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Unlocking the black box of HRM system strength

“Explaining the link between HRM system strength and organizational members’ affective commitment within a Dutch home care organization”

**M. Bomans
Master Business Administration
University of Twente**

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Student

Name: Marjolein Bomans
Student number: s1234382
Study: Master Business Administration
Track: Human Resource Management
E-mail: marjoleinbomans@hotmail.com

Committee:

First supervisor: Dr. Anna Bos-Nehles
University of Twente

Second supervisor: Dr. Tanya Bondarouk
University of Twente

External supervisor: Hans van Leeuwen
TSN Thuiszorg

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Preface

This master thesis is the final project to finish my master Business Administration with the specialization Human Resource Management. The research is aimed at exploring the link between HRM system strength and affective commitment and provides insight in the effectiveness of the HRM system within Dutch home care organization TSN Thuiszorg.

I would like to thank some people who supported me during my graduation project. First of all I would like to thank my first supervisor Dr. Anna Bos-Nehles for her useful support and feedback, and always being there when I needed advice. Furthermore, I would like to thank my second supervisor Tanya Bondarouk for her input, feedback and interesting views on the topic. Special thanks to Hans van Leeuwen, Director HR of TSN Thuiszorg, who provided me the opportunity to conduct research in a very interesting organization. I would like to thank Arlin Sarve, HR professional at TSN Thuiszorg, as well for her practical support during the research at TSN Thuiszorg and for always willing to help me. My perspective on the field of HR in practice is enriched. Furthermore, I learned a lot about doing academic research and I gained more knowledge about HRM system strength and HR effectiveness.

I could not have finished this project without the support of the important people in my life. I would like to thank my mother, brother and sister in law, family, friends and colleagues for their support. Special thanks to my boyfriend, for always being there when I needed you. You listened to all my stories, problems and feelings, you tried to help me as much as possible and did nice things with me when I needed distraction. You always motivated me to go on with this research project.

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Summary

Rationale

In order to explain the link between HRM and performance, HRM literature states that both the content and process approach of HRM need to be taken into account. The concept of HRM system strength integrates the content of HRM, a specific set of HR practices, and the way HR messages are communicated throughout the organization by the HR department and line managers. An organization needs a HRM system that is perceived as strong, which means that organizational members perceive clear, consistent and unambiguous HRM messages about which behavior is expected and rewarded., in order to achieve the organizational goals.

Research objective and research question

Although there is some empirical evidence that HRM system strength contributes to organizational performance, it is not clear how the HRM system strength characteristics are interrelated and how this affects the performance of an organization. The aim of this research was to explain the link between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment by adopting several models. Furthermore, this research was aimed to examine differences in perceptions about HRM system strength among different organizational members; employees, line managers and HR professionals. The following research question was formulated: *"Which combination of the characteristics of HRM system strength; distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, has the strongest influence on organizational members' affective commitment to the organization?"*

A distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system

According to the literature, a strong HRM system contributes to the performance of an organization. A strong HRM system is characterized by high distinctiveness, consistency and consensus. A distinctive HRM system means that organizational members perceive visible, understandable and relevant HR practices which are designed and administered by a high status, high credible HR function. Furthermore, the HRM system needs to be perceived as consistent. HR policies and practices should be implemented as intended and furthermore should be internally consistent. Different actors in an organization are involved in the effective implementation of HR – top managers, line managers and HR professionals – consensus among these HR decision makers is needed to create a strong HRM system. A strong HRM system results in shared understandings about which behavior is expected and rewarded in the organization. This fosters desired attitudes and behaviors of organizational members , thereby contributing to the goals of the organization.

Methodology

In order to investigate the link between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment, a case study is performed. The research is conducted within TSN Thuiszorg, the largest Dutch home care organization. They provide domestic, medical and personal care to needy people. In order to get insight in the context of the HRM system within the organization, a document analysis and data from two bachelor students provided useful information. A questionnaire was sent to all the employees, line managers and HR professionals of TSN Thuiszorg in order to test the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment. Next to that, a focus group session was organized to get more insight in explanations that could be given for the perceptions of employees, line managers and HR professionals about the strength of the HRM system.

Results and conclusion

TSN Thuiszorg scores moderate on all the three characteristics of HRM system strength. In contrast with existing research about HR effectiveness, I found that employees have more positive perceptions about the HRM system compared to HR professionals. As expected, line managers are less positive than HR managers about the strength of the HRM system. For distinctiveness, the results show that at the moment it is not clear for both employees and line managers who is responsible for which HR tasks and who to contact for which HR issues. Furthermore the information is not always provided in an understandable way to employees. Members of the HR department perceive that they do not have a lot of power in the organization, this is due to the high work pressure as well as the self-resolving power of line managers in the organization. The HR practices are not perceived as very relevant, there is no clear link between the goals of the organization and employees' goals. Regarding the consistency of the HRM system, it became clear that there is a perceived difference between intended and implemented HR practices. Low level line managers have difficulties with performing their HR role and furthermore HR tasks are performed too ad hoc. Line managers lack a clear overall HR policy, this increases the risk of communicating inconsistent HRM messages. Although there is a close cooperation among HR managers and line managers, both perceive low consensus. This could be explained by the fact that both stakeholders have different expectations and assumptions about HR implementation and furthermore have different interests, which leads to disagreement about how to solve HR issues. Low level line managers desire to be more involved in the formulation of HR policies and practices. While overall TSN Thuiszorg scores moderate on distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, improvements need to be made in order to increase the effectiveness of HR practices, as well as the effectiveness of the HR department and the implementation of HR.

A multiple regression analysis is performed to test the several formulated hypotheses. First the hypothesis that all the three characteristics have a direct and independent impact on organizational members' affective commitment was supported. Support was found for an additive model as well, which implies that distinctiveness, consistency and consensus are compensatory and together have an effect on affective commitment. Furthermore, two-way interactions were explored. Only a significant interaction effect was found for distinctiveness and consensus. It seems that in order for consistency to have a strong influence on organizational members' affective commitment, both distinctiveness and consensus need to be present. The three-way interaction model implies that the characteristics of HRM system strength are complementary. If one of the characteristics is absent, organizational members will not feel committed at all. Regarding the main question, it can be concluded that models that included interrelationships among HRM system strength characteristics showed greater explained variance than the direct models. The three-way interaction model can be considered as the best predictor of affective commitment. To conclude, organizational members need to perceive a distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system at the same time in order to have a strong influence on their affective commitment to the organization.

Recommendations

In order to improve the effectiveness of HR within TSN Thuiszorg, the following recommendations are formulated. In order to improve the distinctiveness of the HRM system, clarity is needed. It is advised to make clear who is responsible for which HR tasks and to communicate to both line managers and employees who they can contact for which HR issues. A handbook for employees can provide practical information about HR issues to employees in an understandable way. A customized internet portal with specific room for HR related issues improves the accessibility of information about HR. In order to increase the position of HR within the organization, it is recommended to report metrics about the performance of the HR department in order to show how the HR function adds value to the organization. In order to improve both the vertical and horizontal alignment of HR practices, it is advised to develop an overall HR vision and translate this into clear goals for HR policies and procedures. HR tasks are executed differently among different line managers. In order to create more consistency, zorgcoördinatoren need to be trained in order to execute their HR tasks more effectively. The involvement of low level line managers in the formulation of new HR policies, practices and procedures will foster consensus among HR decision makers. An annual HR plan could help to create alignment between HR decision makers in the formulation and implementation of HR strategy as well. Furthermore, it is advised to foster the exchange of knowledge and experiences about HR issues among both HR professionals and line managers. Online communities where they can share information and interact with each other fosters both consensus and consistency.

Table of contents

Preface	3
Summary	4
Table of contents	7
1. Introduction	9
1.1 Integrating the content and process approach of HRM.....	9
1.2 Problem statement.....	10
1.3 Research objective and research question	11
1.4 Relevance of the study	12
1.5 Thesis outline.....	12
2. Theoretical framework	13
2.1 HRM system strength	13
2.1.1 Distinctiveness.....	14
2.1.2 Consistency.....	16
2.1.3 Consensus.....	18
2.2 Discovering the link between HRM system strength and performance	20
2.2.1 HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment	20
2.2.2 Universalistic approach	21
2.2.3 Configurational approach.....	22
2.3 Research model	26
3. Methodology	27
3.1 Company TSN Thuiszorg.....	27
3.2 Research design.....	28
3.3 Data collection methods	28
3.4 Sample and participants.....	29
3.5 Procedure	30
3.5.1 Document analysis	30
3.5.2 Secondary data from interviews bachelor students	30
3.5.3 Questionnaire	30
3.5.4 Focus group	31
3.6 Research instrument	32
3.7 Validity and reliability.....	33
3.8 Data analysis.....	36

4. Results	38
4.1 The HRM system within TSN Thuiszorg.....	38
4.2 Means, standard deviations and correlations.....	40
4.3 Direct effects	43
4.4 Additive effect	45
4.5 Multiplicative effect	46
4.6 Moderating effects.....	51
4.7 Strength of the HRM system within TSN Thuiszorg	55
4.7.1 Distinctiveness.....	55
4.7.2 Consistency.....	58
4.7.3 Consensus.....	60
5. Discussion	63
5.1 Perceptions about HRM system strength	63
5.1.1 Distinctiveness.....	64
5.1.2 Consistency.....	66
5.1.3 Consensus.....	67
5.2 HRM system strength and affective commitment	68
5.3 Main contributions.....	70
5.4 Limitations.....	70
5.5 Suggestions for future research	71
5.6 Recommendations.....	72
List of references	78
Appendix 1: Invitation letters	85
Appendix 2: Questionnaires	88
Appendix 3: List of studied documents	103
Appendix 4: Tables	105

1. Introduction

In this section, an introduction of the research is given. Paragraph 1.1 provides an introduction to the topic. In paragraph 1.2 the problem statement is outlined. The research objective and research question are presented in paragraph 1.3. The relevance of the study is described in paragraph 1.4 In paragraph 1.5, the thesis outline is given.

1.1 Integrating the content and process approach of HRM

There is a lot of attention for the relationship between HRM and organizational performance, because there is evidence that HRM positively influences the performance of an organization (Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995; Huselid et al., 1997; Richard & Johnson, 2001). However, it is not clear through which mechanism HRM affects performance (Wright & Gardner, 2000). The presence of HR practices dominated the research about HRM and performance, nowadays the interest of researchers shift towards the perceptions of employees about HR practices (e.g. Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Wright & Nishii, 2007; Nishii et al., 2008; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). It is argued that the effect of HR practices is resided in the perceptions of employees about those HR practices (Nishii & Wright, 2007), because it are these perceptions that affect employee attitudes and behavior and ultimately, organizational performance (Wright & Nishii, 2007; Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2013). The focus on perceptions leads to increasing attention for the importance of integrating both the content and process approach of HRM (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Sanders et al., 2008; Delmotte et al., 2011; Li et al., 2011; Sanders et al., 2012; Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012). The content of HRM refers to a specific set of HR practices that is necessary for achieving the goals of an organization (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). However, the problem is that the content approach does not explain why the same HR practices do not always lead to the same outcomes in terms of performance (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Sanders et al., 2012; Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012). It seems that employees respond differently to the same set of HR practices. The differences in responses could be explained by the process approach of HRM, which refers to the “set of activities aimed at developing, communicating, and implementing HR practices” (Delmotte et al., 2011, p. 1). The HRM system sends signals which are perceived and interpreted differently among employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Wright & Nishii, 2007; Chow, 2012; Sanders et al., 2012). Therefore, the process approach deals with the effective design and administration of the HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Bowen and Ostroff (2004) introduced the concept of HRM system strength in which they integrate the content and process approach of HRM. For HRM to contribute towards the performance of an organization, the HRM system should be perceived as strong. A strong HRM system is characterized by high distinctiveness, high consistency and high consensus (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al.,

2011). Distinctiveness means that the cause-effect relationship is highly observable. Consistency refers to the consistency of the cause-effect relationship over modalities and time. Consensus means that individuals agree about the cause-effect relationship (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). It is argued that the HRM system is strong when employees perceive (1) clear and unambiguous HRM messages, which are (2) consistently communicated throughout the organization, and (3) which are perceived and interpreted uniformly among employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011). A strong HRM system results in a strong organizational climate in which “employees share a common interpretation of what is important and what behaviors are expected and rewarded” (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004, p. 204). Bowen and Ostroff (2004) argue that a strong HRM system ensures a more effective implementation of HR. Guest and Bos-Nehles (2012) distinguish three types of HR effectiveness. The first component is HR practices effectiveness, which means that the HR practices contribute to the goals of the organization (e.g. Huselid et al., 1997; Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al. 2001; Pereira & Gomes, 2012). The second component is HR department effectiveness, which means that the HR department meets the objectives and expectations of its stakeholders (Tsui, 1990; De Winne et al., 2012). The third component is HR implementation effectiveness. HR practices need to be implemented as intended (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Chow, 2012). HR practices effectiveness can be considered as the content approach of HRM, while HR department effectiveness and HR implementation effectiveness are part of the process approach of HRM.

1.2 Problem statement

Although there is increasing attention for the concept of HRM system strength as introduced by Bowen and Ostroff (2004), research about HRM system strength is scarce. Guest and Conway (2011) found no support for a moderating effect of consensus on the relationship between HR practices effectiveness and performance. In contrast, the results of Chen et al. (2011) showed that a lack of consensus about the effectiveness of HR practices negatively impacts perceived future firm performance. According to the findings of Sanders et al. (2012); distinctiveness, consistency and consensus moderate the relationship between high commitment HRM and employee outcomes. De Winne et al. (2012) treated HRM system strength as an antecedent to HR department effectiveness; the results supported their view that HRM system strength characteristics have a positive impact on perceived effectiveness of the HR department. Gomes et al. (2010) treated consensus and consistency as antecedents to distinctiveness, while Frenkel et al. (2012) related distinctiveness and consistency to one dimension of consensus, namely justice. Both found support for these relationships.

While there is some empirical evidence, the interrelationships between the characteristics of HRM system strength are underexposed in existing research. Only Gomes et al. (2010) and Frenkel et al. (2012) empirically investigated this. As suggested by Bowen and Ostroff (2004), distinctiveness, consistency and consensus are related to each other, but more research is needed to investigate this link. Therefore the main topic of this research is to empirically investigate the interrelationships among distinctiveness, consistency and consensus. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) introduced the concept of HRM system strength, but did not develop a measurement instrument. Recently, Gomes et al. (2010) and Delmotte et al. (2011) made an attempt to develop such a measurement instrument. Both use the characteristics distinctiveness, consistency and consensus and include the features as distinguished by Bowen and Ostroff (2004), however the two researches differ in the way in which they have operationalized HRM system strength. The items of Delmotte et al. (2011) are used by other researchers as well (Bondarouk et al., 2010; Sanders et al., 2012; De Winne et al., 2012). While it is a good attempt to measure HRM system strength, it seems that the items related to distinctiveness, consistency and consensus are mixed up. The separation is made artificially. It can be concluded that the concept of HRM system strength can be considered as a black box; it is not clear which items belongs to distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, how these characteristics are interrelated and how it affects organizational performance. More research is needed to explore the interrelationships in order to investigate what the appropriate model is to explain HRM system strength and its relationship with organizational performance.

1.3 Research objective and research question

The main aim of this research is to investigate the interrelationships among HRM system strength characteristics. It is expected that a strong HRM system contributes to the performance of an organization (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). It is argued that if organizational members perceive a HRM message that the organization cares about their well-being, they will in return expose desired employees attitudes and behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Therefore in this research the influence of HRM system strength on affective commitment will be investigated. Affective commitment to the organization refers to the extent to which employees feel emotionally attached to an organization (Meyer et al., 1993; Torke et al., 2003). Furthermore, existing research about HR effectiveness shows that different stakeholders within an organization have different perceptions about HR effectiveness (a.o. Kane et al., 1999; Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001; Geare et al., 2006; McLean, 2006; Yusoff et al., 2009). It is expected that different stakeholders perceive HRM system strength as different as well, therefore perceptions of several groups of organizational members – employees, HR professionals and line managers – are included in this research. The purpose of this research is to explore which model best explains the relationship between HRM system strength and

organizational members' affective commitment. Therefore, the following research question is formulated:

“Which combination of the characteristics of HRM system strength; distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, has the strongest influence on organizational members' affective commitment to the organization?”

1.4 Relevance of the study

This study is of both theoretical and practical relevance. It contributes to the literature about HRM system strength through empirically investigating which model best explains the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational performance. While there is some empirical evidence about HRM system strength (Guest & Conway, 2011; Chen et al., 2011; Sanders et al., 2012; De Winne et al., 2012), this research will provide insight in the interrelationships between all the three characteristics of HRM system strength.

Furthermore, this research is of practical relevance for the company where the research is conducted in, Dutch home care organization TSN Thuiszorg. The outcomes of the research provide practical recommendations for TSN Thuiszorg to improve the strength of the HRM system within the organization. The implications are that it becomes clear in which areas HR need to be improved. The HR department wants to professionalize. The findings can reveal important outcomes that need to be taken into account in the development of the HR department towards a HR service delivery model.

1.5 Thesis outline

The thesis is structured as follow. First, in chapter two relevant literature about HRM system strength is outlined in order to develop a theoretical framework for this research. Based on the literature review, hypotheses are developed about the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment. In chapter three, the methodology is described. The purpose is to explain the research methods that are used and why this approach is chosen. In the fourth chapter, the results of this research are presented in order to get insight in the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment. In chapter five, the results are discussed. This chapter contains the conclusion as well; an answer is given to the formulated research question. Furthermore, limitations and suggestions for further research are given. The last part of the discussion contains recommendations for TSN Thuiszorg.

2. Theoretical framework

The purpose of this chapter is to get more insight in the theoretical background of HRM system strength. In paragraph 2.1 the concept of HRM system strength is outlined. In paragraph 2.2, the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment is described. Based on the literature study, hypotheses are formulated. In paragraph 2.3, a research model is developed that guides the research.

2.1 HRM system strength

Bowen and Ostroff (2004) argue that the link between HRM and performance could be explained by the strength of the HRM system which integrates both the content and process approach of HRM. The content of HRM refers to a specific set of HR practices that serve as a mechanism to communicate and signal to employees to engage in certain behaviors (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). These HR practices should be effective (e.g. Huselid et al., 1997; Mitsuhasi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001), which means that they are horizontally and vertically aligned thereby contributing to the performance of the organization (Pereira & Gomes, 2012). Furthermore, the process approach should be taken into account. The HR department is responsible for the design and administration of HR practices (Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012), and thus plays an important role in communicating the HRM message. A strong HRM system ensures an effective implementation of actual HR practices by line managers, which means that HR practices are implemented as intended (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Wright & Nishii, 2007; Nishi et al., 2008; Chow, 2012). It is argued that if the HRM system send signals about which organizational goals are important and what behavior is expected and rewarded, the more likely it is that those goals will be achieved (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). A strong HRM system can be characterized by high levels of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011), "these characteristics refer to the process by which a consistent message about HRM content can be sent to employees" (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004, p. 207). A strong HRM system supports a strong organizational climate where the messages that are sent by the HRM system to stakeholders are clear, unambiguous and consistent (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; De Winne et al., 2012), which encourages employees to expose desired attitudes and behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Wright & Nishii, 2007).

The characteristics distinctiveness, consistency and consensus as distinguished by Bowen and Ostroff (2004) are adopted from Kelley's attribution theory that explains the process for making attributions to persons as well as situational factors (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Attribution theory is related to perceived causation, "the common ideas are that people interpret behavior in terms of its causes and

that these interpretations play an important role in determining reactions to the behavior” (Kelley & Michela, 1980, p. 458). Bowen and Ostroff (2004) use these principles and argue that employees make attributions based on the HRM message that is communicated to them by a distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

2.1.1 Distinctiveness

In order for HR to be effective, employees need to make attributions about the HRM system. They need to perceive the HRM system as distinctive, which means that the event-effect relationship is highly observable (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Distinctiveness is facilitated by the degree to which the HRM system delivers visible, understandable, legitimate and relevant messages to employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011).

HR practices serve as a communication mechanism from employer to employee (Gilbert et al., 2011). In order to receive the HRM message HR practices need to be salient and observable for employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), because HR practices that capture the attention of employees will help them to make sense of it which in turn will influence their behavior (Kim & Ryu, 2011). A distinction can be made between technical and strategic HR practices. Technical HRM is about the delivery of activities that are traditionally related to personnel management like recruitment, training, and performance management (Huselid et al., 1997) and are often included in research about HR practices effectiveness (Huselid et al., 1997; Ahmed, 1999; Kane et al., 1999; Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001; Chang, 2005; Geare et al., 2006; McLean, 2006; Mendelson et al., 2011; Su & Wright, 2012). On the other hand, there are strategic HRM activities (Huselid et al., 1997; Ahmed, 1999; Kane et al., 1999; Richard & Johnson, 2001; Guest & Conway, 2011), which are “a firm specific capability that yield economic benefits not readily duplicated through competitive action” (Richard & Johnson, 2001, p.300). It includes activities like team-based job design, employee participation and empowerment, and management and executive development (Huselid et al, 1997; Richard & Johnson, 2001). A wide range of HR practices that affects a large number of employees within an organization, fosters the visibility of the HRM system and creates shared understandings about those HR practices and the desired attitudes and behaviors (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). However, visible HR practices are not enough to make attributions to the HRM system. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) argue that employees need to understand the content of HR practices and refer to this as the understandability of the HRM system. The HR practices should be easy to comprehend for employees; they need to understand how the HR practices work in order to make attributions to it (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), and to judge if the HR practices meet their objectives (Mendelson et al.,

2011). Line managers and employees need to make sense of the HRM system in order to be able to interact with it (Bondarouk & Bos-Nehles, 2012).

