible for administrative HR tasks. Approximately two years ago, the HR performance of HR consultants in the organization became more business orientated, whereby first line managers became responsible for operational, day-to-day HR tasks. However, on average, first line managers working as first line managers in the organization for approximately seven years. Therefore, it is possible that they do not yet take up their new role, because they have worked as a first line manager in another setting for quite a long period.

Perhaps, first line managers of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' are further in the development towards the new role of first line managers instead of the first line managers of the other business units. Therefore, it might be not surprising that the first line managers of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' are more positive about the HR consultant, than first line managers of the business unit 'Projects' and the business unit 'Technique'. However, it is remarkable that all first line managers did not question the fact that they are responsible for operational HR tasks.

Second, besides the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants within Strukton Worksphere, the results of the research show that the perceived lack of support by first line managers are also influenced by the presence of HR consultants within their establishments.

In general, it is remarkable that first line managers of the business unit 'Projects' and the business unit 'Technique' are less positive about the factors which determine the perceived support by first line managers, compared with the first line managers of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance'. From the results of the research became clear that the presence of HR consultants within their establishments plays an important role in the value states of first line managers regarding the perceived support.

In the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' the HR consultant is present at his/her establishment every day, whereby first line managers are able to contact the HR consultant easy to ask for support. First line managers also expect of HR consultants that they are reachable. However, the HR consultants of the business units 'Projects' and the business unit 'Technique' are not present at their establishments regularly which leads to rather negative responses of first line managers. Those first line managers argued that they operate at their own island and have bad reputations of the HR function.

If the HR consultant is present at their establishment at least once a week, first line managers are able to contact the HR consultant easier to have face-to-face contact and to ask questions in order to support them in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere.

So, I found out that the factors which determine the perceived support by first line managers are comparable with what the literature suggested. However, not only the unstructured communication and the unclear division of tasks within the organization influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers, the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants and the presence of HR consultants within their establishments also lead to a perceived lack of support by

first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere.

7. Conclusion and limitations

7.1 Conclusion

The qualitative research offered valuable insights in the factors that determine the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere. The researcher hypothesized that the communication and the factual partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities between the HR function and first line managers influence the expectations of the HR performance of all HR parties concerned. If the expectations of the HR performance regarding the offered support by the HR function, the received support by first line managers, cooperation, communication and task interdependencies not correspond, first line managers perceive a lack of support by the HR function.

The communication between the HR function and first line managers consists of the availability and use of an HR handbook and HR specific training courses, the frequency and consistency of the communication, direct and indirect communication and the assessment of the communication. The division of tasks between the HR function and first line managers consists of the consistency and understandability of task interdependencies. The determined factors are examined by the use of an interview protocol and a document analysis of the function profiles of HR consultants and first line managers. The HR director, the director of the Shared Service Center, and HR consultants and first line managers of the business units 'Service, Management & Maintenance', 'Projects' and 'Technique' participated in the research.

The results concerning research question 1: 'what does the HR function expect of the HR performance by first line managers at Strukton Worksphere' show that the HR function expects of first line managers that they show initiative to perform their HR tasks and responsibilities in which they can be supported by HR consultants. The HR director and the Shared Service Center give no direct support to first line managers. According to HR consultants, first line managers should reflect and prepare their questions before they ask for support. HR consultants can act as a mediator or sparring partner in difficult situations like long-term staff absence, dismissal and official warnings if it is requested. Overall, HR consultants are willing to offer requested support, monitoring and advice.

The results concerning research question 2: 'What do first line managers expect of the HR performance by the HR function at Strukton Worksphere' show that, on the one hand, first line managers expect and receive no direct support from the HR director and the Shared Service Center. On the other hand, they expect HR consultants to offer requested and proactive support, show interest in the HR performance of first line managers, give feedback and inform them about the division of tasks, the development in the field of Human Resource Management and the identified problems. However, if mentioned before, HR consultants are only willing to provide requested support.

The communication and the partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities between HR consultants and first line managers influence the determined differences in the expectations of their HR performances. Every HR consultant has his/her own way of communicating with first line managers. However, the results show that first line managers who do not have frequent and structured communication are not informed and do not often use the HR handbook and HR specific training courses. They would like to communicate more frequently with their HR consultants, even in an informal way. Because of this, for instance, HR consultants are easier to reach, are able to show interest in the HR performance of first line managers, give feedback and inform them about their HR tasks and responsibilities.

Information about the partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities within the organization is expected by first line managers, because they do not exactly know the HR tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants and first line managers. However, they find it consistent, but unclear. As a result, first line managers use own interpretations regarding their HR performance and the HR performance of HR consultants which are mainly based on experiences in the past.

The results of the research show that, besides the ineffective communication and the unclarity of the HR tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants and first line managers, the rather vague ideas about the HR performance of HR consultants and first line managers are also influenced by the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants. HR consultants are both responsible for operational activities as well as strategic activities which lead to tensions in the fulfillment of their HR role. Some HR consultants are mainly focused on the management team of their establishments and try to create partnership with them, whereas another HR consultant tries to create partnership with first line managers. The multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants is also not clearly described in the function profiles.

The results of the research do not only show differences between the HR parties involved, but also differences between the several business units of Strukton Worksphere are examined. Generally, first line managers of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' are rather positive about their HR consultant, whereas first line managers of the business units 'Projects' and 'Technique' experience the HR performance of their HR consultants as less positive. The results show that the communication and the presence of the HR consultants in their establishment influence the value states of first line managers. If an HR consultant offers frequently and structured communication and he/she is present at their establishment at least once a week, first line managers can easier contact him/her in order to ask for support.