While visible and understandable HR practices are considered as important, in order to contribute to the performance of the organization these HR practices should be designed in such a way that the alignment of individual goals with the goals of the organization is fostered (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). This feature is called relevance (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011). In other literature this is referred to as the vertical alignment of HR practices (Delery, 1998; Heneman & Milanowski, 2011; Pereira & Gomes, 2012), it is argued that this alignment will positively influence the performance of an organization (Huselid et al., 1997; Richard & Johnson, 2001; Chang, 2005; Mendelson et al., 2011; Guest & Conway, 2011; Chow, 2012; Su & Wright, 2012). Effective HR practices promote strategically expected employee behaviors, this in turn will contribute to desired organizational outcomes (Ruel et al., 2007).

While the content of HR practices is considered as important, the way in which HR messages are communicated throughout the organization needs to be taken into account as well. HR practices are designed and administered by the HR department within an organization, in collaboration with senior and line management (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). Bowen and Ostroff (2004) argue that employees are more willing to submit to performance expectations of the HRM system if the HR function in the organization is perceived as a high status, high credibility function and activity. This feature is referred to as legitimacy of the HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011). In order for the HRM system to be successful, strategic involvement of HR professionals is considered as important (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Strategic involvement means that HR is involved in the determination of the strategy of the organization (Ulrich, 1997; Chen et al., 2011), and enables the HR function to better align the HR strategy with the strategy of the organization (Huselid & Becker, 1997; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Makela et al., 2012). HR professionals need to act as business partners and change agents of line managers in order to contribute to the goals of the organization (Ulrich, 1997). Evidence is found that strategic involvement of HR professionals positively influences the effectiveness of the HR department (De Winne et al., 2012). However, strategic involvement of HR and legitimacy of the HRM system requires support from top management (Mitsubishi et al., 2000; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). It is the CEO Of an organization “that gave HR legitimacy, provided leadership, committed resources, and provided the links between organizational strategy and HR strategy” (Stanton et al., 2010, p. 578). The HR department is considered as effective when it is able to demonstrate its value to the organization (Tsui, 1990; Ulrich, 1997; Wright et al., 1998; Lawler & Mohrman, 2000; Chen et al., 2011), i.e. show how it

contributes to the competitive position and core competences of the firm (Wright et al., 1998; Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001; Han et al., 2006; Guthrie et al., 2011; Kim & Ryu, 2011). A strong HRM system contributes to the effectiveness of the HR department; if the HRM system sends clear, consistent and unambiguous messages it is more likely that different stakeholders perceive high effectiveness of the HR department (De Winne et al., 2012).

2.1.2 Consistency

Consistency refers to the reliable and internally coherent implementation of HR practices, and establishing consistent relationships over time, people and context (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Sanders et al., 2012). For instance, an organization that trains employees to stimulate their innovative behavior needs to judge and reward this behavior in the performance appraisal cycle. Consistency of HRM messages helps employees to have an understanding of what behaviors are expected and rewarded (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004); it creates awareness (Pereira & Gomes, 2012). Features are instrumentality, validity and consistent HRM messages (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011).

In order to perceive a consistent HRM messages, outcomes should be linked to behavior. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) refer to this as the instrumentality of the HRM system. This feature is based on the expectancy theory of Vroom (1964); which states that employees decide to act in certain behavior based on their expectations of the outcome. The HR department and line managers should create an unambiguous cause effect-relationship when implementing HR practices. The HR practices can be considered as effective when they elicit desired behaviors which are linked to employee consequences (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). High instrumentality means that the relationship between behavior of employees and results are closely related in time and that HR practices are applied consistently over time (Pereira & Gomes, 2012).

Furthermore, in order to ensure an effective implementation of HR, HR practices need to do what they are intended to do (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Chow, 2012), this feature of the HRM system is called validity (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al, 2011). However, there is empirical evidence that there is a difference between intended and actual HR practices (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Wright & Nishii, 2007). Intended HR practices are based on the HR strategy of an organization, and are designed and administered by HR policy makers like HR professionals and senior management (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). Actual HR practices are those HR practices that are implemented in the organization, this responsibility is more and more devolved to line managers (e.g. Hall & Torrington, 1998; Larsen &

Brewster, 2003; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Bos-Nehles, 2010). However, differences between intended and actual HR practices lead to different perceptions of HR practices at the level of employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Wright & Nishii, 2007), which in turn will lead to different attitudes and behaviors of those employees (Wright & Nishii, 2007; Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2013). This hinders the effectiveness of HR implementation. Differences in perceptions can be attributed to the way HR practices are implemented by line managers (Wright & Nishii, 2007). Reasons are that one line manager could implement HR practices differently than others (Wright & Nishii, 2007; Elorza et al., 2011; Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012), or that line managers do not give priority to ensure high-quality implementation of HR practices (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). Furthermore, it could be that line managers fail to implement HR practices (Chen et al., 2011; Guest, 2011; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012), factors that influence the effective implementation of HR practices by line managers are the desire, capacity, competences, support and clear policies and procedures they perceive when implementing HR practices (Bos-Nehles, 2010).

The third feature of consistency is consistent HRM messages. This means that the HRM system should send consistent signals to employees about which behavior is expected and rewarded (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011). Bowen and Ostroff (2004) argue that three types of consistent HRM messages are required. The first aspect is consistency between espoused values by line managers and the inferred values as signaled and perceived by employees through the HR practices of the organization (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011). Furthermore, the HR practices should be internally consistent (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). In literature, the importance of internal alignment between HR practices of the HRM system is often highlighted. HR practices need to be complementary, because this will stimulate employee behavior that is necessary for achieving the goals of the organization (a.o. Delery & Doty, 1996; Delery, 1998; Heneman & Milanowski, 2011; Pereira & Gomes, 2012). The third aspect of consistency is stability over time, which means that employees perceive the HR practices as consistent over a longer period (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011). HR practices serve as a communication mechanism (Gilbert et al., 2011), these communications need to send compatible and stable signals to employees (Pereira & Gomes, 2012). Furthermore, Stanton et al. (2010) argue that in order to create a strong HRM system, managers at all levels of the organization need to 'sing the same song', which means communicating the same HRM messages throughout the organization.

2.1.3 Consensus

Consensus refers to the agreement among employees about what behaviors and responses lead to what outcomes, and consists of the features agreement among principal HRM decision makers and fairness (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011). In this research, only the dimension agreement is taken into account which refers to the agreement among HRM decision makers about the HRM message that needs to be communicated (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Several actors are involved in the effective implementation of HR, like top management, HR managers and line managers (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). Top management within an organization is responsible for setting the goals of an organization (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Stanton et al., 2010), and is involved in the decision to introduce HR practices together with HR managers (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). HR managers are responsible for the design and administration of effective HR practices (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012), while the implementation of HR practices belongs to the responsibility of line managers in an organization (e.g. Hall & Torrington, 1998; Larsen & Brewster, 2003; Bos-Nehles, 2010; Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). Agreement among those HRM decision makers within an organization - top management, HR managers and line managers - helps to create consensus among employees about the HRM message, which in turn will lead to shared interpretations about which behavior is expected and rewarded (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011; Pereira & Gomes, 2012; Sanders et al., 2012).

However, within literature there is empirical evidence that the HRM decision makers are not always on the same wavelength regarding perceptions about HR effectiveness. HR managers and line managers do not always agree about the relative importance and effectiveness of HR practices, HR managers are more positive than line managers (Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001; McLean, 2006; Yusoff et al., 2009). The HR department is considered as least effective in performing strategic HR tasks compared to the more administrative activities (Huselid et al., 1997; Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001; McLean, 2006). It seems that HR is not able to meet the expectations of line managers about HR practices (Mitsuhashi et al., 2000). Furthermore, existing research shows different perceptions about the effectiveness of the HR department as well. Tsui (1990) found that executives assessed the effectiveness of the HR department as highest, followed by line managers, while employees rated the effectiveness lowest. Results of Kane et al. (1999) and Geare et al. (2006) show that HR managers are more positive than employees about the effectiveness of HR. Other researches show that HR managers perceive higher effectiveness of the HR department than line managers do (Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001); line managers perceive the HR department as ineffective, which means that it does not contribute to the achievement of the goals of the organization (Mitsuhashi et al., 2000).

It is argued that an effective HR department is able to meet the needs of its stakeholders (Tsui, 1990; De Winne et al., 2012). However, the role HR need to perform in order to be perceived as effective is not clear. Stakeholders have different perceptions about the role of HR that adds most value to the firm (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). Wright et al. (2001) found that both line managers and HR managers value the HR services role the most, while HR is least effective in performing change consulting. De Winne et al. (2012) found that trade union representatives stated the importance of the more operational roles; administrative expert and employee champion, while line managers valued the HR function in the roles of administrative expert and strategic partner. Overall, line managers perceived the HR department as more effective compared to trade union representatives (De Winne et al., 2012). Buyens and De Vos (2001) found that top managers perceived the domain of transformation and change most frequent as delivering most value for the HR function, while line managers perceived management of firm infrastructure as the most value added domain. Furthermore, HR managers considered the management of employees as the domain in which the HR function delivers value (Buyens & De Vos, 2001). This is in contrast with the findings of Wright et al. (1998); while HR respondents focused on the administrative expert role, line managers wanted a more strategic focus of the HR department. Some other researchers focused on the value of HR competencies. Paauwe and Boselie (2005) found that HR raters score higher on strategic contribution, personal credibility and HR delivery than non HRM raters do. The results of Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) show higher ratings of HR managers compared to non HR managers as well.

It seems that different stakeholders use different criteria to judge the effectiveness of HR (Tsui, 1990; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). Different expectations about the content of HR practices and the role HR professionals need to perform in the organization could lead to disagreement among HRM decision makers, which will hinder the effective implementation of HR. For instance, if senior management and HR managers do not agree about the introduction of HR policies; how to perform HR activities and which HR practices to adopt (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012), it would be difficult to send a clear, consistent and unambiguous HR message to employees about what behavior is expected and rewarded (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). In order to meet the needs of its stakeholders, the HR department needs to be aware of the needs of its stakeholders. Consensus among HRM decision makers can be fostered by close cooperation between those stakeholders (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Yip et al., 2001), because this facilitates the exchange of tacit knowledge about the formulation and implementation of a HR strategy that is aligned with the strategy of the organization (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). HR managers and line managers need to articulate their assumptions and expectations about HR, this fosters congruent HR frames (Bondarouk et al., 2009). Furthermore, a good collaboration among HR managers and line managers enhances shared understanding and

increases the performance of an organization; it improves the alignment of HR practices with the needs of line managers, while it provides line managers the opportunity to get more insight in both the technical and strategic contribution of HR to the organization (Yip et al., 2001).

2.2 Discovering the link between HRM system strength and performance

Bowen and Ostroff (2004) argue that the concept of HRM system strength could help to explain how HR practices lead to organizational outcomes by integrating both the content and process of HRM. The underlying thought is that perceptions about HRM system strength will lead to desired behavior and outcomes. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) did not empirically examine this link. While there is some empirical evidence about the relationship between HRM system strength and performance (Bondarouk et al., 2010; Gomes et al., 2010; Guest & Conway, 2011; De Winne et al., 2012; Frenkel et al., 2012; Sanders et al., 2012), it is still not clear how the characteristics distinctiveness, consistency and consensus are interrelated and how they affect performance. In this research, the focus is on affective commitment as indicator for performance. First, the link between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment is explained. Next to that, several perspectives are adopted in order to explore the relationship between HRM system strength and affective commitment of different organizational members – employees, HR professionals and line managers.

2.2.1 HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment

Within the HRM and performance literature, it is argued that HRM has a greater influence on more proximal outcomes like human resource outcomes, than on financial outcomes (Dyer & Reeves, 1995; Boselie et al., 2005; Colakoglu et al., 2006; Guest & Conway, 2011). In this research, social exchange theory (Blau, 1967) is used as a framework to explain the link between HRM system strength and performance. This theory is based on the norm of reciprocity. Applied to HRM it is argued that employees create perceptions about HRM. Employees react based on their perceptions about HRM and will expose affective, cognitive and behavioral reactions (Wright & Nishii, 2007). It can be argued that if employees perceive HRM as distinctive, consistent and consensual, they will feel that the organization cares about their well-being. This motivates them to adopt desired attitudes and behaviors, which ultimately influence organizational outcomes (Gilbert et al., 2011). In this research, the focus will be on a proximal outcome; organizational members' affective commitment to the organization, because this is seen as a predictor of employee behavior, such as job performance, absenteeism, turnover intention and organizational citizenship behavior (Sanders et al., 2008; Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2013). The commitment of employees towards the organization can be conditioned by the HR system of the organization, because employees react on this based on their perceptions about the HRM system (Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2013). There is some evidence that

HRM system strength is related to employees' affective commitment (Chen et al., 2007; Sanders et al., 2008; Sanders et al., 2012). A definition of affective commitment that is often used in HRM literature is the definition given by Meyer et al. (1993): "the extent to which followers identify with, are involved in and are emotionally attached to an organization". In this research it is argued that if organizational members perceive that their exchange relationship with the organization is characterized by a supportive work environment, in this research a distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system, they are more likely to feel obliged to the goals of the organization and in this way develop an affective bond with the organization (Gilbert et al., 2011; Kehoe & Wright, 2013).

2.2.2 Universalistic approach

First, a universalistic approach is taken. This means that there is a universal relationship between the independent and dependent variable (Delery & Doty, 1996). Applying the universalistic approach to the context of HRM system strength means that the greater the extent of perceived distinctiveness, consensus or consistency, the greater the organizational performance in terms of affective commitment. This is in line with existing research about HRM system strength (Sanders et al., 2008; Sanders et al., 2012). Distinctiveness is related to the content of the HR practices. It can be argued that if employees perceive and understand the content of the HR practices; if they feel that the organization is supportive to them and they know what is expected of them, in return they will expose the desired attitudes and behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Furthermore, it can be argued that if employees perceive a consistent HRM message about organizational goals and congruent individual behavior and rewards, it is more likely that they will expose the desired attitudes and behaviors (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Furthermore, it is argued that if there is consensus among the HRM decision makers; if their behavior is integrated, this will foster consensus among employees, which helps to create shared meanings about which behavior is expected and rewarded. In turn, employees are more likely to expose this behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). So if organizational members perceive that the organization invests in them by receiving a clear, consistent and unambiguous HRM message (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), they will reward the organization with higher attachment to the organization (Kinnie et al, 2005; Gilbert et al, 2011; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). The following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 1: A (a) distinct, (b) consistent, or (c) consensual HRM system is positively related to organizational members' affective commitment.

2.2.3 Configurational approach

Another way to explain the relationship between HRM system strength and affective commitment is to adopt the configurational approach. The underlying principle of this approach is that there are multiple unique configurations of factors that could result in maximum performance (Delery & Doty, 1996). This means that the characteristics of HRM system strength; distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, are interrelated and that there are several combinations of the characteristics that could lead to organizational members' affective commitment. Research about interrelationships between characteristics of HRM system strength is scarce. A theory where the principles of the configurational approach are applied to is the AMO theory (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Therefore, principles of the AMO theory are adopted to help to explain the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment.

Interaction effects

Within the AMO theory, different models are used to explain the relationship with performance. A first model is the additive model (Delery, 1998), it is assumed that there is a substitutional relationship among factors. This means that the factors ability, motivation and opportunity have a direct and independent impact on performance, boosting one of the factors will increase the performance of the organization (Nehles et al., 2010). This line of reasoning could be applied to HRM system strength as well. It can be argued that performance; affective commitment, is a function of the additive effect of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus ($P = D+C+C$). This means that the characteristics can compensate one another. A high level of one of the characteristics will compensate a low level of another characteristic (Nehles et al., 2010). If one of the characteristics is improved, this will positively influence the affective commitment of organizational members. The following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 2: The additive effect of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus is positively related to organizational members' affective commitment

Another model that could be adopted is the multiplicative model. There could be positive or negative synergistic effects (Delery, 1998). Applied to the AMO theory, this means that if ability, motivation or opportunity is absent, then performance cannot occur (Nehles et al., 2010). While the additional model assumes that the characteristics of HRM system strength are compensatory, when adopting a multiplicative approach it is assumed that distinctiveness, consistency and consensus are complementary (Delery, 1998). It is argued that performance is a function of the multiplicative effect of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus ($P=DxCxC$). The implication of this three-way

interaction is that distinctiveness, consistency and consensus should be present at least to some degree, in order for organizational members' affective commitment to occur. If employees do not perceive a distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system at the same time, they will not feel committed to the organization. The following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 3: The multiplicative effect of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus is positively related to organizational members' affective commitment.

Moderating effects

While it could be argued that the three characteristics together have an effect on organizational members' affective commitment, it could also be argued that two-way interaction effects occur. When assuming a moderating effect, this means that some characteristics of HRM system strength do not directly influence organizational members' affective commitment, without the presence of another characteristic. Some arguments can be found in the article of Bowen and Ostroff (2004). However, research about the interrelationships between distinctiveness, consistency and consensus is scarce. Gomes et al. (2010) treated consensus and consistency as antecedents of distinctiveness. They argued that distinctiveness is most important, and that consensus and consistency affects distinctiveness, but they did not explain why this relationship is expected. Frenkel et al. (2012) related distinctiveness and consistency to one dimension of consensus: justice. They found that a distinctive, attractive and consistently implemented HR system influences employees' perceptions of organizational justice. In order to get a better understanding of the interrelationships between the HRM system strength characteristics, hypotheses are formulated to explore two-way interaction effects without a clear theoretical explanation for the suggested relationships.

It seems reasonable to suggest that distinctiveness is a prerequisite for performance. This means that consistency and consensus do not directly influence organizational performance, without observable HR practices that capture the attention and interest of employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Kim & Ryu, 2011). Employees cannot perceive a consistent HRM message or cannot agree about the HRM message if they do not observe the HR practices. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) give some arguments for the moderating effect of consensus on distinctiveness. If HR decision makers agree on the HRM message, more people send similar communications about the HRM message. This enhances the visibility of HR practices. Furthermore, consensus among the HR decision makers fosters the formulation and implementation of a HR strategy which is aligned with the organizational strategy, thereby promoting relevance and legitimacy of the HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 4a: A consensual HRM system moderates the relationship between a distinct HRM system and organizational members' affective commitment.

As argued by Bowen and Ostroff (2004), distinctiveness ensures that the HRM system defines the social context for employee behavior, a consistent HRM message enhances the likelihood that desired behaviors will be exposed by employees. A consistent communication and implementation of HR practices across the organization enhances the visibility, understandability and relevance of the HRM system and fosters the creation of shared meanings about the HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), which in turn will positively influence organizational members' affective commitment. HR practices that are implemented as intended (Chow, 2012), strengthens the relationship between a distinctive HRM system and organizational members' affective commitment. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 4b: A consistent HRM system moderates the relationship between a distinct HRM system and organizational members' affective commitment.

A consistent HRM message that is communicated throughout the organization signals to employees which behavior is expected and rewarded (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). However, the relationship between consistency and organizational members' affective commitment could be impeded by disagreement among HR decision makers (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). When there is no agreement among HR principals, it can occur that the unofficial HRM message is different from the official explicit HRM message, which will lead to different interpretations of the HRM message among employees (Bartram et al., 2007). But if there is agreement among top management and HR managers about the HR goals of the organization, or agreement among HR managers and line managers about the implementation of HR, this will enhance the communication of unambiguous and consistent HRM messages throughout the organization. The effect of consistency on organizational members' affective commitment will become stronger. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 4c: A consensual HRM system moderates the relationship between a consistent HRM system and organizational members' affective commitment.

Less explicit arguments for a moderating effect of distinctiveness on the relationship between consistency and affective commitment can be found in the article of Bowen and Ostroff (2004). Consistency between implemented and intended HR practices (Chow, 2012), positively influences organizational members' affective commitment. This relationship becomes stronger if employees actually observe the HR practices of the organization, if they understand what is expected from them and if they perceive the practices as important to their own goals. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 4d: A distinctive HRM system moderates the relationship between a consistent HRM system and organizational members' affective commitment.

Furthermore, it could be argued that without consensus among HRM decision makers about the HRM message, it will not be possible to communicate distinct and consistent HRM messages. If there is consensus among HRM principal decision makers, this will foster consensus among employees. If organizational members perceive consensus among HRM decision makers, this will help them to create shared meanings about what is expected (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), which in turn will positively influence their affective commitment. Furthermore, if organizational members are supported by consistent HRM messages that communicate which behavior is expected and rewarded, the effect of consensus on organizational members' affective commitment will be enhanced. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 4e: A consistent HRM system moderates the relationship between a consensual HRM system and organizational members' affective commitment.

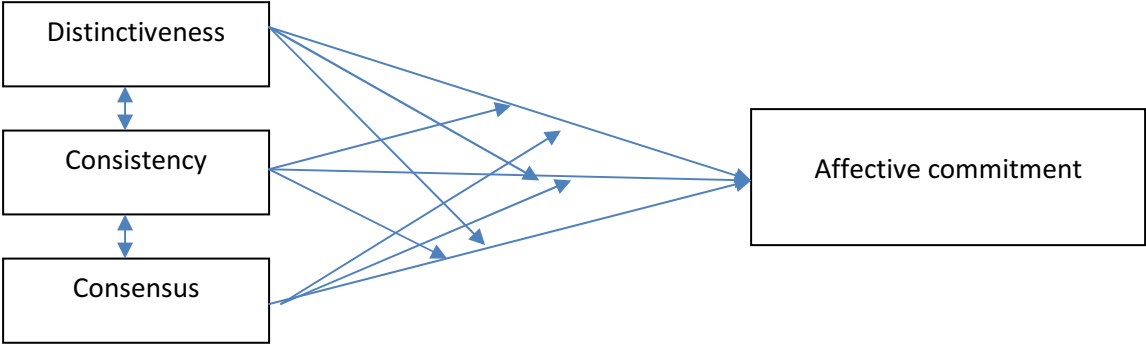
Another explanation could be that distinctiveness moderates the relationship between consensus and organizational members' affective commitment. If consensus among HRM decision makers about the formulation and implementation of HR is translated into visible, understandable and relevant HR practices, the effect of consensus on organizational members' affective commitment will be stronger. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 4f: A distinctive HRM system positively moderates the relationship between a consensual HRM system and organizational members' affective commitment.