The different expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants and first line managers lead to different opinions about partnership, monitoring and advice which determine the perceived support by first line managers. For instance, first line managers expect partnership with HR consultants because they are both responsible for the Human Resource Management of the organization, whereas HR consultants try to create partnership with the management team of their establishment or entity. Some first line managers perceive support from the secretary of an HR consultant regarding employee contracts and staff absence, whereas other HR consultants offer that kind of support themselves. As a result, first line managers expect more support from HR consultants than they actually receive, which, in turn, leads to a perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere.

7.2 Research limitations

The methodology I adopted permitted a direct test of my assumptions about the factors that might determined the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere. However, the research also has some limitations that should be noted.

First, the research used an interview protocol to collect data for the research. The limitations of an interview protocol is the possibility to use own interpretations. For instance, the researcher might weight information from mature and well informed participants more heavily, whereas information from less mature participants might be underrepresented. However, the researcher has attempted to work as systematic as possible by analyzing the results based on the operationalization and by the use of a maximized sample to stimulate the reliability of the research.

Second, the HR director had a say in choosing a research location within the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' and the HR consultants had a say in choosing first line managers. With this, the HR director and the HR consultants were able to choose employees who, for instance, are very active in implementing HR activities and need less support from the HR consultants. This might stimulate desired answers as a result of which unrealistic conclusions could be drawn. The researcher tried to counteract this by emphasizing on the usefulness of the research for the organization towards all participants.

Finally, it is possible that during the research, which took place during June and July 2008, participants became biased by communicating about the interview topics with other participants. This might ensure that participants take over opinions of others, whereby arguments might emerge stronger than that they actually are. For instance, a first line manager might interpret the observed events about the perceived support as more representative than they actually are, because he/she knows that other first line managers have the same opinion about that specific event. Participants might lose their own perspective and judgment capability by taking over opinions and interpretations of others.

Although the qualitative research shows some limitations, it provides us with a valuable insight into the central research question: 'which factors determine the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere'. It can be concluded that ineffective communication and a unclear partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities between HR consultants and first line managers, the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants and the presence of HR consultants in their establishments influence the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of operational HR practices at Strukton Worksphere.

8. Recommendations

In this chapter I will describe the recommendations of the research in order to counteract the perceived lack of support by first line managers in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere. The recommendations consist of organizing evaluation conversations by HR consultants and changing the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants and the presence of HR consultants in their establishments.

8.1 Evaluation conversations

To stimulate the communication between HR consultants and first line managers, HR consultants should organize frequent and structured evaluation conversations with their first line managers once per quarter. In the evaluation conversation, a team, which consists of the HR consultant and his/her first line managers, should be present.

In this way, on the one hand, HR consultants are able to inform first line managers about the developments in the field of Human Resource Management and the partitioning of HR tasks and responsibilities between HR consultants and first line managers, show interest in the HR performance of first line managers and give feedback. On the other hand, first line managers are able to express their needs for support. Approximately, the evaluation conversation could last one hour.

Costs	Benefits
- Preparation time for the HR consultant - Labour time (one hour per quarter)	- Stimulate two-way communication - Cooperation between first line managers and between the line and HR consultants - Ability to clarify the tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants and first line managers - Ability to create partnership - Ability to create collective expectations - HR consultants are easier to reach - HR consultants are able to offer desired support to first line managers - First line managers are able to express their needs for support

Table 6: costs and benefits of evaluation conversations

Fixed bullet times per quarter should be chosen by the HR consultants in which the evaluation conversations should take place. Because of this, HR consultants and first line managers know the date, time and place of the evaluation conversations and can take it into account far in advance. This will stimulate the attendance of all HR parties concerned.

So, in proportion, the costs of the evaluation conversations are low. On the contrary, the benefits of organizing the conversations are high. The evaluation conversations ensure two-way communication and cooperation between HR consultants and first line managers. HR consultants are able to discuss the tasks and responsibilities of the HR parties involved in order to make it understandable. They are easier to reach for first line managers and can offer the desired support to them. This will also stimulate the creation of partnership between HR consultants and first line managers. Because of this, first line managers will no longer experience that they perform on their own island.

As a result, HR consultants' expectations and first line managers' expectations can be accomplished whereby first line managers will no longer experience a perceived lack of support from the HR consultants.

8.2 Multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants

Differences about the HR performances of HR consultants and first line managers are influenced by the fulfillment of the tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants at Strukton Worksphere. Nowadays, HR consultants have both strategic as well as operational tasks and responsibilities which lead to unclear expectations regarding the fulfillment of their role.

In order to make their position within Strukton Worksphere clearer, the organization should split up the advisable/supportive activities of an HR consultant from the strategic activities. HR consultants should deliver organizational transformations and culture change or they should be responsible for maximizing employee commitment and competence.

In order to split up the role of HR consultants, the organization should create a clear picture of the quantity of hours which are put in, both the strategic and operational HR tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants. If the total hours are classified based on the strategic and operational HR tasks and responsibilities, the hours can be divided between the existing HR consultants. As a result, some HR consultants get concerned with strategic HR activities, whereas other HR consultants are responsible for the operational HR activities.

However, if the internal consultancy advice is tailored to the needs of the line, it can become short-term and reactive, and this can undermine any potential strategic or business oriented role for the HR consultant. Therefore, HR consultants should communicate with each other and create collective partnership. For instance, the group of HR consultants who are responsible for strategic activities can inform the other HR consultants about strategic developments and possible changes, whereas the HR consultants who are responsible for operational activities can inform them about operational developments and changes on the shop floor. In this way, both groups of HR consultants are informed about the developments at the strategic and the operational level of the organization and are able to create value whereby they can both take into account the long-term and the short-term.

Costs	Benefits
- Preparation time - Conversation time - Administrative costs - Changes of tasks and responsibilities between HR consultants	- Understandability of the tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants - Creating a collect sense about the expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants - Uniformity between the HR performances of HR consultants - Functionality

Table 7: costs and benefits of the multifaceted and complex nature of the role of HR consultants

The distribution of the strategic and operational tasks and responsibilities of HR consultants should be clearly described in the function profiles whereby HR consultants and first line managers are able to create a collective sense about the expectations of the HR performance of HR consultants. This will ensure uniformity between the HR performances of HR consultants which leads to a better understandability of their tasks and responsibilities. As a result, first line managers know the HR tasks

and responsibilities of HR consultants whereby earlier first line managers expect more support from the HR consultants than they actually receive.

8.3 Presence of HR consultants in their establishments

The results of the research show that the perceived support of first line managers is determined by the presence of the HR consultant in the establishment or entity. This became clear from the fact that first line managers of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' were rather positive about their HR consultant in comparison to the first line managers of the other business units, because the HR consultant is present at the establishment daily. In this way, the HR consultant of the business unit 'Service, Management & Maintenance' is easier to contact by first line managers to ask for support.

First line managers mentioned that, if the HR consultants are present at their establishment at least once a week, first line managers are able to reach HR consultants easier to have face-to-face contact and for asking questions in order to support them in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of the organization. Therefore, I recommend that the HR consultants of the business units 'Projects' and 'Technique' should be present at their entity at least once a week.

If the HR consultant is present at his/her entity, he/she should spend time with the first line managers. This means that, during the day the HR consultant is present at the establishment, he/she should plan free time in which first line managers are able to ask the HR consultants for support. Moreover, first line managers should know when the HR consultant has time for them to offer support in order to stimulate the easiness to contact the HR consultant. Therefore, it is recommended that the HR consultants choose fixed bullet times during the day to spend on supporting first line managers. Besides this, if the HR consultant is present at the entity, he/she is also able to visit first line managers for informal conversations.

Costs	Benefits
- labour time - Changing the weekly planning of HR consultants - Creating a work place for the HR consultant	- Stimulate informal communication - HR consultants are easier to contact - HR consultants are able to offer desired support to first line managers - First line managers are able to express their needs for support - Creating partnership - Reducing distance with shop floor

Table 8: costs and benefits of the location HR consultants

The costs of the change mainly counts for the HR consultants. HR consultants should spend some labour time, change their weekly labour planning and create their own work place. However, the costs can be reduced by choosing a fixed day of the week to be present at the entity and a fixed bullet time during that day to spend on offering support to first line managers. HR consultants should be aware that they slide their tasks that are not connected to a certain location or that are connected to the entity concerned to that particular day in order to be able to perform their HR tasks and responsibilities.

The presence of the HR consultant at the entity ensures that first line managers will no longer experience that they perform on their own island. HR consultants will be easier to contact and are able to offer support which is desired by first line managers. For instance, HR consultants will be able

to communicate the division of tasks, create partnership and clarify obscurities. Moreover, first line managers are able to express their needs for support. As a result, they will be more positive about the reputation of the HR consultants and will feel supported in the implementation of HR practices at the operational level of Strukton Worksphere.

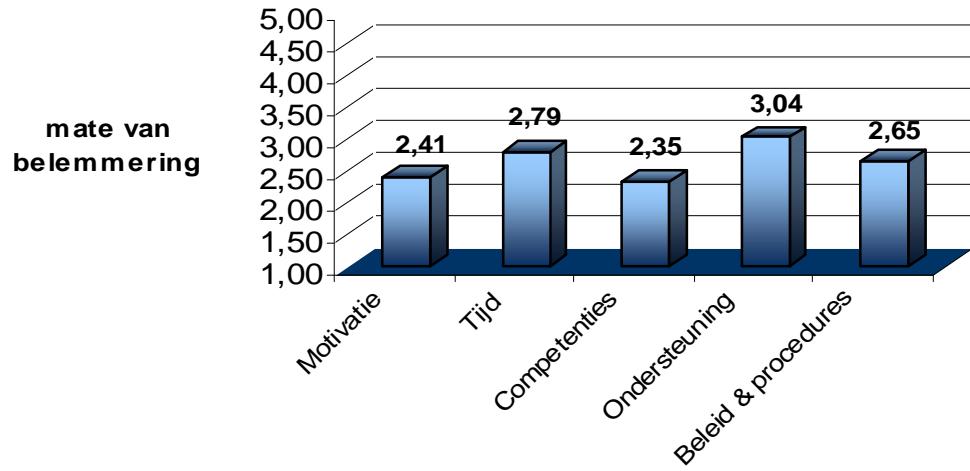
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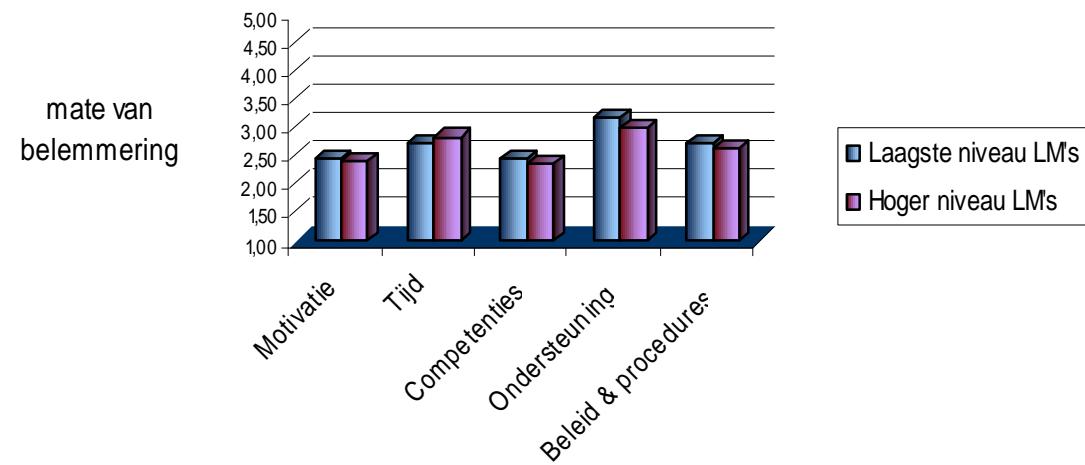
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Appendix 1: Results research Nehles et al (2006)