2.3 Research model

Based on the review of the literature, it can be concluded that HRM system strength is expected to be related to organizational members' affective commitment to the organization. A research model is developed, in line with the formulated hypotheses.

Figure 1: The hypothesized relationship between HRM system strength and affective commitment



3. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology will be outlined. Paragraph 3.1 contains a description of the organization in which the research is conducted. In paragraph 3.2 it is argued which research design is chosen and why. Paragraph 3.3 describes both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods that are used. Paragraph 3.4 contains the sample and participants of the research. The procedures that are followed are outlined in paragraph 3.5. Paragraph 3.6 contains the operationalization of the variables of this study. A reflection on the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument is given in paragraph 3.7. The data analysis procedure is described in paragraph 3.8.

3.1 Company TSN Thuiszorg

The research is conducted within TSN Thuiszorg. The company is established in 2002 by healthcare people who believed that home care could be organized better and more efficiently, with the result of more time and quality for the care of people who need help (Organization, structure and meeting forms, 2011). In 2007, TSN Thuiszorg became part of the ADG Dienstengroep. While TSN Thuiszorg is operating in the health care sector, it is a profit organization. With more than 20.000 employees spread over 56 locations, it is the largest home care organization in the Netherlands. Due to mergers and takeovers, the organization grew tremendously in a short time. TSN Thuiszorg provides domestic care, personal care and guidance to people who need help, and serves about 100.000 clients. Regulations from government play an important role. The domestic care is financed by the WMO (Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning), people who need personal or medical care receive care that is financed by the AWBZ (Algemene Wet Bijzondere Ziektekosten). The mission of TSN Thuiszorg is:

“TSN Thuiszorg is an independent home care provider (AWBZ and WMO) with a nationwide covering of establishments. From local, neighborhood focused establishments, TSN is daily exerting to be the best home care provider with the most competitive price-quality ratio by continuously testing her processes and where necessary improving, and besides maintaining a “lean and mean” organization. Furthermore, TSN provides her clients superior service, which is aimed at optimal functioning in their own environment. In acting personal commitment is the driving force (Organization, structure and meeting forms, 2011).

TSN Thuiszorg has a strong local focus. They believe that care should be organized around the corner. Care is delivered from establishments all over the Netherlands in small teams that know the neighborhood, know what the client needs and they arrange the care that people need (TSN Thuiszorg, n.d.). The main part of the organization is the WMO business unit, which delivers domestic

help for people who are not able to organize their own household like elderly, sick and disabled people. Furthermore, personal and medical care is delivered to needy people by the AWBZ business unit. Supportive staff functions like HR, finance and facility management are organized at the headquarter. Line management consists of 14 rayonmanagers and in total 115 zorgcoördinatoren. Rayonmanagers are responsible for three to ten districts. Zorgcoördinatoren are operating at establishments and are the direct manager of the health care employees. The organization operates in a very dynamic environment which rapidly changes. Political developments largely influence the core business of TSN Thuiszorg. High cuts around the household care in 2015 and devolution of AWBZ tasks to municipalities have a great impact on the operation. Margins are low, therefore TSN Thuiszorg needs to search for new market opportunities, be innovative and deliver high quality care in a very efficient way while putting the client central.

3.2 Research design

In order to investigate the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment, a case study was conducted. A case study involves the in-depth study of a particular phenomenon (Babbie, 2010). This research design provides a rich understanding of the context of the research and the process being enacted (Saunders et al., 2007). The research was conducted within TSN Thuiszorg. This company is chosen because of several reasons. First, with more than 20.000 employees working at TSN Thuiszorg, this organization provides the opportunity to conduct research among a large population of HR professionals, line managers and employees. This makes a comparison between those stakeholders within the organization possible. Second, the business units that provide domestic care and medical care are two very different business units. The research gives insight in the differences in perceptions between those business units. Third, TSN Thuiszorg is a dispersed organization with locations all over the Netherlands. There is a large distance between the HR department and the health care people. From current research it is not clear what this means for the effectiveness of HR.

3.3 Data collection methods

Within case studies, it is likely to use different data collection techniques (Saunders et al., 2007). In this research several quantitative and qualitative techniques are applied as well. Due to time constraints a cross-sectional study was more appropriate than a longitudinal design. In Table 1, an overview of the methods and why these methods are chosen is given.

Table 1: Overview of data collection techniques

Method	Why is this method chosen?	Sample
Document analysis	To get a deeper understanding of the structure of the organization, the organization of the HR department, how the HR responsibilities are divided, the intended HR policies and HR practices and the way this is communicated to employees	Organization documents, HR policies, instruments and procedures, work instructions, job descriptions, regulations N = 34 (see Appendix 3 for an overview)
Interviews bachelor students	To get deeper insight in the HR frames of HR professionals and line managers. It provided a better understanding of the vision and philosophy about HR and how it is executed on the work floor. The secondary data is used to support the outcomes of the questionnaire	HR managers, n = 4 Line managers, n = 4
Questionnaire	In order to test the relationship between the strength of the HRM system and the affective commitment of organizational members	Total n = 3277 Employees, n = 3170 Line management, n = 76 HR professionals, n = 31
Focus group	A focus group is held to get an answer on why the HRM system is perceived in this way and how the effectiveness of HR can be improved	Total n =12 HR professionals, n = 6 Line managers, n = 3 Work council, n = 2 Process employee n = 1

3.4 Sample and participants

The research sample consisted of people working at TSN Thuiszorg. All employees of the organization were approached. The population consisted of line management (n = 143), HR (n = 52), and employees (n = 19910). The employees stemmed from all the three business units; WMO, AWBZ and the headquarter of the organization. In total 3277 online filled out questionnaires were received, which means an overall response rate of 16.4%. 3170 employees filled out the questionnaire, which means a response rate of 15.9%. 76 line managers responded, a response rate of 53.1%. 31 questionnaires were received from HR, the response rate was 59.6%.

3.5 Procedure

Different procedures are used to conduct the data collection techniques as reported in Table 1. The way this is done will be elaborated for each of the methods.

3.5.1 Document analysis

A document analysis was performed in order to gain insight in the organization structure and how HR is organized within TSN Thuiszorg. Several organizational documents like the organization plan and organization structure were studied to get insight in the mission and vision of TSN as well as how the organization is structured. On the website additional information was found about the services that TSN Thuiszorg offers to its clients and how TSN Thuiszorg arranges this care. Furthermore, a lot of HR related documents were analyzed. HR policies, instruments, working instructions and process descriptions provided insight in the intended HR policies and practices, the HR services the HR department delivers and the way this is executed. Job descriptions from HR and line management were studied to gain insight in the division of HR responsibilities within the organization. The HR strategy provided insight in the transition of the HR department towards a HR service delivery model. When selecting relevant documents, a main criterion was if it provided relevant information about the organization or HR.

3.5.2 Secondary data from interviews bachelor students

Two bachelor students conducted semi-structured interviews with HR managers and line managers in order to get insight in the congruence of HR frames within TSN Thuiszorg. Purposive sampling is used to select cases, which is a kind of non-probability sampling technique that selects respondents which best enabled the bachelor students to answer their research question (Saunders et al., 2007). First, based on the advice of a HR professional and with the goal of the research of the bachelor students in mind, four HR professionals were selected of varying rayon's. Two HR professionals that serve the WMO business unit as well two HR professionals that support the AWBZ business unit where invited to participate by me. Then snowball sampling is used to select the rayonmanagers, which means that you ask respondents to identify further cases (Saunders et al., 2007). The HR professionals were asked which of the rayonmanagers they support should be asked to participate in the interviews and then the rayonmanagers were approached by phone. In total eight semi-structured interviews were conducted.

3.5.3 Questionnaire

In order to test the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire was discussed first with

the HR Director and a HR professional, in order to customize the questionnaire to the organization. The HR Director made an announcement about the research in the newsletter of the organization, people were kindly asked to participate in the research. Based on a list of all the employees of the organization, the respondents were approached by e-mail. They received an invitation letter that contains information about the research goal, the research itself, the way they could fill out the questionnaire and the fact that anonymity and confidentiality was assured. The e-mail included a link to the online survey. The response period was three weeks. After 1.5 week, a reminder was sent to the respondents in which they were kindly asked to fill out the questionnaire if they did not responded yet. Completing the questionnaire took about 8 minutes. Forced entry was used, so there were no missing values.

3.5.4 Focus group

A focus group was organized because it provided me the opportunity to get insight in which explanations could be given for the perceptions of different stakeholders about the HRM system within TSN Thuiszorg. Reasons for perceived HR effectiveness were put forward by several stakeholders; line managers, HR professionals and employees. It provided me the opportunity to gather more detailed and qualitative information about the effectiveness of HR within TSN Thuiszorg and gave insights in improvements of the HRM system. Furthermore, the focus group enabled me to come up with better recommendations that fit the context of TSN Thuiszorg. Participants were selected by using purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2007). Employees, HR professionals and line managers were selected because it was expected that they all could reveal important information about the subject of HR effectiveness. Three HR professionals and three rayonmanagers, two from WMO and one from the AWBZ business unit, were invited to participate via an online invitation. Due to practical reasons, the vacation period, only two HR professionals that support the WMO business unit were able to participate. Furthermore, the HR director, the head of the HR administration and two HR process employees were invited. One process employees and two members of the work council were invited to represent the employees within the organization in order to have present all the stakeholders of the research; employees, line managers and HR professionals. The work council members fulfill the function of zorgcoordinator in their daily work, in the focus group they sometimes acted as members of the work council, other times they looked from their perspective as zorgcoördinatoren. I acted as the leader of the 2 hours lasting focus group. After a short introduction of me and the research that was conducted at TSN Thuiszorg, a discussion took place. An announcement in the beginning was made that everyone should feel free to make their contributions to the discussion; everyone got the opportunity to participate. As a preparation, propositions were formulated based on the most striking results of the research. The propositions were shown in a

presentation, and were posed to the participants which were invited to react on it. I asked follow-up questions in order to get a better understanding of the answers given by the participants.

3.6 Research instrument

In order to test the variables that are included in the research model, they needed to be operationalized and translated into items for the questionnaire. The participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire with questions related to HRM system strength. Furthermore, they were asked about their affective commitment to the organization. In order to measure the variables existing scales were used that have been reported to be valid and reliable. The used scales are originally formulated in English, but were already translated into Dutch by other researchers. Table 2 gives an overview of the operationalization of the variables.

HRM system strength

In order to measure HRM system strength, the measure developed by Delmotte et al. (2011) is used. HRM system strength means communicating clear, consistent and unambiguous messages to employees about which behavior is expected and rewarded (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). HRM system strength consists of the elements distinctiveness, consistency and consensus (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011). Bondarouk et al. (2010) translated the items of Delmotte et al. (2011) into Dutch. 27 items about HRM system strength are included in this research. Distinctiveness is about the extent to which HRM is observable, and included 13 items such as 'Employees are regularly informed about the initiatives taken by the HR department'. Consistency deals with the alignment of the HRM system and HR messages. This scale consists of 10 items and included for example 'There is a wide gap between intended and actual effects of HR initiatives'. Consensus refers to the agreement among HRM decision makers about HRM, four items are included. For example: 'HR management and line management are clearly on the same wavelength. The items were all measured on a five point Likert scale. The used scales of Bondarouk et al. (2010) and Delmotte et al. (2011) have been reported to be reliable. The Cronbach alpha's of the scales of Delmotte range from 0.70 to 0.86, Bondarouk et al. (2010) reported Cronbach alpha's ranging from 0.631 (consensus), 0.78 (consistency) and 0.887 (distinctiveness). All but one of the Cronbach Alpha's is above the threshold of 0.70 (Field, 2009).

Affective commitment

The dependent variable of this research is affective commitment of employees. This involves the affective commitment to the organization (Meyer et al., 1993). Existing scales from Torka (2003) are used to measure affective commitment. Affective commitment to the organization can be defined as

a strong desire to remain in the organization (Meyer et al., 1993). The scale consisted of six items and included an item like 'I'm proud to work in this organization'. The items were all measured on a five point Likert scale. The scale of Torka (2003) has proven to be reliable. The Cronbach Alpha of the affective commitment scale to the organization as reported by Torka (2003) is 0.90.

Control variables

In order to rule out the influence of other factors that affects employees perceptions about HRM system strength or their affective commitment, some control variables were included. Control variables related to organizational members' gender, age, level of education, number of years within the organization, and type and size of labor contract were taken into account. The variable gender is dummy coded (0 = male, 1 = female), as well as the type of contract (0 = flexible, 1 = fixed term) and the size of contract (0 = part-time, 1 = fulltime).

3.7 Validity and reliability

An exploratory factor analysis is performed in order to test if the items of the scales loaded on the same factor as expected. In this research, four variables are included: distinctiveness, consistency, consensus and affective commitment. These variables are made up of several items, as reported in Table 2. However, the exploratory factor analysis showed surprising results. For HRM system strength, a three factor solution was expected (Bondarouk et al., 2010; Delmotte et al., 2011), but instead a four factor solution was reported. Surprisingly, all the reversed coded items loaded on one factor. Exploratory factor analysis is performed for the constructs distinctiveness, consistency and consensus as well. Both distinctiveness and consistency showed a two factor solution, with all the reversed coded items loaded on the same factor. For distinctiveness a four factor solution was expected (Bondarouk et al., 2010; Delmotte et al., 2011). The two factor solution for the consistency scale did not fit the operationalization of items as was expected based on the scales of Bondarouk et al. (2010) and Delmotte et al. (2011). Consensus and affective commitment showed a one factor solution in line with existing research about HRM system strength (Bondarouk et al., 2010; Delmotte et al., 2011) and affective commitment (Torka, 2003) respectively. The analysis of the characteristics of HRM system strength showed that the items are mixed up. In order to create a good measurement model, confirmatory factor analysis was performed. In an exploratory factor analysis all factors affect all measured variables, when conducting a confirmatory factor analysis a researcher specifies that particular factors have an effect on, or load on, particular variables that were measured (Grimm & Yarnold, 2002).

Table 2: Operationalization of the variables

Variable	Definition	Items	Source and Cronbach Alpha's
HRM system strength = <i>communicating unambiguous messages to employees about which behavior is expected and rewarded (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011).</i>			
Distinctiveness	Features that allow a situation to stand out in the environment and to capture attention and interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am regularly informed about the initiatives taken by the HR department - In this organization it is clear what the tasks of the HR department are - The actual functioning of the HR department is a mystery to me[®] - The HR department works too much behind the scenes[®] - The HR activities in my organization are easy to understand - I understand the HR strategy of my organization - The HR department gives understandable information on HR activities - The HR department in this organization has a high status - The HR department in this organization has enough power to manage employees - The HR department in this organization gets full support from top management for HR activities - I often wonder about the usefulness of the HR activities in our organization[®] - The HR department undertakes those actions that exactly meet my needs - The HR activities in our organization help me to achieve my goals. 	Adapted from Bondarouk et al., (2010), Delmotte et al. (2011), 13 items $\alpha = 0.918$
Consistency	Establishment of an effect over time and modalities regardless of the form of interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The HR activities for employee appraisal succeed in encouraging the desired behavior. - The HR activities add value to the functioning of our organization. - There is a clear fit between HR promises and deliverables. - There is a wide gap between intended and actual effects of HR initiatives[®] - The HR activities implemented in this organization sound good in theory, but do not function in practice[®] 	Adapted from Bondarouk et al., (2010), Delmotte et al. (2011), 10 items $\alpha = 0.807$

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR policies in this organization are changed every minute[®] - In this organization there is a clear match between all HR messages - There is a clear fit between all HR activities - The various HR initiatives send inconsistent signals[®] 	
Consensus	There is an agreement among individuals' views of the event effect relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR and line management are clearly on the same wavelength - Top management and HR professionals clearly share the same HR vision - HR management is established by mutual agreement between HR professionals and line management - Management commonly supports HR policy in our organization 	Adapted from Bondarouk et al., (2010), Delmotte et al. (2011), 4 items $\alpha = 0.870$
Affective commitment = a strong desire to remain in the organization (Meyer et al, 1993; Torka, 2003).			
Affective commitment	Emotionally attachment towards the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm proud to work for this organization - I belong to the 'organization' family - This organization is nice to work for - This organization means much to me - I feel home in this organization - I want to accept almost every job to work for this organization 	Adapted from Meyer et al. (1993), Torka (2003), 6 items $\alpha = 0.939$

In the confirmatory factor analysis first-order models, as well as second-order models were explored. While both models showed a good model fit, the second order model did not provide reliable scales. Therefore it was decided to develop a first-order measurement model with the characteristics distinctiveness, consistency and consensus included. All the measures were at a satisfactory level, with CFI, GFI and NFI all above 0.90 and a RMSEA below 0.08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The measures are: CFI = 0.924, GFI = 0.900, NFI = 0.919, RMSEA=0.063). The Cronbach Alpha's were all way above the threshold of 0.70 (Distinctiveness = 0.918, consistency = 0.807 and consensus = 0.870). Although exploratory factor analysis showed good factor loading for affective commitment, in order to be consistent a confirmatory factor analysis for this scale is conducted as well. This model shows good fit (CFI = 0.994, GFI, = 0.988, NFI = 0.993, RMSEA = 0.060), and the reported Cronbach Alpha is high (0.939). Based on the analyses, the measurement instruments for HRM system strength and affective commitment can be considered as valid and reliable.

A low response rate increases the risk of sampling bias (Saunders et al., 2007). Therefore the data was checked for sampling bias (Field, 2009). A histogram showed a normal distribution of the data. Scatterplots were checked but did not show extreme outliers and showed heteroscedasticity. The measure of Durbin Watson was 1.905, a value close to 2 shows that there is no problem with the correlation of residuals (Field, 2009). Furthermore, residual statistics were checked with a default criterion of 2 SD away from the mean. The results show that there are 159 cases with SD's above 2. This means a percentage of 4.9% of the cases in the sample, which is below the threshold of 5% (Field, 2009). The measure of Cook distance' of all cases was below 1, so there were no cases that exert undue influence on the parameters in the model (Field, 2009). It can be concluded that sample bias is not a problem.

3.8 Data analysis

A quantitative method is used to collect the data. In order to analyze the results of the questionnaire, SPSS is used. The answers of the questionnaire were automatically entered into SPSS. The answers were coded based on the questionnaire. Means, standard deviations and correlations were calculated. Regression analysis is used to test the formulated hypotheses. First, the independent effect of the different characteristics of HRM system strength on affective commitment was tested. Second, the additional effect was tested by adding up the independent variables and testing their effect on affective commitment. Third, the multiplicative effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable was tested. Fourth, the interrelationships between the characteristics of HRM system strength were investigated by exploring the moderating effects of the characteristics distinctiveness, consistency and consensus upon the direct relationships between a characteristic

and affective commitment. Simple slope analysis was conducted to investigate the significant interaction effects further.

A qualitative research method, a focus group, was conducted to gain more detailed information about the perceived effectiveness of the HRM system. The focus group was recorded. Afterwards a transcription is made from the focus group session. A deductive approach was adopted to analyze the data. The theoretical framework of Bowen and Ostroff (2004) about HRM system strength was taken as a starting point, advantages of such an approach are that it links the research into the existing body of knowledge, and it directs the analysis of the data (Saunders et al., 2007). An open coding process is used to analyze the data. The characteristics of HRM system strength of Bowen and Ostroff (2004), distinctiveness, consistency and consensus formed the main categories. Within these categories, the features as distinguished by Bowen and Ostroff (2004) were defined as subcategories. First each statement from focus group members was cut into short phrases, which then were assigned to one of the main categories. The second step was to assign phrases to the sub dimensions of HRM system strength (validity, understandability, relevance, legitimacy, instrumentality/validity, consistency of HR messages and consensus among HR decision makers). The third step was to assign labels to the phrases within the defined subcategories. For example for the sub item legitimacy codes like demonstrating value to the organization, self-resolving power and sparring partner were created. Furthermore, within each subcategory a distinction is made between phrases of line managers, HR professionals and employees in order to make comparisons between perceptions of different groups of organizational members.

4. Results

In this chapter, the results of the research are presented. In paragraph 4.1, the HRM system within TSN Thuiszorg is described. In paragraph 4.2, means, standard deviations and correlations are reported. Paragraph 4.3 until 4.6 present the results of the tested hypotheses. In paragraph 4.7, the findings of the document analysis and focus group are outlined.

4.1 The HRM system within TSN Thuiszorg

In order to get a better understanding of how HR is organized within TSN Thuiszorg and the intended HR policies and practices, several documents are studied. Documents about the organization, HR policies, HR instruments, job descriptions and HR procedures provided more detailed information about the HRM system of TSN Thuiszorg.

Last years, TSN Thuiszorg grew tremendously due to takeovers and mergers with the major expansion of the workforce as a consequence. However, the HR department within TSN Thuiszorg stayed somewhat behind these developments. In the near future, TSN Thuiszorg will face a lot of challenges. In order to cope with this, the HR department will be professionalized. The HR department at TSN Thuiszorg is organized centrally at the headquarter in Almelo. Several HR disciplines are working together to deliver HR services. The HR administration functions as a front office and back office of all the administrative HR processes. Two specialist teams 'TSN arbo and health care' and 'TSN zorgcollege' deliver expertise in the areas of health and training respectively. The health and sickness team is focused on the prevention of absenteeism and delivers expertise in the area of health and sickness. TSN zorgcollege is responsible for providing training in order to ensure high quality care. HR managers act as a sparring partner of line management and are responsible for giving advice and support to line managers in the organization about HR aspects, social law and the implementation of HR policies and practices (Job description HR professional, 2008). There are some specialists as well, who are responsible for delivering expertise and knowledge in the areas of recruitment and law. The HR Director developed a HR strategy for the professionalization of the HR department. It is planned to organize the HR department as a HR service delivery model. The HR department will be organized around four blocks: HR advice, HR service center, training and development, and health care. Furthermore, there are some specialists, a recruiter, law professionals and professionals who are responsible for the development of HR policies and processes. Main goal is to deliver HR services in a more customer oriented and efficient way. In this way HR is better able to contribute to the organization (HR strategy, 2013). The HR vision of TSN Thuiszorg is:

“TSN Thuiszorg puts the client and the health care professional central. Our way of working and systems are designed in such a way to maximize the time spend on the delivery of care. Employees of TSN provide all sorts of care at home, from household assistance until personal care & nursing. TSN Thuiszorg has a strong position in the neighborhood. Fixed teams know the environment, speak the language and know their way, they organize the care the client needs in order to function in their own familiar environment as long as possible: Always home.”

“The function HR contributes to the result of TSN by the execution of high quality and efficient HR processes and the control of HR costs. In this way TSN can dispose of the right number of qualified and motivated employees at any time. Line management is responsible for HR and is optimal supported and advised by the HR function.” (HR strategy, 2013).

A lot of HR responsibilities are devolved to line management in the organization. Rayon managers are middle level managers of TSN Thuiszorg who are responsible for the operational management of their rayon in the area of WMO or AWBZ. They translate the business strategy to the operation and they need to ensure high service quality and client satisfaction. Furthermore they maintain contacts with municipalities and other third parties and search for new business opportunities. They are directly responsible for the management of 10 to 25 ‘zorgcoördinatoren’, the low level line managers within the organization. Indirectly they are responsible for 2500 employees in the field. The rayonmanager is responsible for HR tasks as well. They need to translate HR policies and practices to the lower level in the organization (Job description rayonmanager, 2010). The operational HR tasks are devolved to zorgcoördinatoren. The main task of zorgcoördinatoren is the planning and coordination of care for their location. Zorgcoördinatoren in the WMO business unit give leadership to 150 to 200 household employees while zorgcoördinatoren in the AWBZ business unit are responsible for the management of 30 to 50 healthcare employees. Zorgcoördinatoren are responsible for the operational HR tasks; recruitment & selection, training and development, employee appraisal, compensation and management of sick leave (Job description zorgcoördinator, 2010).

Both rayonmanagers and zorgcoördinatoren are supported by the HR department for the execution of their HR tasks. The HR managers in the organization act as sparring partners of line management (Job description HR professional, 2008). Each HR manager supports some rayonmanagers and zorgcoördinatoren. Before the HR managers mainly worked from the headquarter. But this is changing. The HR managers will become more locally present in the field. They only come together with the other HR managers one day a week at the headquarter. The HR managers advice the line

management about the translation of HR policies and HR practices to the field and support the implementation of HR initiatives. They need to align HR with the business goals of the organization by taking up a pro-active role (Job description HR professional, 2008).

4.2 Means, standard deviations and correlations

In Table 3 means, standard deviations and correlations of all the variables are reported. The overall mean scores and SD's are calculated, as well as the correlations between the different variables. Spearman's Rho is used as a measure for correlation. The results show that all the three characteristics of HRM system strength are correlated with affective commitment: distinctiveness ($r_s = 0.516$, $p < 0.001$), consistency ($r_s = 0.531$, $p < 0.001$), and consensus ($r_s = 0.453$, $p < 0.001$). It seems that distinctiveness and consistency are better predictors of HRM system strength than consensus, although the strength of the correlations does not differ much. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the characteristics of HRM system strength are interrelated. Distinctiveness and consistency positively correlate ($r_s = 0.797$, $p < 0.001$). There is a positive correlation between distinctiveness and consensus ($r_s = 0.640$, $p < 0.001$), and between consistency and consensus as well ($r_s = 0.641$, $p < 0.001$). The fairly high correlation coefficients may suggest multicollinearity problems. In order to test if multicollinearity between distinctiveness, consistency and consensus could be a problem, the Variance Inflation Factor is analyzed. VIF range from 1.867 to 3.175, which is quite low. All the VIF's are below the threshold of 10, so multicollinearity does not play a role (Field, 2009). From the control variables, only level of education shows a meaningful correlation with each of the characteristics of HRM system strength and employees' affective commitment, although the correlation coefficients are quite low.

The results in Table 3 show that the overall mean scores on the variables distinctiveness (3.01), consistency (3.07) and consensus (3.09) are moderate. The score on affective commitment is quite high (3.77). Most organizational members are women (96.7%) and are relatively old, the mean age category is 45-49. The organizational members are not very highly educated, most people finished high school. Only 35% of the organizational members work longer than seven years in this organization. Many organizational members have a permanent contract (72.1%) and most of them are working part-time (86.8%). The mean scores and SD's for the different stakeholders in the organization are reported in Table 4. The results show different scores for the different groups of organizational members. A one way ANOVA is conducted to test if these differences are significant. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 3: Means, standard deviations and correlations

	Mean	SD	Affective commitment	Distinctiveness	Consistency	Consensus	Gender	Age	Level of education	Number of years	Contract time	Contract size
Affective commitment	3.77	0.97	1.000									
Distinctiveness	3.01	0.72	0.516***	1.000								
Consistency	3.07	0.71	0.531***	0.797***	1.000							
Consensus	3.09	0.67	0.453***	0.640***	0.641***	1.000						
Gender = 1	0.97	0.18	0.040**	0.067***	0.032*	0.039*	1.000					
Age	7.11	2.11	0.007	0.037*	-0.006	0.014	0.055***	1.000				
Level of education	5.11	2.35	-0.197***	-0.160***	-0.104***	-0.116***	-0.122***	-0.212***	1.000			
Number of years	2.24	1.22	-0.022	-0.027	-0.050**	-0.051**	0.055***	0.304***	-0.134***	1.000		
Contracttime = 1	0.72	0.45	-0.010	-0.031*	-0.039*	-0.017	0.023***	0.191***	-0.090***	0.456***	1.000	
Contractsize = 1	0.13	0.34	0.073***	0.026	0.045**	0.001	-0.125***	0.001	0.054***	-0.007	0.054***	1.000

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Table 4: Means, standard deviations different stakeholders and results one way Anova

	Overall (n=3277)		Employees (n=3170)		Line managers (n=76)		HR professionals (n=31)		F-value (df = 2)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Distinctiveness	3.01	0.72	3.02	0.72	2.63	0.47	2.73	0.52	13.077***
Consistency	3.07	0.71	3.07	0.71	2.80	0.54	3.08	0.59	5.337***
Consensus	3.09	0.67	3.10	0.67	2.60	0.58	2.64	0.65	28.209***
Affective commitment	3.77	0.97	3.78	0.97	3.30	0.79	3.48	0.86	10.789***

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

The differences in means for distinctiveness ($F = 13.077$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$), consistency ($F = 5.337$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$), and consensus ($F = 28.209$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$) are all significant. For all characteristics of HRM system strength employees perceive the HRM system as most strong. HR professionals perceive the HRM system as less strong, while line managers perceive lowest strength of the HRM system. A post hoc Bonferroni test is conducted in order to test for significant differences.

Table 4 shows that employees perceive the distinctiveness of the HRM system as most strong (3.02), while line managers are least positive (2.63), HR professionals perceive distinctiveness slightly stronger (2.73). The Bonferroni test shows that for the distinctiveness dimension only the difference between line managers and employees is significant (mean difference = 0.3848, $p = 0.05$). The score on consistency of the HRM system does not differ much for employees and HR professionals (3.07 and 3.08 respectively), while line managers perceive the HRM system as less consistent (2.80). The findings of the Bonferroni test show that only the different scores on consistency between line managers and employees is significant (mean difference = 0.2670, $p = 0.05$). While according to employees the HRM system is most consensual (3.10) when looking at the strength of the HRM system, in contrast both line managers (2.60) and HR professionals (2.64) perceive the HRM system as least consensual. For consensus, Bonferroni test shows that the difference between HR professionals and employees is significant (mean difference = 0.4569, $p = 0.05$) as well as the difference between line managers and employees (mean difference = 0.5044, $p = 0.05$). It can be concluded that employees perceive the HRM system stronger than line managers do. This is in contrast with existing research about HRM system strength and HR effectiveness, it was expected that employees were the least positive (Kane et al., 1999; Geare et al., 2006). Furthermore, one way ANOVA shows that the difference in means for affective commitment is significant as well ($F = 10.789$, $p < 0.001$). Employees are most affectively committed to the organization (3.78), while line managers (3.30) are least committed, followed by HR professionals (3.48). But based on the post hoc Bonferroni test it can be concluded that there is only a significant difference in means for affective commitment between line managers and employees (mean difference = 0.4862, $p = 0.05$).

In order to get better insight in the scores on the three characteristics of HRM system strength, means are calculated for the lower order constructs as well. These means can be found in Table 17 in Appendix 4. The results reveal some interesting scores. While employees perceive the HRM system as legitimate, the HR professionals within the organization do not perceive that they have a lot of power within the organization. According to line managers, the HRM system scores best on this feature of distinctiveness. Furthermore, line managers perceive a low visibility and understandability of the HRM system within the organization, while employees score moderate on visibility. Employees

perceive that there is not a clear link between the goals of the organization and their own goals; they score lowest on the relevance of the HRM system. A closer look to consistency shows disagreement among employees on the one hand and HR professionals and line managers on the other hand. Both HR professionals and line managers perceive the instrumentality of the HR system higher than the consistency of the HRM messages, while employees perceive that there are consistent HRM messages communicated throughout the organization. Both HR and line management perceive low consensus of the HRM system, which means that they experience that they do not always agree about HR. Employees perceive consensus of the HRM system as moderate.

The differences in means for employees from the WMO and AWBZ business unit are analyzed as well; the results are reported in Table 18 from Appendix 4. It can be concluded that employees from the AWBZ department perceive lower HRM system strength. They score lower on all the three characteristics as well as the underlying sub constructs. The AWBZ employees perceive the HRM system as least consensual, while WMO employees gave the highest scores to this dimension of HRM system strength. The AWBZ employees score highest on the consistency dimension. It seems that AWBZ employees have different expectations about the HRM system compared to WMO employees.

4.3 Direct effects

In order to investigate the relationship between the characteristics of HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment, first the direct effect of each of the characteristics on affective commitment is tested using linear regression. The results can be found in Table 5.

Model 1 includes only the control variables. It seems that the higher the organizational members are educated, the less they are committed towards the organization, although the coefficient is quite low (-0.071). Furthermore, employees that have a fulltime contract are more emotionally attached towards the organization (0.222). There is a negative effect of number of years on organizational members' affective commitment, but this effect is very small (-0.037.) Hypothesis 1 proposes that there is a direct and positive relationship between (a) distinctiveness, (b) consistency, and (c) consensus and organizational members' affective commitment. The results confirm this first hypothesis; there are strong relationships between all the characteristics of HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment. The results show that distinctiveness is positively related to organizational members' affective commitment ($t = 33.773$, $p < 0.001$), which supports hypothesis 1a. This implies that employees that perceive the HRM system as more distinctive do feel more emotional attached to the organization. The correlation coefficient for distinctiveness is 0.686, which indicates a strong relationship. Furthermore, the results show that

consistency is positively associated with organizational members' affective commitment ($t = 34.778$, $p < 0.001$). Employees that perceive consistent HRM messages throughout the organization, express higher levels of affective commitment towards the organization. This relationship is fairly strong (0.708). Moreover, the results indicate that consensus positively influences the affective commitment of organizational members ($t = 28.531$, $p < 0.001$). The higher the perceived consensus about the HRM system, the greater the extent to which employees feel that they are affective committed to the organization. This relationship is quite strong as well (0.639).

The regression analysis shows that all the three characteristics of HRM system strength are good predictors of affective commitment. The F-change of the models indicate that they are all better predictors of organizational members' affective commitment than the model with only the control variables included; model 2 (F-change = 1140.649, $p < 0.001$), model 3 (F-change = 1209.493, $p < 0.001$), and model 4 (F-change = 813.995, $p < 0.001$). The R^2 of the models are reported in Table 4 as well. Distinctiveness explains 28.5% of the variance in organizational members' affective commitment, while consistency (29.6%) and consensus (22.8%) also predict the commitment of organizational members fairly well. It seems that consistency is the best predictor of organizational members' affective commitment.

Table 5: Direct effects of HRM system strength characteristics on affective commitment

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	4.024***	4.027***	3.924***	3.990***
Gender	0.164	0.004	0.089	0.088
Age	0.002	-0.006	0.001	-0.003
Level of education	-0.071***	-0.044***	-0.050***	-0.055***
Number of years	-0.037*	-0.016	-0.013	-0.008
Contract time	-0.006	0.027	0.025	-0.012
Contract size	0.222***	0.148***	0.152***	0.210
Distinctiveness		0.686***		
Consistency			0.708***	
Consensus				0.639***
F	20.453***	186.591***	196.795***	138.175***
DF	6	7	7	7
R^2	0.036	0.285	0.296	0.228
R^2 adjusted	0.034	0.284	0.295	0.227

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

4.4 Additive effect

Results of the correlation analysis show that distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus are interrelated. Several hypotheses were formulated to test these interrelationships. Hypothesis 2 proposes that the characteristics of HRM system strength are compensatory. The independent effects can be added up and together distinctiveness, consistency and consensus affect organizational members' affective commitment. Multiple regression analysis is performed in order to test the formula $AC = D+C+C$.

The results of the multiple regression analysis are reported in Table 6. The results support the second hypothesis; together distinctiveness, consistency and consensus are positively related to organizational members' affective commitment ($F = 172.714$, $df = 9$, $p < 0.001$). The additive model implies that if organizational members perceive a distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system at the same time, the more affective committed they will be towards the organization. Furthermore, an additive effect means that a low score on one of the HRM system strength characteristics can be compensated for by a high score on one of the other characteristics. It can be concluded that distinctiveness ($t = 7.886$, $p < 0.001$), consistency ($t = 9.421$, $p < 0.001$) and consensus ($t = 5.719$, $p < 0.001$) are all significant predictors of organizational members' affective commitment. The coefficients range from 0.173 (consensus) to 0.354 (consistency), the coefficient for distinctiveness is 0.285. The coefficients are not quite large, which indicate not very strong relationships. Consistency has the most impact, while distinctiveness has a moderate impact as well. An increase in perceived consensus of the HRM system has the least effect on organizational members' affective commitment.

The results show that the explained variance of the additive model is 32.2%, which means that the sum of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus accounts for 32.2% of the variance in organizational members' affective commitment. The F-change is significant ($F=442.415$, $p < 0.001$), it is not surprising that the model which includes all the characteristics of HRM system strength is a better model to predict affective commitment than model 1 which only includes the control variables. Furthermore, the explained variance of the additive model (32.2%) shows that this model is a better predictor of organizational members' commitment than the model that included only the direct effects, because the explained variance of the direct models is lower (explained variance ranging from 22.8% to 29.6%).

Table 6: Additive effect of HRM system strength characteristics on affective commitment

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	4.024***	3.966***
Gender	0.164	0.039
Age	0.002	-0.003
Level of education	-0.071***	-0.045***
Number of years	-0.037*	-0.008
Contract time	-0.006	0.022
Contract size	0.222***	0.153***
Distinctiveness		0.285***
Consistency		0.354***
Consensus		0.173***
F	20.453***	172.714***
DF	6	9
R ²	0.036	0.322
R ² adjusted	0.034	0.321

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, * p<0.05

4.5 Multiplicative effect

Before the two-way and three-way interaction effects of the HRM system strength characteristics on organizational members' affective commitment are tested, both the independent variables and control variables need to be centralized. The problem with interaction is the risk of correlations of lower order constructs with their interactions. Therefore, Aiken and West (1991) suggest to centralize all the independent variables and the control variables around the mean to overcome problems of multicollinearity. The dummy coded variables gender, contract time and contract size are recoded into -1 and +1 values.

Hypothesis 3 proposes that there is a multiplicative effect among the three characteristics of HRM system strength. The results in Table 7 show that the multiplicative model is significant (F=124.785, df=13, p<0.001). The multiple regression analysis shows that there is a significant three-way interaction effect (t=-6.529, p<0.001). The main effects are still significant, but the two-way interaction effects not. The results indicate that there is a significant and negative interaction effect, although the coefficient is quite small (-0.112). The three-way interaction effect implies that the characteristics of HRM system strength are complementary. As a consequence, if performance of one of the three characteristics is very low, this will lead to a decrease in organizational members' affective commitment unless high scores on the other characteristics of HRM system strength.

Table 7: Multiplicative effect of HRM system strength characteristics on affective commitment

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	3.772***	3.803***	3.818***	3.827***
Gender	0.082	0.020	0.020	0.017
Age	0.002	-0.003	-0.003	-0.002
Level of education	-0.071***	-0.045***	-0.045***	-0.044***
Number of years	-0.037*	-0.008	-0.009	-0.009
Contract time	-0.003	0.011	0.011	0.011
Contract size	0.111***	0.077***	0.080***	0.084***
Distinctiveness		0.285***	0.286***	0.303***
Consistency		0.354***	0.356***	0.404***
Consensus		0.173***	0.177***	0.287***
Distinctiveness*Consistency			0.000	0.005
Distinctiveness*Consensus			-0.058	-0.043
Consistency*Consensus			0.020	-0.001
Distinctiveness*Consistency*Consensus				-0.112***
F	20.453***	172.714***	129.974***	124.785***
DF	6	9	12	13
R ²	0.036	0.322	0.323	0.332
R ² adjusted	0.034	0.321	0.321	0.329

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

The analysis shows that the F-change for model 3 that included only the two-way interactions is not significant (F-change = 1.511, p=0.210), but the F-change for the fourth model is significant (F-change = 42.631, p<0.001). Model 4 which includes the three-way interaction effect explains 33.2% of the variance in organizational members' affective commitment, which means that this model is a slightly better predictor than the additive model which showed an explained variance of 32.2%.

Simple slope analysis is conducted to investigate the three-way interaction effect further. A three-way interaction effect means that the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable varies across different levels of the two moderators. The levels that are chosen are a low level, which is -1 SD from the mean, and a high level which means 1 SD above the mean. Within the simple slope analysis, the control variables are included as well. Table 8 gives the results for the relationship between distinctiveness and organizational members' affective commitment for different levels of consistency and consensus. The interaction plot is shown in Figure 2.

It can be concluded that the relationship between distinctiveness and organizational members' affective commitment varies across different levels of perceived consistency and consensus. The interaction plot shows that organizational members who perceive the HRM system as highly consistent and consensual report the highest level of affective commitment, when they perceive the HRM system as highly distinctive. The strongest relationship is found for the condition high

consistency and low consensus with a coefficient of 0.389. This means that for organizational members who perceive high consistency and low consensus of the HRM system, an increase in perceived distinctiveness has the greatest effect on their affective commitment. A test for significant slope differences is conducted as well. The results are reported in Table 9. The results show that only some differences in slopes are significant. The difference between high consistency and high consensus and high consistency and low consensus is significant ($t = -2.780, p < 0.01$), as well as the difference between high consistency and high consensus and low consistency and high consensus ($t = -2.234, p < 0.05$). A significant difference in slopes for the pair high consistency and low consensus and low consistency and low consensus is found as well ($t = 2.507, p < 0.05$).

Table 8: Moderating effect of consistency and consensus on distinctiveness

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Moderator 1	Consistency high	Consistency high	Consistency low	Consistency low
Moderator 2	Consensus high	Consensus low	Consensus high	Consensus low
T-value	4.518	6.856	5.710	5.466
Coefficient	0.224	0.389	0.324	0.275

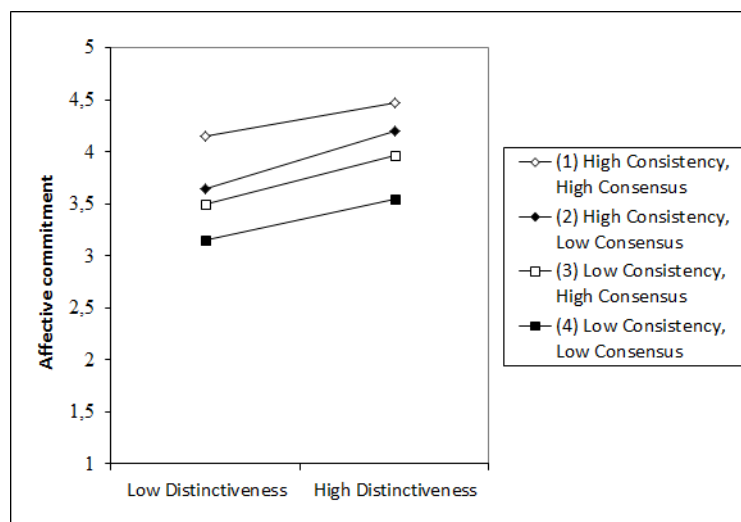
*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Table 9: Test for differences in slopes for distinctiveness as independent variable

	Pair 1 and 2	Pair 1 and 3	Pair 1 and 4	Pair 2 and 3	Pair 2 and 4	Pair 3 and 4
T-value	-2,780**	-2.236*	-0.675	0.864	2.507*	0.805
P-value	0.005	0.025	0.500	0.388	0.012	0.421

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Figure 2: Interaction plot for distinctiveness as independent variable



A simple slope analysis for consistency as independent variable, with distinctiveness and consensus as moderators is conducted as well. Results are given in Table 10, Figure 3 presents the interaction plot. It can be concluded that employees that perceive both high distinctiveness and high consensus of the HRM system, feel most affective committed towards the organization under conditions of high perceived consistency. The relationship between consistency and organizational members' affective commitment is strongest under the conditions of high distinctiveness and low consensus with a coefficient of 0.462, although the strength of the relationship for low distinctiveness and high consensus is only a bit smaller (0.454). This means that an increase in consistency has the strongest effect on affective commitment when employees perceive the HRM system as distinctive but not as consensual. Tests for differences in slopes, as reported in Table 11, show that only the difference in slopes between two pairs is significant: high distinctiveness – high consensus and low distinctiveness – high consensus ($t = -2.236, p < 0.05$), and the combination high distinctiveness – low consensus and low distinctiveness – low consensus ($t = 2.507, p < 0.05$).