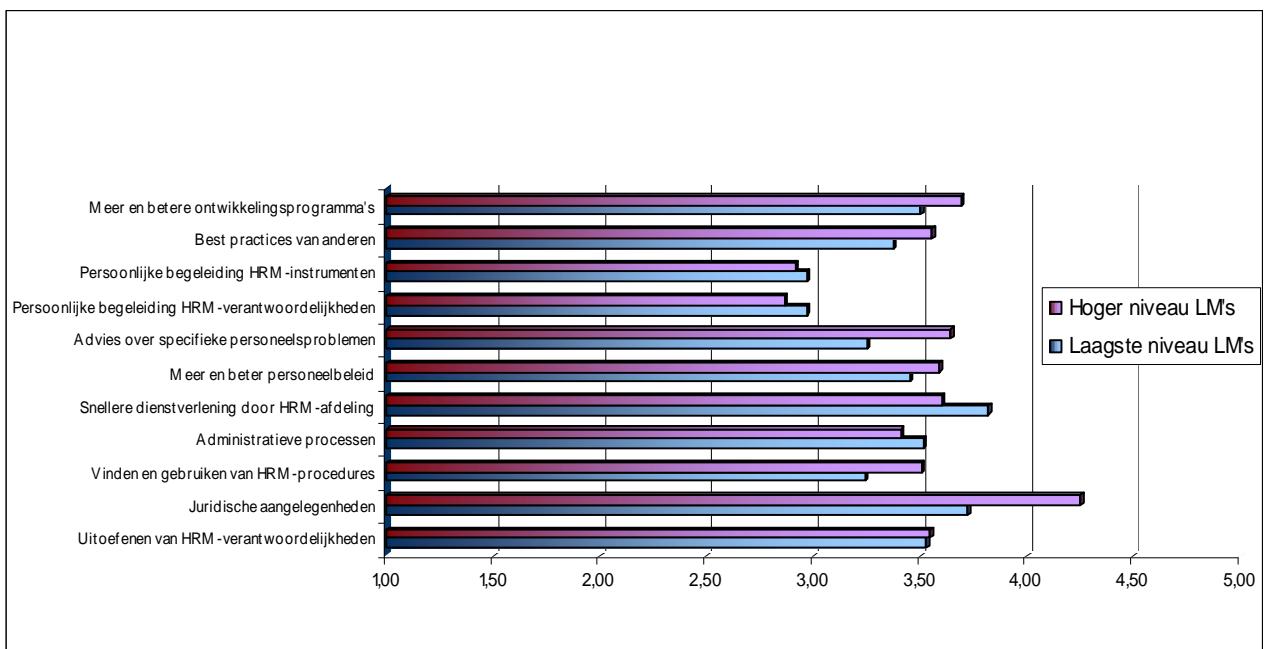
Hindrances line managers experience at Strukton Worksphere