Table 10: Moderating effect of distinctiveness and consensus on consistency

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Moderator 1	Distinctiveness high	Distinctiveness high	Distinctiveness low	Distinctiveness low
Moderator 2	Consensus high	Consensus low	Consensus high	Consensus low
T-value	6.938***	7.591***	7.775***	7.231***
Coefficient	0.353	0.462	0.454	0.347

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$

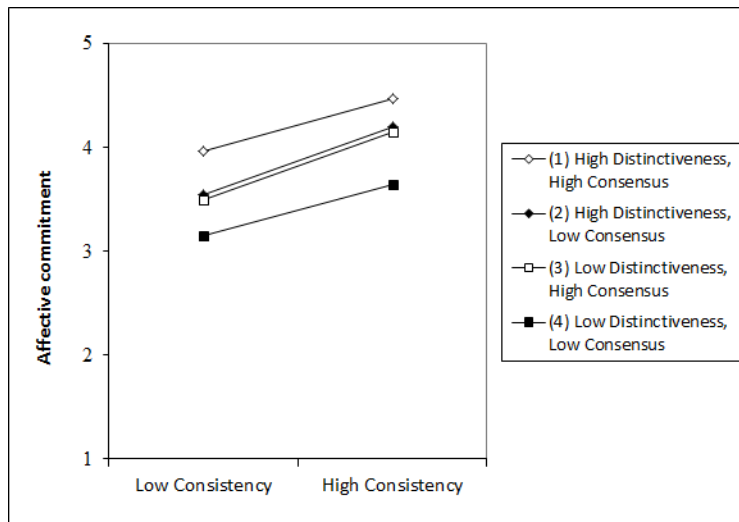
Table 11: Test for differences in slopes for consistency as independent variable

	Pair 1 and 2	Pair 1 and 3	Pair 1 and 4	Pair 2 and 3	Pair 2 and 4	Pair 3 and 4
T-value	-1.791	-2.236*	0.078	0.113	2.507*	1.817
P-value	0.073	0.025	0.938	0.910	0.012	0.069

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$

The last multiplicative effect that is explored is the effect of distinctiveness and consistency as moderators on the relationship between perceived consensus and affective commitment. Results are shown in Table 12 and Figure 4. Again, the results show that organizational members' feel most affectively committed when they perceive both high distinctiveness and consistency of the HRM system, and furthermore perceive the HRM system as highly consensual. As became clear from the simple slope analysis and the interaction plot, the relationship between consensus and the moderators distinctiveness and consistency is strongest under the conditions of high distinctiveness and low consistency with a coefficient of 0.378.

Figure 3: Interaction plot for consistency as independent variable



This implies that for organizational members who perceive the HRM system as high distinctive and low consistent, an increase in perceived consensus of the HRM system will lead to the highest increase in their affective commitment. Simple slope analysis for differences in pairs shows that only the differences between two pairs are significant. Those are the pairs high distinctiveness and high consistency, and low distinctiveness and high consistency ($t = -2.780$, $p < 0.01$), and high distinctiveness and high consistency, and low distinctiveness and low consistency ($t = -70.816$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 12: Moderating effect of distinctiveness and consistency on consensus

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Moderator 1	Distinctiveness high	Distinctiveness high	Distinctiveness low	Distinctiveness low
Moderator 2	Consistency high	Consistency low	Consistency high	Consistency low
T-value	5.235***	6.114***	5.188***	7.717***
Coefficient	0.203	0.378	0.301	0.272

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

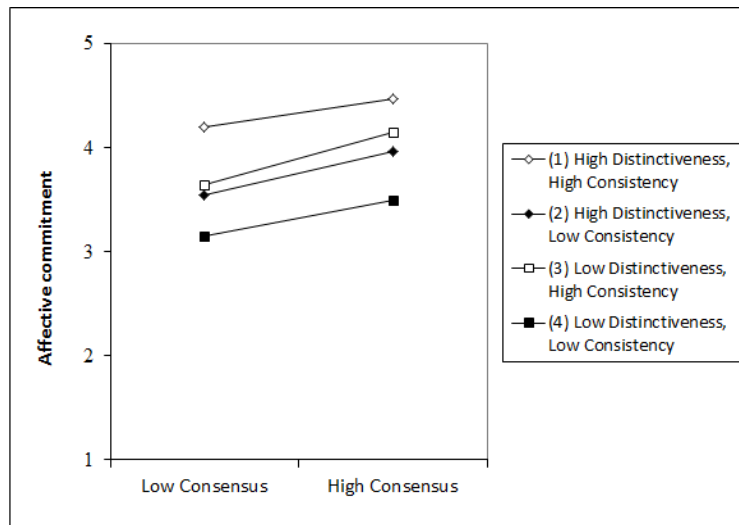
Table 13: Test for differences in slopes for consensus as independent variable

	Pair 1 and 2	Pair 1 and 3	Pair 1 and 4	Pair 2 and 3	Pair 2 and 4	Pair 3 and 4
T-value	-1.791	-2.780**	-70.816***	-0.473	0.805	1.817
P-value	0.073	0.005	<0.001	0.636	0.421	0.069

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

It can be concluded that three-way interaction effects occur among the three characteristics of HRM system strength. If organizational members perceive the HRM system as distinctive, consistent and consensual at the same time, they will feel more affectively committed towards the organization.

Figure 4: Interaction plot for consensus as independent variable



4.6 Moderating effects

Hypotheses 4a until 4f contain propositions for moderating effects of the characteristics of HRM system strength. From theory it became not clear which of the three characteristics needs to be present for the others to occur, so all possible moderating effects are tested. In analyzing moderation effects in regression analysis, you need to include both the predictor and moderator at the same step in the analysis. Therefore, it is only possible to test if there are significant interaction effects between two of the characteristics of HRM system strength. The results of the multiple regression analysis are shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Two-way interactions of HRM system strength characteristics on affective commitment

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Constant	3.772***	3.803***	3.815***	3.818***	3.815***
Gender	0.082	0.020	0.021	0.020	0.020
Age	0.002	-0.003	-0.003	-0.002	-0.002
Level of education	-0.071***	-0.045***	-0.045***	-0.045***	-0.045***
Number of years	-0.037*	-0.008	-0.008	-0.009	-0.008
Contract type	-0.003	0.011	0.010	0.011	0.010
Contract size	0.111***	0.077***	0.078***	0.080***	0.078***
Distinctiveness		0.285***	0.286***	0.286***	0.286***
Consistency		0.354***	0.352***	0.355***	0.354***
Consensus		0.173***	0.178***	0.177***	0.178***
Distinctiveness*Consistency			-0.029		
Distinctiveness*Consensus				-0.040*	
Consistency*Consensus					-0.032
F	20.453***	172.714***	155.743***	156.034***	155.828***
R ²	6	0.322	0.323	0.323	0.323
R adjusted	0.036	0.321	0.321	0.321	0.321

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

The first hypothesis, hypothesis 4a, proposes that the relationship between distinctiveness and organizational members' affective commitment is moderated by consensus. The results show a significant interaction effect between distinctiveness and consensus ($t = -2.082, p < 0.05$). Simple slope analysis is conducted to investigate this interaction effect further. Table 15 and Figure 5 show the results of this analysis.

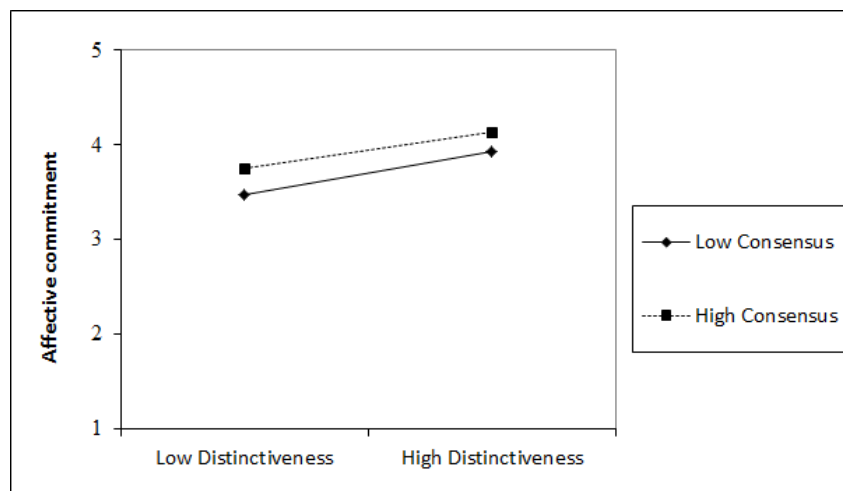
Table 15: Simple slope analysis moderation effect consensus on distinctiveness

	Model 1	Model 2
Independent variable	Distinctiveness	Distinctiveness
Moderator	Consensus low	Consensus high
T-value	8.125***	6.976***
Coefficient	0.313	0.260

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Simple slope analysis shows significant relationships for both low consensus ($t = 8.125, p < 0.001$) and high consensus ($t = 6.976, p < 0.001$) as moderators on the relationship between distinctiveness and organizational members' affective commitment. The interaction plot shows that organizational members who perceive the HRM system as distinctive but do not perceive consensus about the HRM system are less committed towards the organization than employees who perceive consensus of the HRM system. The relationship is strongest for low consensus with a coefficient of 0.313; an increase in perceived distinctiveness has the greatest effect on organizational members' affective commitment when the HRM system is perceived as low consensual.

Figure 5: Interaction plot moderation effect consensus on distinctiveness



Hypothesis 4b states that the relationship between distinctiveness and organizational members' affective commitment is positively moderated by perceived consistency of the HRM system. However, no significant interaction effect was found for distinctiveness and consistency ($t = -1.536,$

p=0.125). The findings did not support the hypothesis that the effect of a distinctive HRM system on affective commitment becomes stronger if the HRM system is perceived as consistent.

Hypothesis 4c is formulated in order to investigate the moderating effect of consensus on the relationship between a consistent HRM system and organizational members' affective commitment. However, multiple regression analysis did not show a significant interaction effect ($t = -1.713$, $p=0.087$). No support was found for the hypothesis that perceived consensus of the HRM system strengthens the relationship between a consistent HRM system and affective commitment.

Hypothesis 4d proposes that the relationship between consistency and organizational members' affective commitment is positively moderated by perceived distinctiveness of the HRM system. Due to the fact that no significant interaction was found ($t = -1.536$, $p=0.125$), the hypothesis that perceived distinctiveness of the HRM system lead to a stronger effect of consistency on affective commitment is not supported.

Hypothesis 4e states that consistency moderates the relationship between a consensual HRM system and affective commitment of employees. But no significant interaction effect was found ($t = 1.713$, $p=0.087$), which implies that the results did not support the hypothesis that the relationship between perceived consensus of the HRM system and affective commitment becomes stronger when employees perceive a consistent HRM system.

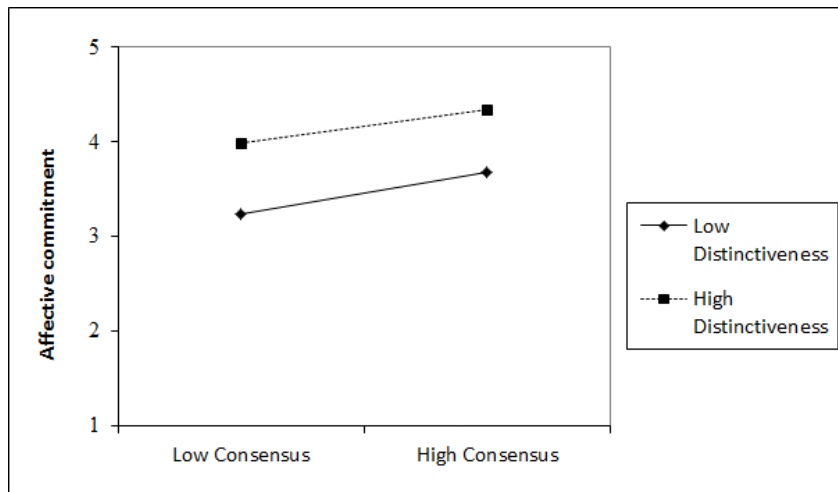
The last hypothesized two-way interaction effect is the effect of a distinctive HRM system on the relationship between perceived consensus and affective commitment. A significant interaction effect was found for distinctiveness and consensus ($t = -2.082$, $p<0.05$), this means that hypothesis 4f could be supported. Simple slope analysis is conducted to further investigate the moderating effect of distinctiveness on the relationship between a consensual HRM system and organizational members' affective commitment. The results are shown in Table 16 and Figure 6.

Table 16: Simple slope analysis moderation effect of distinctiveness on consensus

	Model 1	Model 2
Independent variable	Consensus	Consensus
Moderator	Distinctiveness low	Distinctiveness high
T-value	6.040***	4.571***
B	0.206	0.149

*** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$

Figure 6: Moderation effect of distinctiveness on consensus



Based on the simple slope analysis it can be concluded that the moderation effect of distinctiveness on the relationship between consensus and affective commitment is significant for both conditions of low distinctiveness ($t = 6.040, p < 0.001$) and high distinctiveness ($t = 4.571, p < 0.001$). The simple slope analysis shows that this relationship is slightly stronger for low distinctiveness ($B = 0.206$) than for high distinctiveness ($B = 0.149$). Organizational members who perceive a consensual HRM system but do not perceive the HRM system as distinctive are less committed towards the organization than organizational members who perceive distinctiveness of the HRM system, as is shown in Figure 6. An increase in perceived consensus of the HRM system has the strongest influence on affective commitment under the condition of low distinctiveness.

It can be concluded that only a significant two-way interaction effect occurs between the characteristics of HRM system strength distinctiveness and consensus. This implies that the relationship between distinctiveness and organizational members' affective commitment becomes stronger when they perceive consensus about the HRM system. Furthermore, perceived distinctiveness of the HRM system strengthens the relationship between consensus and affective commitment. No two-way interaction effects were found for consistency; it seems that consistency has only an effect on affective commitment when both distinctiveness and consensus are present. The two-way interaction model explains 32.3% in the variance of organizational members' affective commitment. This model is a better predictor than models which include only the direct effects (highest explained variance for consistency, 29.6%). The two-way interaction model is a slightly better predictor than the additive model (32.2%) as well, although the improvement is very small. However, the three-way interaction model can be considered as the best predictor of organizational members' affective commitment with an explained variance of 33.2%.

4.7 Strength of the HRM system within TSN Thuiszorg

The effectiveness of the HRM system at TSN Thuiszorg is investigated. According to the HR strategy (2013) of TSN Thuiszorg, the HR department should focus on delivering high quality and efficient HR processes that contribute to the performance of the organization. In the focus group, HR professionals highlighted the importance of being able to demonstrate how they add value to the organization, while line managers focused more on the actual delivery of support and state that the HR department adds most value when they provide line management with support in order to reach the goals of the organization. The work council looked from the perspective of employees and highlighted the importance of translation of the strategy of the organization to what this means for employees within TSN Thuiszorg. In order to investigate the effectiveness of the HRM system further, the distinctiveness, consistency and consensus of the HRM system at TSN Thuiszorg is explored.

4.7.1 Distinctiveness

The first aspect of distinctiveness is visibility. The HR department operates from the headquarter, only the absenteeism coaches and HR professionals are regularly present in the field. They act as sparring partners of line managers by providing them with advice and support (Job description HR professional, 2010). HR professionals and line managers agree about the visibility of the HRM system. The HR department is not very visible in the organization. Both HR professionals and line managers see this as a logic consequence of the devolution of HR tasks to line management in the organization:

“We choose to devolve a lot of HR tasks to the line, so it is not very surprising that employees do not know HR. You could say that this is a good sign, because this means that zorgcoördinatoren take on their HR responsibilities as we want.” (HR professional 1)

All the stakeholders – HR professionals, line managers and employees – agree that it is not important to know the people of the HR department personally, but all highlighted the importance of clarity about who is responsible for which HR tasks. At the moment this is not clear, especially for zorgcoördinatoren and employees. People do not know who is responsible for which HR tasks and therefore do not know who to contact. Line managers state that more communication is needed to both line managers and employees about where to go with your HR related questions. All the stakeholders within the focus group believe that the professionalization of the HR department is a good step to improve this visibility. In the HR strategy (2013) the way HR will be organized is described. Both rayonmanagers and HR professionals believe that the communication between HR and zorgcoördinatoren will be easier when HR professionals are locally present in the field. The zorgcoördinatoren agree about this. Furthermore, line managers expect that it will be easier for

employees to call the information center of HR that will be set up. At the moment, both rayonmanagers and zorgcoördinatoren perceive a lack of feedback from the HR department. It is not clear what happens with your question, it looks like a black hole:

“The distance between HR and the work floor is too large. If you mail or call, it looks like a black hole. You don’t hear anything. This is slightly improved, but still you don’t receive a reaction on which actions are taken to answer your question. So you do not know what happened with your question and if you need to call or mail again.” (Zorgcoördinator 2)

The HR professionals agree that line managers and employees might expect that they always receive an answer from the HR department. The information center that is set up is expected to improve this; people will be informed about the progress of their question. Besides knowing where to ask your question, line managers stated the importance of informing employees about the main aspects of HR policies and practices of TSN Thuiszorg. From the document analysis, it became clear that there are documents about HR policies and HR practices like recruitment & selection, career planning and employees appraisal. No documents were found about the HR practices training and compensation. Only the site of TSN zorgcollege provides information about training. There are no policies or procedures about compensation, because people are rewarded based on the CAO. Furthermore, there are a lot of work instructions and procedures about different HR processes, for example about making contracts or mutations. All this information can be found on the intranet of TSN Thuiszorg, which is accessible for all the organizational members of TSN Thuiszorg. However, the information is provided in a very formal way in documents which are not very easy to understand for employees. The way information is communicated to employees is mostly via intranet or e-mail. Within the WMO business unit, only twice a year a ‘work meeting’ is organized. In this meeting, line managers inform employees about developments in the organization and changes in work. Important changes in policies and procedures of the organization are discussed as well. However, due to the length of the meeting it is not possible to discuss all the changes in depth. Furthermore, employees are not obliged to attend these meetings. So it is difficult to inform the employees of the WMO business unit. For the AWBZ business unit, work meetings are organized every six weeks. Line managers perceive that employees do not always read the information that is sent to them via e-mail or intranet. The representatives of the work council know that employees have difficulties with the interpretation of information about HR that is provided to them and draw attention to the risk of information overload. HR professionals are aware of the need to improve communication about HR.

“We need to be aware of an overkill of information, especially when you look to the target group of employees. We have different groups of employees with different backgrounds. People read and interpret the information in a wrong way or do not read the information at all. There are employees that read their e-mail, however if they see a list with information they do not know which information is of importance to them.” (Zorgcoordinator 1)

TSN Thuiszorg scores low on the relevance of the HRM system. Organizational members do not perceive a clear link between the goals of the organization and their own goals. Within the focus group, line managers perceive that a clear link between the goals of the organization and goals of HR policies and procedures is missing. In the HR strategy (2013) a clear link is made between the strategy of the organization and the HR strategy. However, this is focused more on how the HR department should be organized and which HR capabilities TSN Thuiszorg needed to achieve the goals of the organization, it contains not a link to concrete HR policies and instruments. While goals for recruitment & selection, career planning and employee appraisal are outlined in documents, these are not clearly aligned with the business strategy of TSN Thuiszorg. The interviews held by Hesselink (2013) and Oude Maatman (2013) revealed that a clear philosophy of the HRM system; underlying principles and goals, is missing. Rayonmanagers and the work council representatives highlighted the need for a translation of the organization strategy towards how employees are managed within TSN Thuiszorg. The organization strategy should be translated into clear goals for HR policies and practices. Input should be gathered from the work floor. Both HR professionals and line managers agree that clear goals help to create clarity and are furthermore needed to evaluate the performance of HR.

“HR is responsible for the translation of the vision of TSN Thuiszorg into a vision about HR. Where do we stand for? Where do we need to go to? How are we going there?” (Rayonmanager 2)

The HR department is in the middle of a transition towards a professional HR organization. The employees of the HR department experience that they do not have a lot of power within the organization. During the last years the work pressure increased, both HR professionals and line managers agree that HR is still working too reactive. This was a main finding of the interviews of Hesselink (2013) and Oude Maatman (2013) as well. In order to anticipate on future developments within the organization, both HR professionals and line managers highlighted the importance of a more pro-active role of the HR department instead of being reactive when a problem occurs:

“We are always working re-active. At the end of the story they asked for support from HR, while as HR department you want to work pro-active and being supportive to the line beforehand.” (HR professional 5)

While the HR professionals believe that the re-active role is due to the high workload, line managers state that this could be partly explained by the self-resolving power of the organization as well. Due to the rapid growth of the organization people are used to solve their own problems. The organization is in a transition; all the staff departments are going to be professionalized. Line managers need to become aware that they do not need to solve problems on their own, but that they can ask for support:

“Zorgcoördinatoren in the field call HR when they have a problem, but that’s when the problem already occurred. The ideal situation is to signal problems beforehand and call HR to ask for support how to anticipate on developments.” (Rayonmanager 1)

Besides being more pro-active, the HR professionals highlighted the importance of being able to demonstrate how the HR department adds value to the organization. The HR department wants to deliver good professional support and good management information. This should be supported by solid processes and smart systems. In this way, the customers of HR can arrange their HR issues with the least effort.