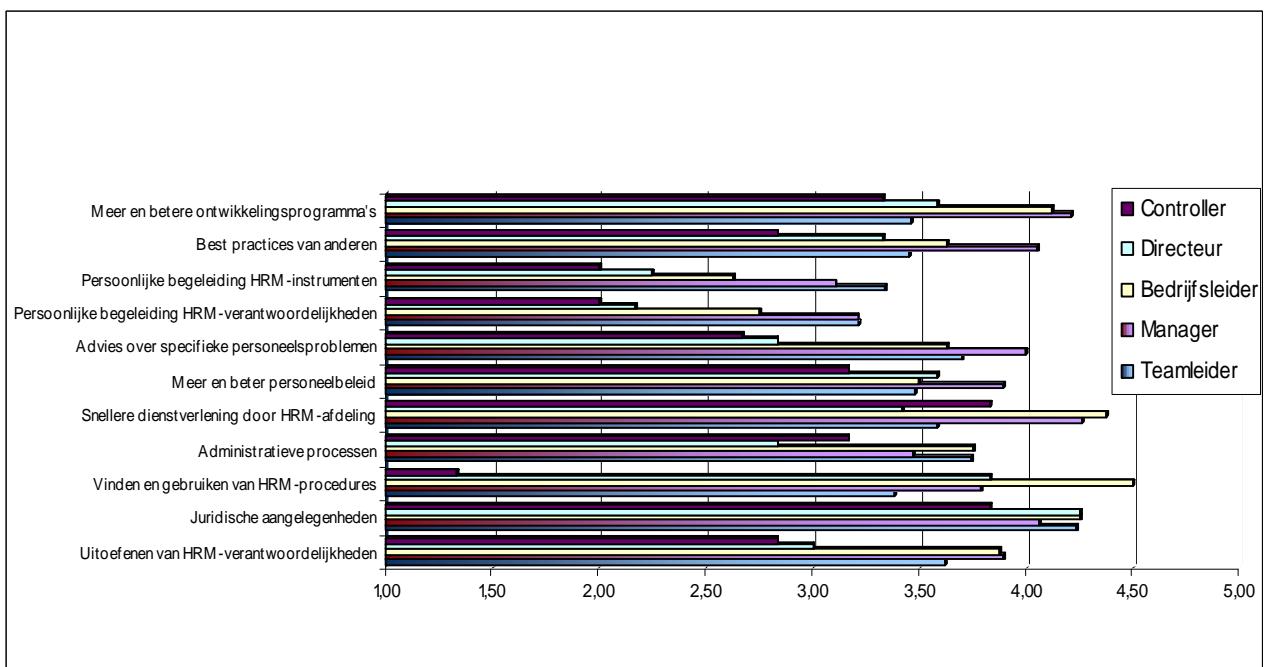
Hindrances line managers of different levels experience at Strukton Worksphere



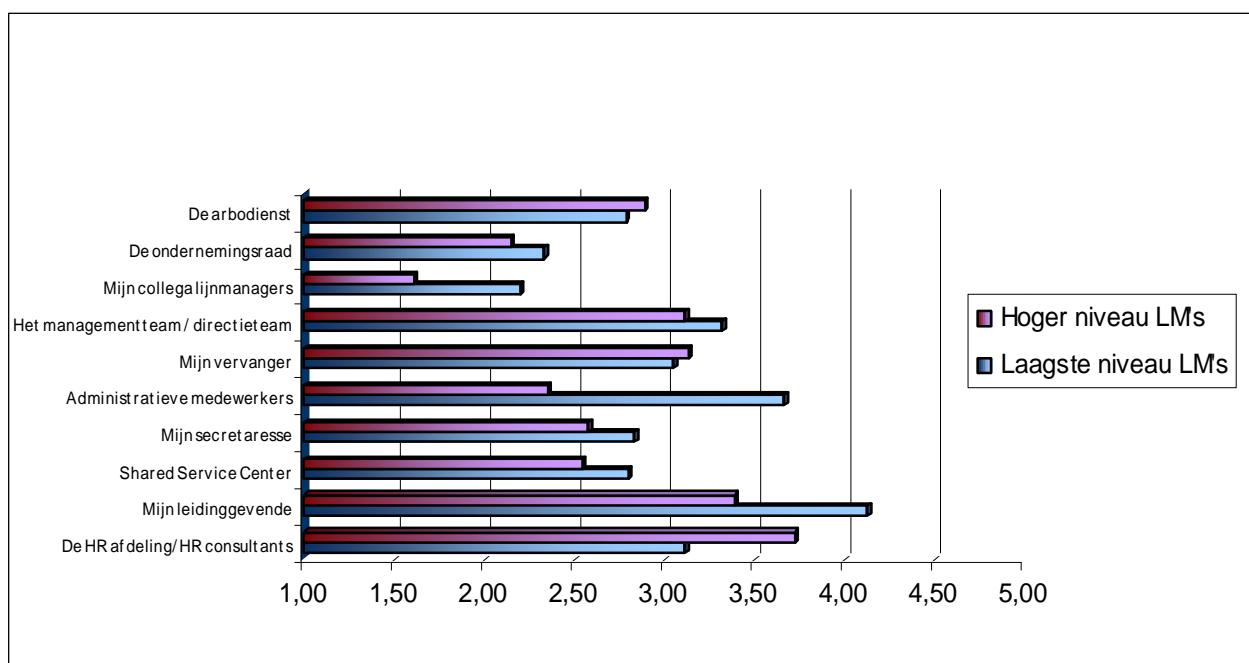
Type of support line managers of different levels need at Strukton Worksphere



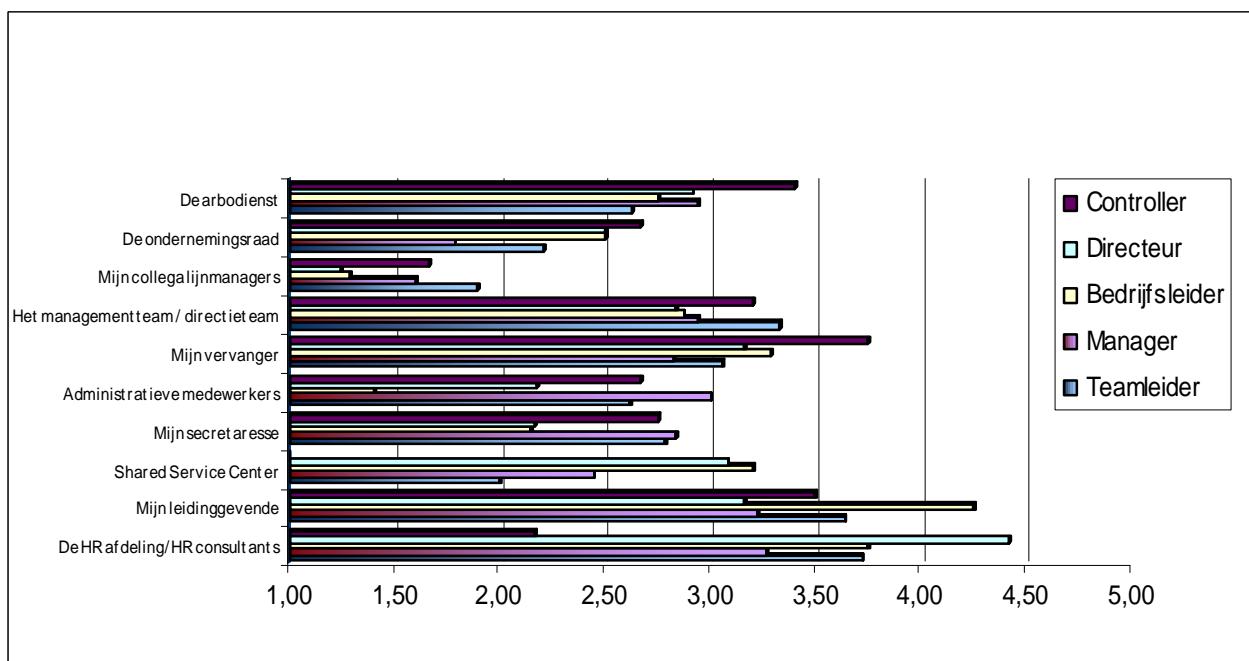
Type of support line managers in different functions need at Strukton Worksphere



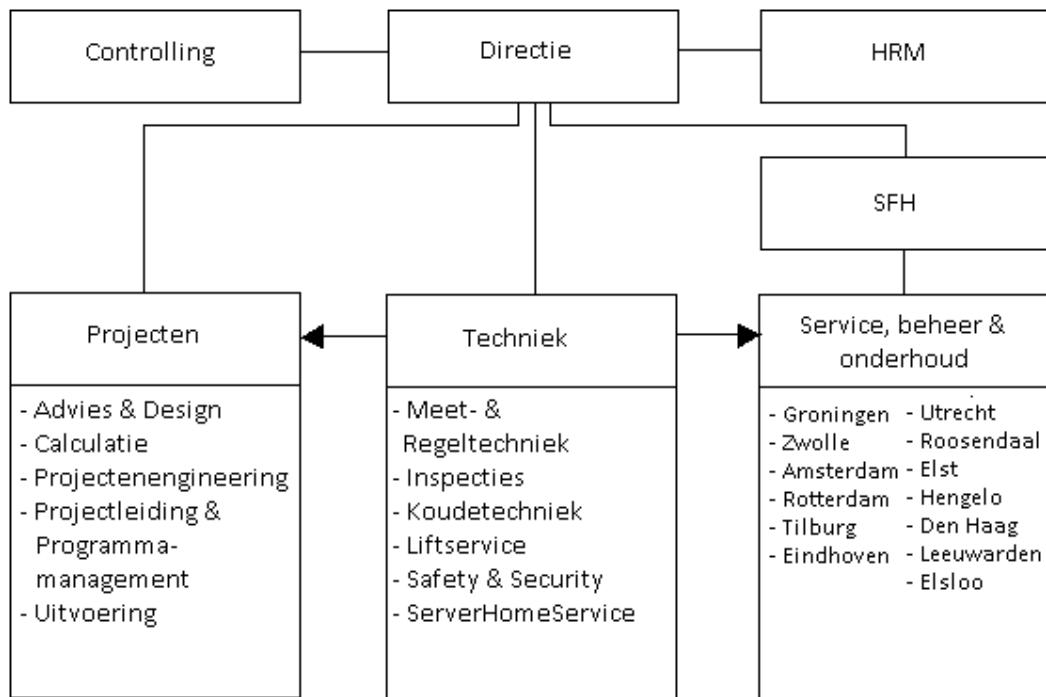
Sources of support line managers at different levels use at Strukton Worksphere