Overall, it can be concluded that the distinctiveness of the HRM system within TSN Thuiszorg need to be improved. The HR department as well as HR policies and practices need to become more effective. Line managers highlighted the importance of clear communication about HR, especially about who is responsible for which HR tasks and how to contact these disciplines. Furthermore, line managers call for the need of a clear link between goals of the organization and HR policies and practices. Both HR professionals and line managers believe that HR should take up a more pro-active role in order to be better able to contribute to the goals of the organization, the HR department wants to demonstrate its added value more thereby showing the effectiveness of the HR department.

4.7.2 Consistency

Consistency deals with the effective implementation of HR. Two important aspects are if the HR practices are implemented as intended and the internal alignment of HRM messages. The HR department within TSN Thuiszorg is responsible for the design and administration of HR policies and

practices, while the execution of HR tasks is devolved to rayonmanagers and zorgcoördinatoren. Line managers score lowest on the dimension instrumentality/validity. There is a difference between intended and implemented HR policies and practices. Line managers agree that they play an important role in the translation of HR policies and practices to the work floor, but zorgcoördinatoren state that they are not always aware of their HR tasks. They believe that they do not always have the knowledge and perceive that they are not provided with the right policies and procedures and support from HR to perform their HR role. This increases the risk of differences in the execution of their HR tasks:

“HR policy is not only the responsibility of HR, but to what extent is HR the responsibility of zorgcoördinatoren and rayonmanagers? As zorgcoördinator you need to have knowledge about HR issues. You need to know which your responsibilities for HR tasks are as a zorgcoördinator and where you need support and expertise.” (Zorgcoördinator 1)

In order to create alignment in the actual implementation of HR policies and practices, line managers highlighted the importance of the role of the HR managers. They need to support line managers in the important transformations of the operation, line managers believe that HR professionals have an important role in creating support and managing changes within the organization. More and more the HR manager is locally present, which makes it possible to explain what the HR policy is, what the reasons are behind the policy and how it should be implemented. However, this is not always the case. The zorgcoördinatoren perceive that sometimes they are only informed about a new HR policy via e-mail, without a clear explanation. Then it is difficult to communicate a consistent message to the executive employees. Rayonmanagers acknowledge that they are responsible for the translation of HR policies to the work floor. In some rayon's, there is already a close cooperation between HR and line management in the implementation of HR policies and practices:

“For instance around flexibility. First I discussed with my HR-professional what does this mean and how do we translate this to the zorgcoördinatoren. We made a presentation and visited all the locations, in this way you can discuss the issue with each other. What is meant with this? If this happens, what should I do then? We got very positive reactions from the zorgcoördinatoren, you can ask your questions directly to one of the disciplines.” (Rayonmanager 2)

Furthermore, line managers perceive the HRM messages within the organization as less consistent than HR professionals do. There is not always a plan, sometimes the execution of HR tasks is very ad hoc. Line managers state that problems were solved local. This increases the risk of inconsistencies in

the way HR is executed within TSN Thuiszorg. While HR believes that HR policies and practices are consistent, line managers lack an overarching HR policy how to manage employees within TSN Thuiszorg. Both line managers and HR professionals agree that unless the volatile environment where TSN Thuiszorg is operating in, an overarching HR policy could help to create alignment between the different HR projects within the organization. At the moment HR policies change quickly and the execution of HR tasks is too ad hoc:

“We need to have the idea that there are policies for some issues. At the moment it is too fragmented. Too much ad hoc. Oh we have a problem, look how we can solve this. Instead of looking around to see if someone else have the same problem. Everyone solves their own problems, therefore implementation of HR differs.” (Rayonmanager 1)

While both line managers and HR believe that the consistency of HR messages in the organization is improved, it is still too ad hoc. HR practices are not always implemented as intended. This is due to the fact that zorgcoördinatoren have sometimes difficulties with performing their HR role and the way HR is implemented differs locally. Line managers lack of a clear overarching HR policy, which increases the risk of non-alignment of HR practices and differences in implementation and hinders the effective implementation of HR.

4.7.3 Consensus

Consensus refers to the agreement among HRM decision makers about the formulation and implementation of HR within TSN Thuiszorg. First, the within group agreement is investigated. Within the HR department, the HR managers have regularly meetings with the HR director. New developments within the organization, as well as changes in HR are discussed. Furthermore, HR managers discuss about the implementation of HR policies and practices in the organization. While the HR managers are going to act more in the field, these formal meetings become more and more important to discuss the framework for HR implementation with each other. Line managers have regularly meetings as well. Rayonmanagers in the WMO business unit as well as the AWBZ business unit have regular meetings to discuss about the business, HR issues are part of these meetings as well. Rayonmanagers state that they share their experiences about the translation and implementation of HR policies and practices with their colleagues. Furthermore, rayonmanagers have regular meetings with their zorgcoördinatoren, in these meetings zorgcoördinatoren are informed about new HR policies and practices. They discuss together how the new policy should be implemented. Zorgcoördinatoren are dispersed throughout locations all over the Netherlands, and only have contact with zorgcoördinatoren in the same rayon.

The HR Director is part of the management team of TSN Thuiszorg, and is responsible for the alignment of the HR strategy with the strategy of the organization (HR strategy, 2013). The HR director has regularly meetings with topmanagement. HR needs support from top management before new HR policies are introduced or HR projects are started. There is a close cooperation between HR managers and line managers in the organization. HR managers have regularly meetings with rayonmanagers in order to discuss HR issues. Zorgcoördinatoren could ask for support from the HR manager as well. The results of the questionnaire show that both HR professionals and line managers perceive a lack of consensus. However, both HR managers and line managers within the focus group state that they perceive that they are on the same wavelength and that they are working together to reach the goal of the organization. According to the line managers, the perceived lack of consensus should be explained at a more practical level. The way HR managers and line managers want to solve problems or anticipate on the future could be different, because they have different interests. As became clear from the interviews of Hesselink (2013) and Oude Maatman (2013), HR managers and line managers have different cognitive frames. While HR managers focus on the professionalization of the HR department, line managers puts the interests of employees and clients central (Hesselink, 2013; Oude Maatman, 2013). But both line managers and HR professionals agree that while there are sometimes discussions, they always search for a solution that serves the interest of the organization as a whole.

Both HR and line management recognizes that at the moment HR acts too ad hoc and plead for a long term vision on HR which is supported by both HR as well as management in the organization. A year plan that is integrated with the business plans of rayonmanagers helps to align HR with the operation and fosters consensus among HR decision makers about the formulation of HR strategy. A line manager highlighted the importance of involvement of HR in seeking for new markets and innovative concepts, they should translate this and make clear what this means for the executive employees within the organization. Both HR managers and line managers believe that a plan for a one or two year period about HR topics should be feasible. Line managers stated the importance of getting input from the work floor, that's where it all happens. An annual plan for HR helps the HR department to take up a more pro-active role:

"I think at the moment it's too ad hoc. We do not make plans for a one year or three year period. You can make clear what the overall goals are, what we are going to do, and what the organization might expect from us. After a year you can evaluate with each other which goals are reached and which not." (HR-professional 1)

In the development of HR policies or new HR projects, often line management is involved. A HR professional highlighted that in the past rayonmanagers were involved in the creation of new HR policies in the form of project groups. This involvement of line management is mostly at the level of rayonmanagers. Zorgcoördinatoren state that they are not directly involved in the formulation of new HR policies and practices and do not participate in how it should be implemented, they need to deliver their input via the rayonmanager and hope that they will bring it to HR. Line managers highlighted the importance of talking to each other. Both rayonmanagers and zorgcoördinatoren experience the physical attendance of a HR manager as positive for creating consensus between HR managers and line managers:

“In one rayon you see that the HR manager regularly visits the internal meetings of the rayonmanager and the zorgcoördinatoren, in other rayon’s this occurs less. If HR managers are going to act more locally, then this will become usual and it would be easier to explain aspects from the HR perspective as well.” (Rayonmanager 1)

In order to create consensus between HR and line management within the organization, good collaboration is important. Both line management and HR perceive a very cooperative working relationship, this is supported by the findings of the interviews of Hesselink (2013) and Oude Maatman (2013) as well. An aspect to improve is management of expectations. It is not always clear what both parties might expect from each other, therefore HR managers and line managers are not always on the same wavelength:

“I think that we do not know what we could expect from each other. Then it is simple to point to them and say they don’t do that. But is this a real expectation?” (Rayonmanager 2)

There is lot of contact between HR professionals and line managers. While there is consensus at a more strategic level, line managers perceive that they do not always agree at a more practical level due to different interests. Both line managers and HR professionals highlighted the importance of regularly meetings which fosters consensus. Zorgcoördinatoren perceived that they are not involved in the early stages of new HR policies and procedures. In order to ensure an effective implementation of HR, consensus between HR managers and line managers should be fostered by creating awareness about expectations and assumptions about the HR system.

5. Discussion

Paragraph 5.1 and 5.2 contain a discussion of the results of the research. The main contribution of this research is outlined in paragraph 5.3, followed by the limitations which are reported in paragraph 5.4. Suggestions for future research are given in paragraph 5.5. Finally, recommendations are presented in paragraph 5.6; advice is given about how the effectiveness of HR within TSN Thuiszorg could be improved.

5.1 Perceptions about HRM system strength

In order to explain the relationship between HRM and performance, the effect of HRM system strength on organizational members' affective commitment is investigated. Both the content and process of HRM are integrated, the way HRM messages are communicated throughout the organization and the way these messages are perceived affects employees' attitudes and behavior.

Therefore in this research, perceptions from different stakeholders - employees, line managers and HR-professionals, were measured. Overall TSN Thuiszorg scores moderate on the distinctiveness, consistency and consensus dimensions of HRM system strength. While employees score moderate on all the three characteristics, line managers and HR professionals perceive lower HRM system strength. Both line managers and HR managers score low on the consensus dimensions, it seems that those HRM decision makers do not agree about the HRM system. Furthermore, they do not score high on the distinctiveness of the HRM system. They do not perceive the HR practices of TSN Thuiszorg as effective and furthermore gave low ratings to the effectiveness of the HR department. While both HR managers and employees perceive consistent HRM messages, line managers score lower on this dimension.

These findings are in contrast with existing research about HR effectiveness (Kane et al., 1999; Geare et al., 2006), employees, not HR professionals, perceive the HRM system as most strong. Line managers perceive the HRM system as least strong. One explanation for the positive view of employees could be that the communication about HR is already improved compared to some years ago, thereby satisfying the needs of employees. For example, they are regularly informed via intranet about changes in HR. From the analysis it became clear that employees from the AWBZ business unit perceive the HRM system as less strong than employees from the WMO business unit do. It seems that they have different expectations regarding the HR within TSN Thuiszorg and that the HRM system is less able to meet the needs of the AWBZ employees compared to the WMO employees. An explanation could be that the AWBZ employees interact more with the HR practices in the organization and therefore expect more of it. While Lepak and Snell (1999) argue that different

employment relations need different HR configurations, it could be argued that different types of functions in an organization require different HR configurations as well.

The more positive view of HR professionals compared to line managers is in line with existing research about HR effectiveness (Mitsuhashi et al, 2000; Wright et al., 2001; Mclean, 2006; Yusoff et al., 2009). While Tsui (1990) argues that HR should serve the interests of the customers that are most critical to them, it can be concluded that the HRM system within TSN Thuiszorg does not meet all the expectations of line managers. An explanation for the lower scores of line managers and HR professionals could be that they know that the HR department is in a transition and that the HR department will be professionalized, they are aware of the things that need to be improved and are therefore not satisfied yet. Other factors that could explain the differences in perceptions between HR professionals and line managers which became clear from the focus group and which are found in other researches as well are the failure of line managers to implement HRM systems and a lack of involvement of line managers in HR activities (Wright et al., 1998; Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001). Furthermore, it could be that the traditional role-staff conflict played a role as well (Wright et al., 1998; Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001). To conclude, overall the effectiveness of HR is moderate. Employees score moderate on distinctiveness of the HRM system. But looking to the perceptions of HR professionals and line managers about HRM system strength, it can be concluded that the HRM system does not meet their expectations; the distinctiveness, consistency and consensus of the HRM system need to be improved.

5.1.1 Distinctiveness

Overall, TSN Thuiszorg scores moderate on the distinctiveness dimension of HRM system strength. Line managers and HR managers perceive the HRM system as less distinctive than employees do. Especially line managers score low on the visibility of the HRM system, because they perceive that it is not clear who is responsible for which HR tasks. An explanation could be that line managers more frequently ask for HR support than employees and that they have difficulties to contact the right person or HR discipline. While employees are more and more informed about HR, line managers experience that employees do not always pay attention to important information. It could be that the HR department is not aware of the issues were employees are concerned about (Kim & Ryu, 2011), and thus communicates information to employees where they not interested in. Another explanation could be that they have difficulties with interpreting this information; the HRM messages do not fit the requirement of ease of comprehension (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). It is argued that the ease of recognition of information has an influence on the attention employees pay to information (Pereira & Gomes, 2012).

The results show that HR professionals perceive a low status of the HR department; they score lowest on legitimacy of the HRM system. This is in contrast with what was expected from theory, research about HR effectiveness shows that HR managers are more positive about the contribution of HR to the firm than line managers (Mitsubishi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001; Han et al., 2006). HR professionals attribute the low score on legitimacy to the high work pressure of last years, while line managers believe that the high self-resolving power of line managers and employees within the organization could be an explanation for these findings. Another reason could be the fact that the HR department finds itself in the middle of a transition towards a HR shared service delivery model and that they need to act more pro-active. The HR professionals are aware of the improvements that need to be made in order to increase their status as a high quality and service department, and they believe that they are not there yet. At the moment HR professionals are too reactive, they are willing to act more pro-active by delivering expertise, support and efficient HR processes. The HR department needs to be able to demonstrate its value, show its effectiveness (Ulrich, 1997). Internal marketing activities (Yip et al., 2001) show how HR contributes to the firms. Besides the role of business partner, the HR managers need to act as change agents; they need to help to achieve the business goals of the organization while at the same time they need to keep employees motivated and committed (Ulrich, 1997). The HR department believes that more value is created when the HR department is organized as a HR service delivery model, in which transactional HRM services for daily business as well as the transformational HRM services to support the business unit in transforming the operation are brought together (Maatman et al., 2010). Both line managers and HR managers highlighted the importance of taking up a more strategic role. Existing research shows that there is a positive link between HR service quality and the strategic role of HR within an organization. If HR members exploit their expertise and specialized knowledge to provide services that fulfill the needs of customers, it is more likely that they become involved in strategic HR decision making (Uen et al., 2012). In turn, strategic involvement of HR positively influences the effectiveness of the HR department; it enables HR to contribute to the goals of the organization (Mitsubishi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001).

Furthermore, the results show that the HR practices are not perceived as relevant by organizational members. This can be explained by the lack of a clear HR vision, a transition of the goals of the organization towards HR policies and practices is missing. Previous research has shown that if HR wants to be effective, it needs to deliver HR practices that are aligned with the goals of the organization, in such a way HR can contribute to the performance of an organization (Huselid et al., 1997; Richard & Johnson, 2001; Mendelson et al., 2008; Guest & Conway, 2011; Chow, 2012; Su & Wright, 2012). To conclude, there are some improvements that need to be made for HR to become

more effective. An important aspect of visibility of the HRM system is clear communication about HR responsibilities as well as clear information about HR issues. The link between organizational goals and goals of employees needs to be improved. The HR department wants to increase their status in the organization, through delivering high service quality and by taking up a more strategic role. In this way the HR department is expected to be more effective, because it is better able to contribute to the goals of the organization.

5.1.2 Consistency

The results show that HR policies and practices are not always implemented as intended. This research shows that indeed line managers implement HR practices in different ways (Wright & Nishii, 2007; Elorza et al., 2011; Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012). This inconsistency can be explained by the lack of an overarching HR vision and clear goals. Line managers state that the daily execution of HR tasks is often very ad hoc, as a consequence HR practices are communicated and implemented in a different way (Pereira & Gomes, 2012), which lead to different perceptions of line managers and employees about the intentions of the individual HR practices (Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk 2012), thereby hindering the effectiveness of HR implementation. In order to be effective, the HR practices need to be horizontally aligned (Delery & Doty, 1996; Huselid et al., 1997; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012; Pereira & Gomes, 2012). But due to the lack of a vision about the HRM system the HR policies and practices within TSN Thuiszorg are not perceived as consistent, this makes it more difficult to communicate consistent messages about the HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Line managers play an important role in implementing HR practices within TSN Thuiszorg. The results show that line managers are aware of their HR role, but have some difficulties in performing this role. Zorgcoördinatoren receive less support from HR than rayonmanagers. While the function of zorgcoördinator has changed rapidly last years, they did not receive extensive support or training to perform their new HR tasks. While they are willing to execute HR tasks, they do not always have the competences or do not receive the right support and policies and procedures from HR, this will influence their effective implementation of HR (Bos-Nehles, 2010). To conclude, at the moment differences are perceived between intended and implemented HR policies and practices. The daily execution of HR tasks is too ad hoc. In order to align HR practices, a clear overall HR policy is desired. The implementation of HR practices is devolved to line managers. While they are willing to implement HR policies, they lack the competences, support and policies and procedures to perform their HR role effectively.

5.1.3 Consensus

In order to foster consensus, close cooperation between HRM decision makers is needed (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). The results show that although there are structural meetings between HR managers and line managers, they both perceive low consensus of the HRM system. It seems that close cooperation is not sufficient. Existing research about HR effectiveness shows that HR managers and line managers do not always agree about the effectiveness of HR practices and the role of the HR department (a.o. Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001), the results of this research show that disagreement could be explained at a more practical level. HR professionals and line managers have different interests, and therefore prefer different approaches to solve HR issues. Existing research show indeed that HR managers and line managers have different cognitive HR frames (Bondarouk et al., 2009; Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012), HR professionals are involved in HR policy making and HR administration while line managers focus on the day-to-day business (Bondarouk et al., 2009). The differences in HR frames within TSN Thuiszorg could lead to problems. Line managers could have different or even opposing assumptions about the HRM system compared to HR professionals, this incongruence in HR frames could lead to non-aligned expectations, resistance and skepticism (Bondarouk et al., 2009; Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012). This hinders the effective implementation of HR within the organization. Alignment of HR frames could be achieved through early articulation and discussion of inconsistencies and incongruences (Bondarouk et al., 2009). Besides, line managers and HR professionals do not always manage their expectations and therefore do not always agree about HR issues. However, an important principle of a HR service delivery model is that it is the customer who decides which services to receive and at which level (Farndale et al., 2009).

Another explanation for the lack of consensus could be the lack of involvement of lower level management within the organization. While Bowen and Ostroff (2004) highlighted the importance of the exchange of tacit knowledge about the formulation and implementation of HR, involvement takes only place at the level of rayonmanagers. Current participation of low level managers can be characterized as hands-on-activities (Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012), while low level line managers desire to be more involved beforehand and to participate in the development of HR processes. It is argued that this more active participation fosters the likelihood of shared HR frames and leads to a stronger HRM system (Bos-Nehles & Bondarouk, 2012), and furthermore ensures a more effective implementation of HR (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2012). To conclude, HR managers and line managers have regularly contact about HR issues but do not always agree about the way HR issues should be solved. HR managers and line managers need to articulate more explicit what they expect from each other as well as what their ideas are about HR practices and policies in order to foster agreement about the formulation and implementation of HR within the organization.

5.2 HRM system strength and affective commitment

The results revealed strong direct effects of each of the characteristics of HRM system strength on organizational members' affective commitment. In line with what was expected, perceiving a distinct HRM system, which means visible, understandable, legitimate and relevant HRM messages will lead to desired attitudes and behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Delmotte et al., 2011), and thus increases the affective commitment of organizational members towards the organization. If consistent HRM messages are sent about which behavior is expected and rewarded, it is more likely that employees expose such behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), and thus positively influence organizational members' affective commitment. Consensus among top management, HR professionals and line management fosters shared understandings about the HRM system (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), this will positively influence the emotional attachment of organizational members towards the organization. A direct effect means that all the characteristics of HRM system strength; distinctiveness, consistency and consensus, have a direct and independent effect on organizational members' affective commitment. This is in line with the findings of Sanders et al. (2012). The explained variance of the direct models range from 22.8% to 29.6%. However, the results show that models that include interrelationships are better predictors of organizational members' affective commitment. The additive, two-way and three-way interaction models show greater explained variance in organizational members' affective commitment than the direct effect models. This means that organizational members' are more affectively committed if they perceive a strong HRM system; a distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system at the same time.

Support was found for an additive model, which means that the characteristics of HRM system strength are compensatory (Delery, 1998). This means that the sum of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus has an effect on organizational members' affective commitment. Low perceived strength of one of the characteristics can be compensated for by the other characteristics of HRM system strength. Two-way interaction effects were tested as well. No support was found for interaction effects between distinctiveness and consistency and consistency and consensus. Only the interaction effect between distinctiveness and consensus revealed a significant relationship. The two-way interaction model is only a slightly better predictor of organizational members' affective commitment (32.3%) compared to the additive model (32.2%). A moderation effect of consensus on distinctiveness means that the more agreement among HRM decision makers, the stronger the effect of an observable HRM system on organizational members' affective commitment. Agreement among HRM decision makers means that more people send similar communications about the HRM system, this foster organizational members' affective commitment when they perceive an observable HRM system that integrates HR and organizational strategy (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Furthermore, a

moderating effect of distinctiveness on the relationship between consensus and organizational members' affective commitment was found. If employees feel that the organization invests in them by perceiving visible, understandable and relevant HR practices, they will feel more emotional attached towards the organization when they perceive the same HR message from the HR decision makers within the organization (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). The fact that no two-way interaction effects were found when consistency is treated as independent variable or moderator indicates that for consistency in order to effect organizational members' affective commitment, both distinctiveness and consensus need to be taken into account. Consistency deals with the actual implementation of the HRM system within the organization. The research shows that in order to actually implement HR practices, both agreement among HRM decision makers about which HRM practices should be implemented and how this should be done, as well as salient and observable HR practices are needed. A significant three-way interaction effect was found as well. It seems that none of the characteristics is a prerequisite for the other to occur, but that the characteristics are complementary to each other. This implies that if one of the characteristics is absent, as a consequence organizational members' will not feel affectively committed to the organization. Together a distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system, affects organizational members' affective commitment.

Several models are explored to explain the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment. The direct models were significant, but show the lowest explained variance. The additive model and two-way interaction model show a greater explained variance than the direct models. However, the three-way interaction model improved the explained variance. Regarding the main research question, it could be concluded that the three-way interaction model is the best model to predict organizational members' affective commitment, with an explained variance of 33.2%. All the three characteristics of HRM system strength need to be taken into account in order to best explain the relationship between HRM system strength and affective commitment. So the theory of Bowen and Ostroff (2004) that a strong HRM system needs to be perceived as distinctive, consistent and consensual is supported. If organizational members perceive a strong HRM system; if they feel that the organization invests in them through a distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system at the same time, they will expose higher levels of affective commitment towards the organization (Kinnie et al, 2005; Kehoe & Wright, 2013).

5.3 Main contributions

This study contributes to academic research in the following points. It contributes to the understanding of the relationship between HRM and performance by integrating both the content and process approach of HRM through investigating the interrelationships between HRM system strength characteristics and their effect on organizational members' affective commitment. Empirical evidence shows that a strong HRM system contributes to the affective commitment of organizational members towards the organization. The findings show that models that included all the three characteristics of HRM system strength are a better predictor for affective commitment than the direct effects. This means that organizational members' feel more affective committed to the organization when they perceive the HRM system as distinctive, consistent and consensual at the same time. The three-way interaction model is the best model to explain the relationship between HRM system strength characteristics and affective commitment. This implies that the characteristics are complementary, all the three characteristics of HRM system strength need to be present to some extent in order for organizational members to feel affectively committed to the organization. Another theoretical contribution is that this is the first study that includes perceptions of employees, line managers and HR professionals about HRM system strength.

5.4 Limitations

There are some limitations of this research. The research is conducted in one particular organization, which limits the extent to which the results can be generalized towards other organizations. TSN Thuiszorg operates in a very volatile environment, which could influence the perceptions about the HRM system and therefore the results could not be applied to other organizations. However, this was not the intention of this research. The research was aimed to develop a model that explained the relationship between HRM system strength and organizational members' affective commitment. There are some threats to internal validity in this study. A cross-sectional research design is used. Within this type of research, it is not possible to determine causal order. History could play a role as well, this means that an outside event could have affected the results (Shadish et al., 2002). Recently, a new HR information system is introduced. There are some problems with the system, which could have negatively influenced the perceptions of employees, line managers and HR professionals about the strength of the HRM system. Another limitation of the research is the low response rate. Although the absolute number of filled out questionnaires is quite large ($n = 3277$), the response rate was especially low among employees (15.9%). This could lead to sampling bias, this means a risk that the sample is not representative for the population (Saunders et al., 2007). However, several statistical tests showed that sampling bias was not a problem in this research. Different questionnaires were sent to HR professionals, line management and employees, so it was ensured

that the different stakeholders filled out the right questionnaire. It became clear that employees had difficulties with indicating to which rayon they belonged to and therefore some decided to fill out that they were working at the corporate business unit instead of the WMO or AWBZ business unit. This makes comparison between employees from the headquarter and employees from the WMO and AWBZ business unit not possible.

Conducting a focus group is not without limitations as well. It could be that participants felt pressure from the group to give similar answers or to give social desirable answers instead of their personal perceptions. Moderator bias could have played a role as well, which means that I could have influenced the outcomes of the focus group discussion. I tried to reduce this bias by discussing the questions to pose in the focus group beforehand with the HR director and a HR professional as well as with a researcher of the University. Furthermore, I asked neutrally formulated questions, which not included my own view on the topic.

5.5 Suggestions for future research

This research was a first attempt to unlock the black box of HRM system strength. Main aim was to explore how HRM system strength characteristics are interrelated and furthermore how this affects organizational members' affective commitment. Future research in different organizations is needed to get more insight in the interrelationships among HRM system strength characteristics. This research should include multiple stakeholders, like employees, HR professionals and line managers, because this research revealed that they have different perceptions about HRM system strength. Organizations from different industries, and from different size and structure should be included in order to investigate if organization context plays a role. The factor analysis showed that the sub constructs do not load on the three characteristics of HRM system strength at a sufficient level. So it is not clear what the characteristics distinctiveness, consistency and consensus mean. The measurement scales provide different measurement models in various contexts. Future research is needed to explore the interrelationships between distinctiveness, consistency and consensus further and to improve the measurement instrument of HRM system strength.

There is a lot of literature about HR effectiveness, the concept of HRM system strength deserves more and more attention. As became clear from the literature review, these two concepts are related. By improving the measurement instrument of Delmotte et al. (2011), items from research about HR effectiveness (Huselid et al., 1997; Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001) could be incorporated to make the measurement more complete. The items of Delmotte et al. (2011) are quite generally formulated and do not ask about specific HR practices. In research about HR

effectiveness questions about specific HR practices are included (Huselid et al., 1997; Mitsuhashi et al., 2000; Wright et al., 2001), which could be used in future research about HRM system strength as well. Results of De Winne et al. (2012) showed that HRM system strength is an antecedent to perceived effectiveness of HR in performing the different HR roles as defined by Ulrich (1997). The role that HR needs to perform is different for multiple stakeholders (a.o. Ulrich, 1997; Wright et al., 1998; Buyens & De Vos, 2001; Wright et al., 2001; De Winne et al., 2012). This research only included items related to the legitimacy of the HR department. More research is needed to explore the link between HRM system strength and the role HR need to perform in order to be perceived as effective.

In this research the focus was on affective commitment as an indicator of organizational performance, future research should take into account other performance indicators like absenteeism, turnover and financial indicators as well (Huselid, 1995; Guest & Conway, 2011). Furthermore, there are other variables that could play a role in the relationship between HRM system strength and performance. Understanding of the relationship between HRM system strength and performance can be enriched by including aspects like transformational leadership (Pereira & Gomes, 2012), HRM service quality (Uen et al., 2012) and e-HRM (Bondarouk et al., 2010).

5.6 Recommendations

This research is conducted within TSN Thuiszorg. Organizational members of TSN Thuiszorg score quite high on affective commitment. They feel emotionally attached towards the organization. Based on the results of the SPSS analyses, it can be concluded that a distinctive, consistent and consensual HRM system could improve the affective commitment of employees. Therefore recommendations are focused on the HRM system within TSN Thuiszorg.

The HR department of TSN Thuiszorg is at the early stages of a transition towards a more service oriented and efficient HR organization. Main goal for TSN Thuiszorg is to provide better services to line managers and employees in a more efficient way. The transition of HR is expected to improve the HR effectiveness. Some recommendations for TSN Thuiszorg are formulated, which should be taken into account in the further professionalization of the HR department.

Formulate clear HR responsibilities

The results of the focus group showed that the visibility of the HR department needs to be improved. At the moment, both within the HR department as well as for line managers, it is not always clear who is responsible for which HR tasks. The HR strategy contains a clear view on how HR should be organized within TSN Thuiszorg. It is recommended to make clear which specific HR tasks belong to

which HR role and which capabilities are needed to perform this role. This could be done by making clear job descriptions. Furthermore, it is important to inform people about their HR tasks. Especially zorgcoördinatoren are not always aware of their specific HR tasks. A meeting of a HR professional with zorgcoördinatoren in a rayon could help zorgcoördinatoren to become aware of their HR tasks.

Make clear which HR discipline to contact

Recently a HR information center is set up. Both employees and line managers could call this center with all their HR questions. Employees need to contact the information center or their zorgcoördinator, this depends on the kind of question they are willing to ask. It is recommended to inform employees when they need to call the information center and which HR issues contain to the responsibility of their zorgcoördinator. This can be done by placing a contact button on the intranet and extranet for employees, if they click on it they can see who to approach for which HR issues. Rayonmanagers and line managers can call the HR information center as well, but could also ask for support from other HR disciplines like the HR manager or the recruiter. Therefore it is recommended to provide them with a list of contacts of the different HR professionals. This list should include their name, phone number and e-mail address and most important, their area of expertise. In this way it would be easier for line managers to contact the right specialty within the HR department.

Provide clear information to employees

TSN Thuiszorg provides information about HR to organizational members, however the way this information is communicated to line managers and employees is not effective. News about HR-related topics is placed on the intranet, HR policies and HR practices can be found on the intranet as well. However, the information presented in the 'infotheek' is not easy to find. Furthermore, the information is written in a formal way and most documents contain more than 5 pages. There is a large distance between the work floor and the headquarter, communication needs to be done via intranet or e-mail. However, most employees have a low level of education and have difficulties with interpreting the information that is provided to them. They are provided with a lot of information which is not always tailored to their needs, this leads to the risk of information overload. It would be more useful to provide employees with practical information that serves their needs. Therefore, it is recommended to develop a HR handbook with very practical information about the most important HR subjects like absenteeism, training, and 'vacation leave'. This should be written in such a way that it is easy to understand for employees. Different handbooks could be made for the WMO and AWBZ business department, because they have different needs and different HR issues are important to them.

Furthermore, it is recommended to organize the infotheek in another way. It is advised to create a place in the internet portal which is reserved for HR issues. Policies, procedures and work instructions should be organized around HR themes such as employee appraisal and training. Furthermore, HR news can be placed at this page. It is recommended to provide the information in an informal way, a brief introduction of the topic with a link to underlying policies and practices, instead of only placing the documents online. Because line managers have different needs than employees, it is recommended to create different 'HR portals' with information that is tailored to the needs of the different customers.

Use HR analytics to demonstrate the performance of the HR department

Professionals from the HR department do not perceive that the HR department is seen as a credible HR function. The work pressure is high. But HR is already contributing to the performance of the organization and should make this more visible. The HR department should provide line managers with good management information to manage their employees and to be able to anticipate on the future. Furthermore, it is recommended to report about the performance of the HR department. Metrics about the quality of the services should be included. Indicators like perceived quality of the solution, as well as indicators like responsiveness and reliability should be taken into account. Furthermore, the HR department could provide their customers with quantitative performance indicators like amount of questions that are handled and the time needed to do this. This makes the performance of the HR department more visible.

Overall HR vision and clear HR policies and practices

The results show that the HR policies and HR practices of TSN Thuiszorg are not always perceived as relevant to employees' goals. Furthermore, line managers perceive inconsistency in HR policies and practices, they lack an overarching HR vision on how to manage employees within TSN Thuiszorg. Goals of existing HR policies and procedures are not always clearly formulated and both HR professionals and line managers are not aware of these goals. A lot of policies, practices, work instructions and procedures concerning HR issues are developed without a clear overall umbrella. Besides, daily HR tasks are often performed in a very ad hoc fashion. In order to create alignment, it is advised to develop a HR vision together with line management. This HR vision provides a framework for all the HR policies, procedures and instruments within the organization. Furthermore, it is recommended to formulate explicit goals for HR policies and practices which are linked with the strategy of TSN Thuiszorg. This fosters the alignment of the HR strategy with the strategy of the organization as well as contributes to the internal alignment of HR practices. The HR policies and

practices in the organization should not be separated, they should be linked to each other. This ensures that the HR practices are complementary.

Provide training to zorgcoördinatoren to perform their HR role more effectively

Perceived differences between intended and implemented HR practices could be attributed to the way HR practices are implemented within TSN Thuiszorg. HR practices are not always uniformly implemented throughout the different locations. The results show that zorgcoördinatoren do not always perceive that they are able to perform their HR tasks, which could be due to a lack of competences as well as a lack of support and clear policies and procedures how to perform their HR tasks. Therefore it is recommended to provide zorgcoördinatoren with a training. This training should address the following issues: HR tasks that belong to the responsibility of zorgcoördinatoren, the way these HR practices should be executed, and the support that could be offered by the HR department to help zorgcoördinatoren with their HR tasks. Furthermore, this training could help zorgcoördinatoren to deal with issues as time management. Due to the high span of control and a high work pressure it is sometimes difficult for zorgcoördinatoren to offer time to other tasks such as HR issues. The training should provide zorgcoördinatoren with policies and procedures to manage their HR tasks more efficiently. This training should be offered to new zorgcoördinatoren that enter the organization as well, in order to ensure that they are able to perform their HR tasks. At the moment, there is a pilot for self-regulating teams within the AWBZ business unit of TSN Thuiszorg. The function of zorgcoördinator will disappear, one member of the team will become responsible for HR tasks. A description of this HR role is made and team members will be trained. It is advised to discuss the issues as described above in these trainings as well.

Involve line managers in the formulation and implementation of HR policies and practices

The results show that HR professionals and line managers have different cognitive frames, which lead to differences in understandings and expectations about the HRM system. Line managers and HR managers have different ideas about the way HR issues need to be solved. In order to create consensus about the formulation and implementation of the HR strategy within TSN Thuiszorg, it is important that they have the same expectations about new HR practices and that they understand these practices. Therefore it is recommended to discuss new HR practices and processes between HR actors in the organization, this could be done in work meetings between rayonmanagers and zorgcoördinatoren with the presence of a HR professional. Main topics that should be discussed are the ideas behind the new HR practice or procedure, and what it means to the employees that deliver care. Furthermore it should be outlined who is responsible for which activities that are related to the HR practices, and how the HR practices should be implemented. Discussion and clear articulation of

expectations and assumptions beforehand creates consensus among HRM decision makers and will foster the consistency of actual HR implementation.

Develop an annual HR plan

HR managers act as sparring partner of line management. Based on the interviews of the bachelor students and the focus group, it can be concluded that both HR managers and line managers perceive this collaboration as good and relevant. However, TSN Thuiszorg scores low on consensus. It seems that although HR managers and line managers are cooperating, alignment between the operation and HR needs to be improved. The new HR organization with clear roles and responsibilities is a first step. A recommendation to create more alignment is to develop a year plan for HR, with themes and projects where HR is going to work on. Input for this plan should be gathered from top management and line management within the organization. Sessions between rayonmanagers and zorgcoördinatoren need to be organized to discuss which HR topics are important for the next period and these should be translated into an annual HR plan with specific actions and deadlines. Both HR managers and line managers need to agree about the priorities for the coming period. This does not only foster the alignment of HR activities with the goals of the operation, but furthermore makes clear for everyone what they might expect from each other. This increases consensus among HRM decision makers within TSN Thuiszorg about the formulation and implementation of HR strategy.

Foster knowledge sharing through online communities

TSN Thuiszorg is a dispersed organization with locations spread out all over the Netherlands. While regular informal meetings are often not feasible due to time and costs constraints, other ways of knowledge sharing need to be searched for. It is recommended to develop online communities for knowledge sharing among specific organizational members, for instance a group where zorgcoördinatoren can exchange knowledge with their colleagues about how to implement HR policies and practices and share success stories. They can share their experiences about how to deal with absenteeism issues, difficult individual cases and dismissal of employees. HR professional could be added to part of the page to interact with the zorgcoördinatoren, to answer their questions and provide them with advice how to deal with HR issues. It is a cost efficient and useful way to share knowledge among low level line managers. This possibility of knowledge exchange could be useful among HR managers as well. HR managers will be more locally present in the field, only one day a week they are present at the headquarter. The pressure of the field will increase, while the HR managers also need to hold the frameworks of HR policies, procedures and CAO regulations in mind. A side effect of the decentralization is the reduction of the informal exchange of information

between HR managers. Therefore, an online community for HR managers can be set up as well. They can share information about how to act within the frameworks of the HR policies and procedures of TSN Thuiszorg. For instance they could exchange knowledge about difficult individual cases or share experiences about how to deal with new HR regulations in practice or how to support line managers with implementing HR policies and practices. In this way professionals can learn from each other and knowledge can be stored. Knowledge sharing among organizational members enhances consensus and fosters the effective implementation of HR within TSN Thuiszorg.

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Appendix 1: Invitation letters

Beste medewerker,

In de nieuwsbrief ('Het bericht van Hans') heb je kunnen lezen dat er een onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd naar de effectiviteit van HR binnen TSN Thuiszorg. HR is de Engelse term voor de afdeling Personeel & Organisatie. Wij nodigen je graag uit om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek. Het doel van het onderzoek is om inzicht te krijgen in hoe HR binnen TSN Thuiszorg wordt ervaren. Er wordt daarnaast een aantal vragen gesteld over je betrokkenheid bij de organisatie.

Wil je deelnemen aan dit onderzoek? Klik dan hier om de online vragenlijst in te vullen. Het invullen van de vragenlijst kost maar ongeveer 5 minuten. Er wordt vertrouwelijk met de gegevens omgegaan. Omdat de gegevens direct worden doorgestuurd naar de Universiteit Twente, hebben alleen de onderzoekers van de Universiteit Twente inzicht in de anoniem ingevulde vragenlijsten. De rapportage die voor TSN wordt gemaakt is volledig anoniem, de resultaten kunnen niet naar individuen worden herleid.

Alvast hartelijk bedankt voor je medewerking aan dit onderzoek. Heb je nog vragen? Neem dan contact op met Marjolein Bomans, MBomans@thuiszorgservice.nl of m.bomans@student.utwente.nl.

Met vriendelijke groet,
namens de onderzoekers van de Universiteit Twente,

Marjolein Bomans
Universiteit Twente

Beste leidinggevende,

In de nieuwsbrief ('Het bericht van Hans') heb je kunnen lezen dat er een onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd naar de effectiviteit van HR binnen TSN Thuiszorg. Wij nodigen je graag uit om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek. Het doel van het onderzoek is om inzicht te krijgen in hoe HR binnen TSN is geregeld en hoe dit op de werkvloer wordt ervaren. Er wordt daarnaast een aantal vragen gesteld over je betrokkenheid bij de organisatie.

Wil je deelnemen aan dit onderzoek? Klik dan hier om de online vragenlijst in te vullen, voor 28 juni. Het invullen van de vragenlijst kost maar ongeveer 5 minuten. Er wordt vertrouwelijk met de gegevens omgegaan. Omdat de gegevens direct worden doorgestuurd naar de Universiteit Twente, hebben alleen de onderzoekers van de Universiteit Twente inzicht in de anoniem ingevulde vragenlijsten. De rapportage die voor TSN wordt gemaakt is volledig anoniem, de resultaten kunnen niet naar individuen worden herleid.

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Met vriendelijke groet,
namens de onderzoekers van de Universiteit Twente,

Marjolein Bomans
Universiteit Twente

Beste HR-professional,

Zoals je weet wordt er een onderzoek uitgevoerd naar de effectiviteit van HR binnen TSN Thuiszorg. Wij nodigen je graag uit om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek. Het doel van het onderzoek is om inzicht te krijgen in hoe HR in de organisatie wordt ervaren door medewerkers, lijnmanagers en HR zelf.

Wil je deelnemen aan dit onderzoek? Klik dan hier om de online vragenlijst in te vullen, dit kan tot uiterlijk 26 juni. Het invullen van de vragenlijst kost maar ongeveer 5 minuten. Er wordt vertrouwelijk met de gegevens omgegaan. Omdat de gegevens direct worden doorgestuurd naar de Universiteit Twente, hebben alleen de onderzoekers van de Universiteit Twente inzicht in de anoniem ingevulde vragenlijsten. De rapportage die voor TSN wordt gemaakt is volledig anoniem, de resultaten kunnen niet naar individuen worden herleid.

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Met vriendelijke groet,
namens de onderzoekers van de Universiteit Twente,

Marjolein Bomans
Universiteit Twente

Appendix 2: Questionnaires

Beste medewerker,

Fijn dat je mee wilt werken aan het onderzoek. Wil je deze online vragenlijst volledig invullen en geen vragen overslaan?

De vragenlijst bevat vragen over hoe je HR ervaart binnen TSN Thuiszorg. Wat vind je van de HR-instrumenten zoals werving & selectie, opleiding, loopbaanbegeleiding en de functionerings- en beoordelingsgesprekken? Hoe tevreden ben je met de HR-afdeling? Hoe ervaar je HR op de werkvloer? Daarnaast wordt een aantal vragen gesteld over je betrokkenheid bij TSN Thuiszorg.

Alvast bedankt voor je medewerking.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Marjolein Bomans
Universiteit Twente

A. HRM in de organisatie

Hieronder volgen enkele vragen over HRM in binnen TSN Thuiszorg.

De HR-afdeling

Geef aan hoe sterk je het eens bent met de volgende beweringen. Graag één antwoord per bewering omcirkelen.