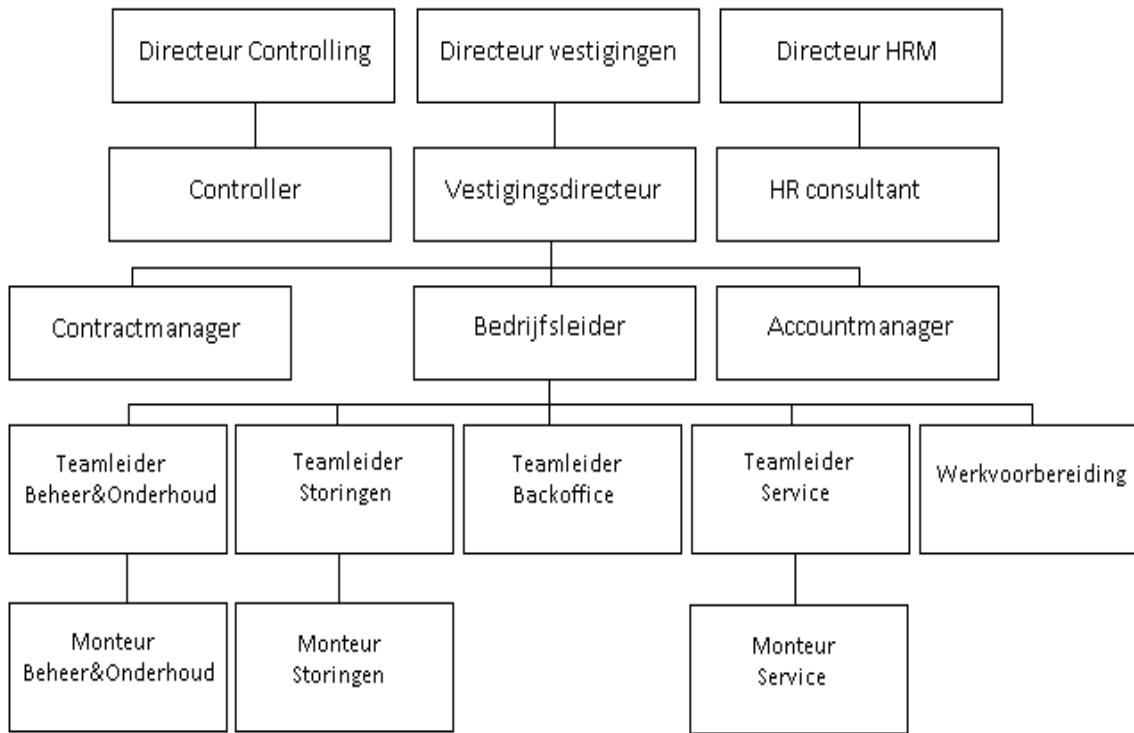
Sources of support line managers in different functions use at Strukton Worksphere



Appendix 2: Structure Strukton Worksphere



Appendix 3: Structure Service, Management & Maintenance



Appendix 4: Interview protocol

This interview protocol is based on the interviews with HR consultants.

1. HR consultant

Tasks

- What are your tasks?
- What are your HR responsibilities?

2. HR consultant – HR director

Factual division of tasks

- What does the division of tasks between the HR director and HR consultants look like?
- Is the division of tasks between the HR director and HR consultants consistent?
 - § Why / why not?
- Is the division of tasks between the HR director and HR consultants understandable?
 - § Why / Why not?

Cooperation

- What does the cooperation between the HR director and HR consultants look like?
- Where does this cooperation consist of?
 - § What do you expect of the cooperation with the HR director?
 - § What does the HR director expect of you regarding the cooperation?
- Do you experience a partnership with the HR director?

Task interdependencies

- Do task interdependencies exist between the HR director and HR consultants?
- What do the task interdependencies look like?
 - § What do you expect of the HR director regarding task interdependencies?
 - § What does the HR director expect of you regarding task interdependencies?

Communication

- What does the communication between the HR director and HR consultants look like?
- Is the communication between the HR director and HR consultants consistent?
 - § Why / why not?
- Are there frequent consultations between the HR director and HR consultants? How frequently do you communicate with each other?

3. HR consultant – Shared Service Center

Factual division of tasks

- What does the division of tasks between the Shared Service Center and HR consultants look like?
- Is the division of tasks between the Shared Service Center and HR consultants consistent?
 - § Why / why not?
- Is the division of tasks between the Shared Service Center and HR consultants understandable?
 - § Why / Why not?

Cooperation

- What does the cooperation between the Shared Service Center and HR consultants look like?
- Where does this cooperation consist of?
 - § What do you expect of the cooperation with the Shared Service Center?
 - § What does the Shared Service Center expect of you regarding the cooperation?
- Do you experience a partnership with the Shared Service Center?

Task interdependencies

- Do task interdependencies exist between the Shared Service Center and HR consultants?
- What do the task interdependencies look like?
 - § What do you expect of the Shared Service Center regarding task interdependencies?
 - § What does the Shared Service Center expect of you regarding task interdependencies?

Communication

- What does the communication between the Shared Service Center and HR consultants look like?
- Is the communication between the Shared Service Center and HR consultants consistent?
 - § Why / why not?
- Are there frequent consultations between the Shared Service Center and HR consultants?
How frequently do you communicate with each other?

4. HR consultant – First line managers

Factual division of tasks

- What does the division of tasks between the HR consultants and first line managers look like?
- Is the division of tasks between the HR consultants and first line managers consistent?
 - § Why / why not?
- Is the division of tasks between the HR consultants and first line managers understandable?
 - § Why / Why not?

Support

- How do you support first line managers? (think of monitoring, advice, leadership, personal development)
 - § What do you expect of first line managers in this process? (per point)
 - § What do first line managers expect of you in this process? (per point)
- How do you give advice to first line managers?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers in this process? (per point)
 - § What do first line managers expect of you in this process? (per point)
- How do you monitor first line managers?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers in this process? (per point)
 - § What do first line managers expect of you in this process? (per point)
- Do you give feedback to first line managers? (if not, do you think that first line managers expect that you give feedback?)
- What does the feedback look like?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers regarding feedback?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding feedback?

Support regarding HR tasks

- How do you support first line managers in performing job evaluation conversations?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers regarding job evaluation conversations?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding job evaluation conversations?
- How do you support first line managers in performing appraisal conversations?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers regarding appraisal conversations?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding appraisal conversations?
- How do you support first line managers in staff absence?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers regarding staff absence?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding staff absence?
- How do you support first line managers in recruitment?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers regarding recruitment?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding recruitment?
- How do you support first line managers in selecting new employees?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers regarding selection?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding selection?
- How do you support first line managers in employee career development?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers regarding employee career development?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding employee career development?
- How do you support first line managers in taking difficult decisions?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers regarding taking difficult decisions?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding taking difficult decisions?