	Helemaal oneens	Eerder oneens	Noch eens, noch oneens	Eerder eens	Helemaal eens
1. Ik word regelmatig geïnformeerd over nieuw HR-beleid en nieuwe HR-instrumenten van de HR afdeling	1	2	3	4	5
2. Binnen TSN Thuiszorg is het duidelijk voor welke taken de HR afdeling verantwoordelijk	1	2	3	4	5
3. Het huidige functioneren van de HR afdeling is een raadsel voor mij	1	2	3	4	5
4. De HR afdeling werkt te veel achter de schermen	1	2	3	4	5

5. De activiteiten van de HR afdeling zijn gemakkelijk te begrijpen	1	2	3	4	5
6. Ik begrijp de HR strategie van TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5
7. De HR afdeling geeft begrijpelijke informatie over de HR activiteiten	1	2	3	4	5
8. De HR afdeling heeft veel aanzien	1	2	3	4	5
9. De HR afdeling heeft voldoende zeggenschap op het gebied van personeels- en organisatiebeheer	1	2	3	4	5
10. De HR afdeling krijgt de volledige steun van de directie voor HR activiteiten	1	2	3	4	5
11. Ik vraag me vaak af wat het nut is van de HR activiteiten binnen TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5
12. De HR afdeling levert diensten die precies aan mijn behoeften voldoen	1	2	3	4	5
13. De HR activiteiten binnen TSN Thuiszorg helpen mij om mijn doelen te bereiken	1	2	3	4	5
14. De functionerings- en beoordelingsgesprekken moedigen mij aan goed te presteren	1	2	3	4	5
15. De HR activiteiten hebben toegevoegde waarde voor de werking van TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5
16. Er is een duidelijke overeenkomst tussen de beloften van de HR afdeling en wat ze uiteindelijk doet	1	2	3	4	5
17. Er is een groot verschil tussen geplande en gerealiseerde van HR-beleid en HR-instrumenten	1	2	3	4	5
18. De HR activiteiten in deze organisatie klinken goed in theorie maar functioneren niet in de praktijk	1	2	3	4	5
19. De HR activiteiten binnen TSN Thuiszorg dragen niet bij aan de motivatie van	1	2	3	4	5

medewerkers					
20. In deze organisatie verandert het HR beleid iedere minuut	1	2	3	4	5
21. Binnen TSN Thuiszorg is er een duidelijk verband tussen alle HR berichtgevingen	1	2	3	4	5
22. Alle HR activiteiten zijn afgestemd op elkaar	1	2	3	4	5
23. De verschillende HR initiatieven zenden tegenstrijdige signalen	1	2	3	4	5
24. HR management en lijnmanagement zitten duidelijk op dezelfde golflengte	1	2	3	4	5
25. De directie en HR delen duidelijk dezelfde visie	1	2	3	4	5
26. Het HR beleid is ontstaan als gevolg van overleg tussen de HR afdeling en de lijnmanagers	1	2	3	4	5
27. Het management steunt het HR beleid binnen onze organisatie	1	2	3	4	5

B. Betrokkenheid

Hieronder volgen enkele vragen over je betrokkenheid bij de organisatie.

Betrokkenheid bij de organisatie

Geef aan hoe sterk je het eens bent met de volgende beweringen. Graag één antwoord per bewering omcirkelen.

	Helemaal oneens	Eerder oneens	Noch eens, noch oneens	Eerder eens	Helemaal eens
1. Ik ben er trots op dat ik bij TSN Thuiszorg werk	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ik behoor echt bij de "TSN Thuiszorg" familie	1	2	3	4	5
3. TSN Thuiszorg is een leuke organisatie om voor te werken	1	2	3	4	5

4. TSN Thuiszorg betekent veel voor mij	1	2	3	4	5
5. Ik voel me thuis bij TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5
6. Ik zou bijna iedere baan accepteren om bij TSN Thuiszorg te kunnen blijven werken	1	2	3	4	5

C. Achtergrondgegevens

Tot slot wordt er een aantal vragen gesteld over je persoonlijke achtergrond. Kruis het hokje aan dat op jou van toepassing is, of vul bij open vragen het antwoord in.

1. Wat is je geslacht?

Man

Vrouw

2. Wat is je leeftijd?

Jonger dan 20 jaar

20 – 24 jaar

25 – 29 jaar

30 – 34 jaar

35 – 39 jaar

40 – 44 jaar

45 – 49 jaar

50 – 54 jaar

55 – 59 jaar

60 – 64 jaar

65 jaar of ouder

3. Wat is je hoogst genoten opleiding?

Lagere school

VMBO

MAVO

HAVO

VWO

LBO

MBO

HBO

WO

4. Van welke organisatie-eenheid maak je onderdeel uit?

WMO

AWBZ

Centraal Bureau

5. Voor welk Rayon van TSN Thuiszorg ben je werkzaam?
6. Voor welke vestiging van TSN Thuiszorg ben je werkzaam?
7. Hoeveel jaren ben je werkzaam binnen TSN Thuiszorg?
 - 0-3 jaar
 - 4 – 7 jaar
 - 8 – 11 jaar
 - 12 – 15 jaar
 - Langer dan 15 jaar
8. Wat voor type contract heb je met TSN Thuiszorg?
 - Nul-uren contract
 - Min-max contract
 - Arbeidsovereenkomst met vaste uren
9. Heb je een contract voor bepaalde tijd of onbepaalde tijd met TSN Thuiszorg?
 - Bepaalde tijd
 - Onbepaalde tijd
10. Werk je parttime of fulltime bij TSN Thuiszorg?
 - Bepaalde tijd
 - Onbepaalde tijd

Beste lijnmanager,

Fijn dat je mee wilt werken aan het onderzoek.

De vragenlijst bevat vragen over hoe je HR ervaart binnen TSN Thuiszorg. Wat vind je van de HR-instrumenten? Hoe vind je dat de HR afdeling het doet? Hoe wordt HR geïmplementeerd binnen de organisatie? Ook wordt een aantal vragen gesteld over je betrokkenheid bij TSN Thuiszorg.

Alvast bedankt voor je medewerking.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Marjolein Bomans
Universiteit Twente

A. HRM in de organisatie

Hieronder volgen enkele vragen over HRM binnen TSN Thuiszorg.

De HR-afdeling

Geef aan hoe sterk je het eens bent met de volgende beweringen. Graag één antwoord per bewering omcirkelen.

	Helemaal oneens	Eerder oneens	Noch eens, noch oneens	Eerder eens	Helemaal eens
1. De HR afdeling informeert medewerkers regelmatig over nieuw HR-beleid en HR-instrumenten	1	2	3	4	5
2. Binnen TSN Thuiszorg is het duidelijk voor welke taken de HR afdeling verantwoordelijk is	1	2	3	4	5
3. Het huidige functioneren van de HR afdeling is een raadsel voor medewerkers	1	2	3	4	5
4. De HR afdeling werkt te veel achter de schermen	1	2	3	4	5
5. De activiteiten van de HR afdeling zijn gemakkelijk te begrijpen voor medewerkers	1	2	3	4	5
6. Medewerkers begrijpen de HR strategie van	1	2	3	4	5

TSN Thuiszorg					
7. De HR afdeling geeft begrijpelijke informatie over de HR activiteiten	1	2	3	4	5
8. De HR afdeling heeft veel aanzien	1	2	3	4	5
9. De HR afdeling heeft voldoende zeggenschap op het gebied van personeels- en organisatiebeheer	1	2	3	4	5
10. De HR afdeling krijgt de volledige steun van de directie voor HR activiteiten	1	2	3	4	5
11. Medewerkers vragen zich vaak af wat het nut is van de HR activiteiten binnen TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5
12. De HR afdeling levert diensten die precies aan de behoeften van medewerkers voldoen	1	2	3	4	5
13. De HR activiteiten helpen medewerkers om hun doelen te bereiken	1	2	3	4	5
14. De functionerings- en beoordelingsgesprekken moedigen medewerkers aan goed te presteren	1	2	3	4	5
15. De HR activiteiten hebben toegevoegde waarde voor de werking van TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5
16. Er is een duidelijke overeenkomst tussen de beloften van de HR afdeling en wat ze uiteindelijk doet	1	2	3	4	5
17. Er is een groot verschil tussen gepland en gerealiseerd HR-beleid en HR-instrumenten	1	2	3	4	5
18. De HR activiteiten binnen TSN Thuiszorg klinken goed in theorie maar functioneren niet in de praktijk	1	2	3	4	5
19. De HR activiteiten binnen TSN Thuiszorg dragen niet bij aan de motivatie van medewerkers	1	2	3	4	5
20. Binnen TSN Thuiszorg verandert het HR beleid iedere minuut	1	2	3	4	5

21. Binnen TSN Thuiszorg is er een duidelijk verband tussen alle HR berichtgevingen	1	2	3	4	5
22. Alle HR activiteiten zijn afgestemd op elkaar	1	2	3	4	5
23. De verschillende HR initiatieven zenden tegenstrijdige signalen	1	2	3	4	5
24. HR management en lijnmanagement zitten duidelijk op dezelfde golflengte	1	2	3	4	5
25. De directie en HR delen duidelijk dezelfde visie	1	2	3	4	5
26. Het HR beleid is ontstaan als gevolg van overleg tussen de HR afdeling en de lijnmanagers	1	2	3	4	5
27. Het management steunt het HR beleid binnen onze organisatie	1	2	3	4	5

B. Betrokkenheid

Hieronder volgen enkele vragen over je betrokkenheid bij de organisatie.

Betrokkenheid bij de organisatie

Geef aan hoe sterk je het eens bent met de volgende beweringen. Graag één antwoord per bewering omcirkelen.

	Helemaal oneens	Eerder oneens	Noch eens, noch oneens	Eerder eens	Helemaal eens
1. Ik ben er trots op dat ik bij TSN Thuiszorg werk	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ik behoor echt bij de "TSN Thuiszorg" familie	1	2	3	4	5
3. TSN Thuiszorg is een leuke organisatie om voor te werken	1	2	3	4	5
4. TSN Thuiszorg betekent veel voor mij	1	2	3	4	5
5. Ik voel me thuis bij TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5

6. Ik zou bijna iedere baan accepteren om bij TSN Thuiszorg te kunnen blijven werken	1	2	3	4	5
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C. Achtergrondgegevens

Tot slot wordt er een aantal vragen gesteld over je persoonlijke achtergrond. Kruis het hokje aan dat op jou van toepassing is, of vul bij open vragen het antwoord in.

1. Wat is je geslacht?

Man

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2. Wat is je leeftijd?

Jonger dan 20 jaar

20 – 24 jaar

25 – 29 jaar

30 – 34 jaar

35 – 39 jaar

40 – 44 jaar

45 – 49 jaar

50 – 54 jaar

55 – 59 jaar

60 – 64 jaar

65 jaar of ouder

3. Wat is je hoogst genoten opleiding?

Lagere school

VMBO

MAVO

HAVO

VWO

LBO

MBO

HBO

WO

4. Van welke organisatie-eenheid maak je onderdeel uit?

WMO

AWBZ

Centraal Bureau

5. Wat is je functie?

Directeur

Rayonmanager

Zorgcoördinator

Afdelingshoofd

6. Hoeveel jaren ben je werkzaam binnen TSN Thuiszorg?

0-3 jaar

4 – 7 jaar

8 – 11 jaar

12 – 15 jaar

Langer dan 15 jaar

7. Hoeveel jaren ben je werkzaam als leidinggevende?

0-3 jaar

4 – 7 jaar

8 – 11 jaar

12 – 15 jaar

Langer dan 15 jaar

8. Aan hoeveel mensen geef je leiding?

9. Heb je een contract voor bepaalde tijd of onbepaalde tijd met TSN Thuiszorg?

Bepaalde tijd

Onbepaalde tijd

10. Werk je parttime of fulltime bij TSN Thuiszorg?

Bepaalde tijd

Onbepaalde tijd

Beste HR professional,

Fijn dat je mee wilt werken aan het onderzoek.

De vragenlijst bevat vragen over hoe je HR ervaart binnen TSN Thuiszorg. Wat vind je van de HR-instrumenten? Hoe vind je dat de HR afdeling het doet? Hoe wordt HR geïmplementeerd binnen de organisatie? Ook wordt een aantal vragen gesteld over je betrokkenheid bij TSN Thuiszorg.

Alvast bedankt voor je medewerking.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Marjolein Bomans
Universiteit Twente

A. HRM in de organisatie

Hieronder volgen enkele vragen over HRM binnen TSN Thuiszorg.

De HR-afdeling

Geef aan hoe sterk je het eens bent met de volgende beweringen. Graag één antwoord per bewering omcirkelen.

	Helemaal oneens	Eerder oneens	Noch eens, noch oneens	Eerder eens	Helemaal eens
1. De HR afdeling informeert medewerkers regelmatig over nieuw HR-beleid en HR-instrumenten	1	2	3	4	5
2. Binnen TSN Thuiszorg is het duidelijk voor welke taken de HR afdeling verantwoordelijk is	1	2	3	4	5
3. Het huidige functioneren van de HR afdeling is een raadsel voor medewerkers	1	2	3	4	5
4. De HR afdeling werkt te veel achter de schermen	1	2	3	4	5
5. De activiteiten van de HR afdeling zijn gemakkelijk te begrijpen voor medewerkers	1	2	3	4	5
6. Medewerkers begrijpen de HR strategie van TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5
7. De HR afdeling geeft begrijpelijke	1	2	3	4	5

informatie over de HR activiteiten					
8. De HR afdeling heeft veel aanzien	1	2	3	4	5
9. De HR afdeling heeft voldoende zeggenschap op het gebied van personeels- en organisatiebeheer	1	2	3	4	5
10. De HR afdeling krijgt de volledige steun van de directie voor HR activiteiten	1	2	3	4	5
11. Medewerkers vragen zich vaak af wat het nut is van de HR activiteiten binnen TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5
12. De HR afdeling levert diensten die precies aan de behoeften van medewerkers voldoen	1	2	3	4	5
13. De HR activiteiten helpen medewerkers om hun doelen te bereiken	1	2	3	4	5
14. De functionerings- en beoordelingsgesprekken moedigen medewerkers aan goed te presteren	1	2	3	4	5
15. De HR activiteiten hebben toegevoegde waarde voor de werking van TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5
16. Er is een duidelijke overeenkomst tussen de beloften van de HR afdeling en wat ze uiteindelijk doet	1	2	3	4	5
17. Er is een groot verschil tussen gepland en gerealiseerd HR-beleid en HR-instrumenten	1	2	3	4	5
18. De HR activiteiten binnen TSN Thuiszorg klinken goed in theorie maar functioneren niet in de praktijk	1	2	3	4	5
19. De HR activiteiten binnen TSN Thuiszorg dragen niet bij aan de motivatie van medewerkers	1	2	3	4	5
20. Binnen TSN Thuiszorg verandert het HR beleid iedere minuut	1	2	3	4	5
21. Binnen TSN Thuiszorg is er een duidelijk	1	2	3	4	5

verband tussen alle HR berichtgevingen					
22. Alle HR activiteiten zijn afgestemd op elkaar	1	2	3	4	5
23. De verschillende HR initiatieven zenden tegenstrijdige signalen	1	2	3	4	5
24. HR management en lijnmanagement zitten duidelijk op dezelfde golflengte	1	2	3	4	5
25. De directie en HR delen duidelijk dezelfde visie	1	2	3	4	5
26. Het HR beleid is ontstaan als gevolg van overleg tussen de HR afdeling en de lijnmanagers	1	2	3	4	5
27. Het management steunt het HR beleid binnen onze organisatie	1	2	3	4	5

B. Betrokkenheid

Hieronder volgen enkele vragen over je betrokkenheid bij de organisatie.

Betrokkenheid bij de organisatie

Geef aan hoe sterk je het eens bent met de volgende beweringen. Graag één antwoord per bewering omcirkelen.

	Helemaal oneens	Eerder oneens	Noch eens, noch oneens	Eerder eens	Helemaal eens
1. Ik ben er trots op dat ik bij TSN Thuiszorg werk	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ik behoor echt bij de "TSN Thuiszorg" familie	1	2	3	4	5
3. TSN Thuiszorg is een leuke organisatie om voor te werken	1	2	3	4	5
4. TSN Thuiszorg betekent veel voor mij	1	2	3	4	5
5. Ik voel me thuis bij TSN Thuiszorg	1	2	3	4	5

6. Ik zou bijna iedere baan accepteren om bij TSN Thuiszorg te kunnen blijven werken	1	2	3	4	5
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C. Achtergrondgegevens

Tot slot wordt er een aantal vragen gesteld over je persoonlijke achtergrond. Kruis het hokje aan dat op jou van toepassing is, of vul bij open vragen het antwoord in.

1. Wat is je geslacht?

Man

Vrouw

2. Wat is je leeftijd?

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60 – 64 jaar

65 jaar of ouder

3. Wat is je hoogst genoten opleiding?

Lagere school

VMBO

MAVO

HAVO

VWO

LBO

MBO

HBO

WO

4. Hoeveel jaren ben je werkzaam binnen TSN Thuiszorg?

0 - 3 jaar

4 – 7 jaar

8 – 11 jaar

12 – 15 jaar

Langer dan 15 jaar

5. Hoeveel jaren ben je werkzaam binnen de HR-afdeling?
- 0 - 3 jaar
 - 4 – 7 jaar
 - 8 – 11 jaar
 - 12 – 15 jaar
 - Langer dan 15 jaar
6. Heb je een contract voor bepaalde tijd of onbepaalde tijd met TSN Thuiszorg?
- Bepaalde tijd
 - Onbepaalde tijd
7. Werk je parttime of fulltime bij TSN Thuiszorg?
- Bepaalde tijd
 - Onbepaalde tijd

Appendix 3: List of studied documents

Organizational documents

- Organization, structure and meeting forms (Directie TSN Thuiszorg, 2012).
- Organization structure (Directie TSN Thuiszorg, 2013)
- Meeting structures (Directie TSN Thuiszorg, 2011)
- HR strategy (Van Leeuwen, 2013)
- CAO VVT 2012-2013
- TSN Thuiszorg (n.d.). <http://www.tsn-thuiszorg.nl/>
- Vision on care (TSN Thuiszorg Groningen, 2012)

HR policies, practices and procedures

- Personell management (HR, 2007)
- Introduction policy for new employees (HR TSN Thuiszorg, 2011).
- Introduction program indirect personnel (TSN Thuiszorg, 2010)
- Task and job description (TSN Thuiszorg, 2007)
- Competences (TSN Thuiszorg, 2013)
- Policy recruitment and selection (HR TSN Thuiszorg, 2010)
- Placing a vacancy WMO (TSN Thuiszorg, 2013)
- Placing a vacancy AWBZ (TSN Thuiszorg, 2013)
- Policy employee appraisal indirect personnel (TSN Thuiszorg, 2013)
- Procedure employee appraisal indirect employees (TSN Thuiszorg, 2013)
- Work instructions performance appraisal direct personnel WMO (TSN Thuiszorg, 2013)
- Career planning policy health care employees (HR TSN Thuiszorg, 2007)
- Absenteeism regulation (TSN Thuiszorg, 2013)
- Division of responsibilities sick leave (TSN Thuiszorg, n.d.)
- Working conditions (Directie TSN Thuiszorg, 2007)
- Procedure alcohol and drugs abuse (TSN Thuiszorg, 2011)
- Regulation compensation travel time (TSN Thuiszorg, 2010)
- Volunteers policy home and care (TSN Thuiszorg Groningen, 2013)
- Codes of conduct (TSN Thuiszorg, 2011)
- Work appointments zorgcoordinator V&V (TSN Thuiszorg, 2013).
- Checklist tasks zorgcoordinator (TSN Thuiszorg, 2011)

Job descriptions

- HR professional (TSN Thuiszorg, 2008)
- Zorgcoördinator (TSN Thuiszorg, 2010)
- Rayonmanager (TSN Thuiszorg, 2010)
- Nurse (TSN Thuiszorg, 2012)
- Household employee (TSN Thuiszorg, 2008)
- Health care employee (TSN Thuiszorg, 2011)

Appendix 4: Tables

Table 17: Means, SD's lower order constructs HRM system strength

	Overall (n=3277)		Employees (n=3170)		Line managers (n=76)		HR professionals (n=31)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Distinctiveness	3.01	0.72	3.02	0.72	2.63	0.47	2.73	0.52
Visibility	3.07	0.85	3.07	0.85	2.70	0.66	2.91	0.67
Understandability	2.98	0.89	3.00	0.89	2.46	0.60	2.63	0.68
Legitimacy	3.06	0.74	3.07	0.74	2.84	0.57	2.63	0.55
Relevance	2.90	0.81	2.91	0.81	2.53	0.55	2.76	0.67
Consistency	3.07	0.71	3.07	0.71	2.80	0.54	3.08	0.59
Instrumentality	3.06	0.90	3.06	0.91	2.90	0.64	3.31	0.79
Consistency of HRM messages	3.08	0.59	3.09	0.58	2.68	0.56	2.80	0.59
Consensus	3.09	0.67	3.10	0.67	2.60	0.58	2.64	0.65
Affective commitment	3.77	0.97	3.78	0.97	3.30	0.79	3.48	0.86

Table 18: Means, SD's for employees of the WMO and AWBZ business unit

	Overall (n=3277)		WMO (2208)		AWBZ (419)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Distinctiveness	3.01	0.72	3.05	0.73	2.79	0.66
Visibility	3.07	0.85	3.13	0.85	2.79	0.84
Understandability	2.98	0.89	2.95	0.87	2.66	0.84
Legitimacy	3.06	0.74	3.09	0.75	2.86	0.68
Relevance	2.90	0.81	2.93	0.82	2.76	0.77
Consistency	3.07	0.71	3.08	0.72	2.95	0.66
Instrumentality	3.06	0.90	3.05	0.91	2.96	0.85
Consistency of HRM messages	3.08	0.59	3.12	0.58	2.93	0.55
Consensus	3.09	0.67	3.13	0.66	2.90	0.68
Affective commitment	3.77	0.97	3.84	0.95	3.44	1.02