Cooperation

- What does the cooperation between the HR consultants and first line managers look like?
- Where does this cooperation consist of?
 - § What do you expect of the cooperation with first line managers?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding the cooperation?
- Do you experience a partnership with first line managers? Why?

Task interdependencies

- Do task interdependencies exist between the HR consultants and first line managers?
- What do the task interdependencies look like?
 - § What do you expect of first line managers regarding task interdependencies?
 - § What do first line managers expect of you regarding task interdependencies?

Communicatie

- What does the communication between the HR consultants and first line managers look like?
- Is the communication between the HR consultants and first line managers consistent?
 - § Why / why not?
- Are there frequent consultations between the HR consultants and first line managers? How frequently do you communicate with each other?
- How do you communicate your support to first line managers?
 - § Directly / indirectly?
- Is an HR handbook or something similar available to first line managers? Do first line managers use the HR handbook?

- Are specific HR training courses available to first line managers which will help them to implement HR practices at the operational level of the organization? Do first line managers follow HR specific training courses?
- What do you expect of first line managers regarding communication?
- What do first line managers expect of you regarding communication?
- How do you assess the communication regarding the support to first line managers?
- In what extent does the way of communication influence the perceived support by first line managers?

5. General questions

- How can the perceived support by first line managers be improved?
- Do we have discussed all the factors that influence the perceived support by first line managers?
- After this interview, is it possible for me to ask questions by e-mail or phone if it proves to be necessary?

Appendix 5: English translations of the Dutch citations

1. 'it is to them (first line managers) to indicate; hé, I have sufficient baggage (to perform HR tasks) or not'.
2. 'No, you must indicate everything yourself. I would rather have HRM offering several training courses,...than you have the training course which is effective in the point of view of HRM; this is the one you need, this needs a first line manager'.
3. 'Unstructured, ad hoc, as a result of concrete occasions'.
4. 'I would like to have more talks, even if it is only informal once a time'.
5. 'Zero. There is no communication. Nothing more than, good morning, good evening, have a nice weekend, nothing more...If I speak to the HR consultant once a month, it is really much'.
6. 'I am able to switch on between employment agencies...I notice, however, that I often perform recruitment. Then I inform the central recruitment department about the actions I undertake, but in fact, I should not undertake actions regarding recruitment, that is a task of the central recruitment department'.
7. '...on paper, we are one company, eleven establishments, business unit 'Projects', central technique department and a central 'SFH' organization. One company, but in the end we are still an enumeration of all kinds of, very different companies which are less similar than we believe'.
8. 'it (the division of tasks) is simply not clear, who does what...creating clarity, I think that is what it is all about'.
9. 'in fact, it (the HR responsibilities of the first line manager) never falls on my board, there has never been said something. That, we have to discover ourselves...but I still had the other role of HRM (the operational role) at the back of my mind'.
10. 'if you do not receive support, you are able to device your own way'.
11. 'we have to do more HRM tasks of which job evaluation conversations are a part...that was not always clear. That has grown from the role as first line manager...in fact, experimentally you discover; this is a task of mine.'
12. 'An HR consultant does nothing for our department and that is just a shame'.
13. '...the HR consultant, if he or she identifies something, if the first line manager or the manager of the establishment walks around with a knot in his stomach, that you dare to take a step forward'.
14. 'if you are a first line manager, you have a team, so you are responsible for that team. Well, behave like that and don't say; you should do that, you should do that'.
15. 'we belong to HRM'.
16. 'support is offered if it is asked'.

17. 'I think if you operate at this level (middle management), you should not be waiting (until you receive support).
18. 'We must select all the training courses ourselves and in that I think HRM should be able to play a more active (support) role, because they find it important that people remain at a certain (educational) level or even get an higher level'.
19. 'We just get an envelope with appraisal forms and job evaluation forms thrown over the wall'.
20. 'I get my executive function; job evaluation conversations, appraisal conversations, staff absence, employee career development and so on, this is how we do it, in that and that manner, this is the policy of the organization concerning those HR aspects. No, that in fact, I do not know'.
21. 'it is strange, if you just carry on growing within the organization, I have the feeling that they (HR consultants) think that you should know everything (how to implement HR tasks)'.
22. 'a way of communicating is also saying when something (a current action) is not finished yet'.
23. 'As the word 'must have' occurs (if first line managers should implement HR tasks) then I think: according to me, 'we do not have partnership.'
24. '...I do not know if it is right, but I shape partnership with the higher management of the organization much stronger'.
25. 'you should be able to contact that man. He is supportive to us. So, in that respect, there simply should be a free relationship...in that respect, we just have our own island, at least it seems like that'.
26. '...if I made agreements with my employees about certain training courses, that HRM organizes a test moment of: hé how is it organized, is it agreed with each other, we (HR consultants) still have not seen something, have you started yet?
27. 'No, totally not, zero comma, zero, zero, zero, nothing. It sounds strange, but it is just what happens'.
28. 'we do not have an HR consultant here and that I think is strange. If he really is here physically once or twice a week, that you really can walk to him with the forms of the training courses, that you just can walk to him (to ask for support).